LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

MORALITY AND THE PERSONHOOD OF GOD: A MORAL ARGUMENT FOR THE

EXISTENCE OF A PERSONAL GOD

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVIITY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN THEOLOGY AND APOLOGETICS

BY

STEPHEN S. JORDAN

GOODE, VIRGINIA

MARCH 26, 2021

APPROVAL SHEET

MORALITY AND THE PERSONHOOD OF GOD: A MORAL ARGUMENT FOR
THE EXISTENCE OF A PERSONAL GOD

Stephen S. Jordan

Read and approved by:

Chairperson: _____

David Baggett, Ph.D.

Reader: _____

Marybeth Baggett, Ph.D.

Reader: _____

Ronnie Campbell, Ph.D.

Date: March 26, 2021_____

DEDICATION

To my beautiful bride, McKenzie, and our children.

Without your love, prayers, and encouragement, this project would not have happened. Thank you for all of the ways that you have supported me throughout the PhD journey.

Disney World, here we come!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Not many worthwhile things are accomplished in life apart from the help of others, and a project such as a dissertation is certainly no exception. For this reason, I have several people that I would like to thank below.

First, thank you to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Without Your transforming love, I would be lost and without hope.

Second, I would like to thank my wife, McKenzie, for her encouragement to pursue a PhD, and for her unwavering support of my doctoral studies over the past six years. I have said it before, and I will say it again, apart from the grace that made my salvation possible, you are the most vivid representation of grace I have experienced this side of heaven. I love you, and I hope and pray that we continue to live out "our verse" for many more decades: "Glorify the Lord with me, let us exalt His name together" (Ps. 34:3).

Third, thank you to my children for giving me countless study and writing breaks over the years. Time spent with each one of you is time well spent. I deeply love each one of you and I cannot wait to see what God does in each one of your lives. Being your "dad" is one of the greatest blessings of my life.

Fourth, a special thanks goes to my parents for raising me in a Christian home and for always challenging me to pursue further education. I am also grateful to my Grandma, who has served as a "second mom" to me from the time I was a little boy.

Fifth, thank you to Scott Hyland, Jay Hamilton, Tom Donovan, Chris Rocco, and Mike Morris—each of you have supported me in various ways throughout my PhD journey. More than just "friends," I consider each of you to be "brothers." I would go to battle any day with you guys.

Sixth, I would like to thank Liberty Christian Academy. There are several administrators who deserve specific mention, including Dr. John Patterson, Tim Hahn, and Jeff Capps. Each of you allowed me to miss time from my regular teaching duties in order to attend PhD seminars over the course of several years. I am grateful to each one of you for this, and for giving me the opportunity to share the truths I have learned in the PhD program with my students at LCA.

Seventh, thank you to all of my students over the years. I hope and pray that each one of you will take the truths we discussed in class and apply them each day—all in an effort to fulfill God's purpose for your lives.

Eighth, Dan Merritt is deserving of special thanks. I have told you many times before, but thank you for believing in me at a time when I did not believe in myself. I will never forget your impact upon my life.

Lastly, I am grateful to Dr. David Baggett, Dr. Marybeth Baggett, and Dr. Ronnie Campbell, along with the faculty of the Liberty University Rawlings School of Divinity. Dr. David Baggett has served as a mentor to me in many ways over the past few years, and is the one who initially encouraged me to write on the moral argument, particularly the version presented in this dissertation. Thank you for giving me time to write and think, and for your helpful feedback over the years. Even though he did not serve on my dissertation committee, I would like to specifically thank Dr. Gary Habermas. You have been a consistent source of encouragement throughout my time in the PhD program.

ABSTRACT

The concept that God is personal is an important part of religious belief. If God were not personal, it would be odd to think of him as moral or loving; it would also seem counterintuitive to speak of him as One with whom humans can have a personal relationship, One who can be trusted, cares for the people he created, listens to their prayers, acts on their behalf, has their best interests at heart, and so on. In short, to talk of such matters in a sensible manner and to experience them in everyday life seemingly requires that God is personal.

Is there evidence that a personal God actually exists? Enter the moral argument. The moral argument, like other classical arguments for God's existence, is able to provide evidence for believing in God's existence, but—unlike other arguments, or perhaps better than the other arguments—is able to shed an incredible amount of light on God's character (i.e., what God is like). For example, in order to account for morality, God must be good, loving, and holy. Additionally, by surveying the moral landscape—specifically, categories such as moral knowledge, moral values, moral obligations, and moral transformation—it becomes apparent that the deeply personal nature of morality points in the direction of a personal source, and most appropriately, a source personal to the highest degree possible.

If the moral argument suggests that a personal source is needed in order to account for the personal nature of morality, naturalism is in a difficult position because of its impersonal or non-personal nature. Similarly, Platonism is a non-personal metaphysical system and therefore faces a challenge in accounting for the personal nature of morality. Although there are several belief systems that set forth the notion of a personal God, with some conceptions coming nearer to adequately accounting for what is required of a personal God than others, Christianity uniquely demonstrates that not only is God personal, but that *he has always been personal*. If the *only*

sense in which God is personal is in his personal interactions with human persons, then one could say that God's personality was frustrated before he created human persons or that God became personal only after he created human persons. To say these sorts of things presents all sorts of theological and philosophical problems, namely, that God is dependent on something other than himself and therefore not self-sufficient.

A Trinitarian conception of God, which is a distinctly Christian concept, solves the sorts of problems alluded to above, suggesting that God has always been personal in and through the inner personal relations of the three Persons of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is the fundamental reason why the Judeo-Christian God, the God of the Bible, is the best explanation for the deeply personal nature of morality: *he is intrinsically personal himself*.

While there is certainly more involved, there are two key tasks to this version of the moral argument: (1) demonstrate that morality points in the direction of a personal source; and (2) explain how a Trinitarian conception of God provides the best explanation for the deeply personal nature of morality.

"[T]o expound the thought of God as personal, and to help to restore it to a more living and central place in the experience and witness of Christian men and women, is one of the major tasks of the theologian today."

H. H. Farmer, *The World and God*

". . . Personality and Morality go together."

Clement Webb, *God and Personality*

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In addition to the ontological, cosmological, and teleological arguments, the moral argument is one of the classical arguments offered by theists in favor of God's existence. By referring to the "moral argument," one usually assumes that there is only one moral argument. However, a careful study of the history of this argument, beginning with Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and moving toward the present day, reveals that a variety of moral arguments have been formulated by philosophers, theologians, and apologists over the past three centuries.[1] Regardless of the form that the moral argument takes, the underlying logic of moral arguments for God's existence is that the phenomena of morality are able to provide veridical insight into the nature of ultimate reality. Does God exist? Are there many gods that exist? What is God (or the gods) like? Does God (or do the gods) have expectations of human beings? What about good and evil? These are the sorts of questions that individuals have wrestled with throughout history, and they are the kinds of inquiries that ultimately frame humanity's quest to determine the nature of reality as a whole. Interestingly, these are the questions that the moral argument also attempts to answer.

Although there are numerous questions that the moral argument addresses, the primary goal of the moral argument involves examining the data of morality, which are readily available to virtually everyone, in an effort to provide warrant for believing in God's existence.[2] A moral argument usually begins by acknowledging that there are certain moral features about the world

---

[1] David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls identify several precursors to Kant in the field of moral apologetics, including individuals such as Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas, among others. For an extended look at these precursors, see David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *The Moral Argument: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 8-18.

[2] This dissertation will also provide reasons for taking Christianity seriously as a specific version of theism. Opposing views will be also be addressed throughout, with the final chapter (chapter 7) examining some of the opposing views in a more focused manner.

that are as real and important for human existence as things such as gravity, Earth's position in relation to the sun, and the water cycle. Of course, one can object by stating that humans might physically exist without morality. However, humans are more than physical beings; there is more to a human person than a person's physical makeup. This is why human beings possess a deep desire for things like meaning and purpose, have an awareness of right and wrong while also being able to characterize things as one or the other, feel and express emotions such as gratitude or guilt in response to good or evil, and have a need for loving relationships with others. Whereas theistic arguments from nature, such as the cosmological or design arguments, are "out there," the moral argument possesses force because it is "in here."[3] In other words, humans *feel* the force of the moral argument because it resonates deeply with the fabric of their own humanity. Yet again, humans might physically exist apart from morality, but they would not exist in any *meaningful sense* or possess the ability to operate in any *decent* or *orderly manner*.[4] Simply put, human beings are fundamentally different from the stars, planets, and gravity—all of which are physically existing things. A major difference, however, is that stars and planets do not possess a deeply felt desire for meaning and purpose, and gravity does not express approval or feel guilty when other things (e.g., people or animals) fly or fall.

---

[3] This discussion leads one to consider Immanuel Kant's famous quote: "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and the more steadily we reflect on them: *the starry heavens above and the moral law within*." Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004), 170. Taken together, arguments from nature (i.e., arguments focused on "the starry heavens above") and arguments from morality (i.e., arguments from "the moral law within") form a strong cumulative case for God's existence. These types of arguments are not in competition with one another; rather, they are on the same philosophical team, working together in order to clear the path for belief in God (or deeper belief and trust in God).

[4] It could be supposed for pragmatic reasons that humans might treat each other decently if they came to see that doing so, though not ontologically rooted, has prudential benefits. But then again, that would all quickly go away with free riders or folks who think they can get away with subterfuge.

Morality is important, and human beings are moral creatures. To be moral and to possess the ability to be immoral is part of what it means to be human. If these things are true, then it makes sense to ask where morality comes from. Is it the product of social convention, educational upbringing, a transcendent source, or something else? It also makes sense to ask what the source of morality is like. Does the source of morality possess a certain sort of character or set of attributes? Ultimately, these questions are the entire aim of this project and the moral argument as a whole. Though there are various approaches to answering these questions among moral apologists (i.e., philosophers who have postulated moral arguments for God's existence), the approach that will be taken in this project involves considering whether morality is personal or non-personal, and then, given the nature of morality, whether the source is personal or non-personal.[5] In order to set the stage for the moral argument that follows—namely, a moral argument for the existence of a personal God—there are a few important preliminary matters that need addressing.

The Rich History of the Moral Argument

The moral argument has a rich history, and it would be unwise for anyone presently working in moral apologetics to neglect reflecting on how numerous luminaries in the field make it possible for present work on the argument to prove fruitful. Anything less than a deeply felt gratitude for the work of these thinkers is a significant oversight, as these thinkers largely shape and significantly influence present writings on the topic. Although the insightful words of many of these thinkers will appear throughout the moral argument for a personal God that is the focus

---

[5] Attention will be given later in this chapter to the terms "personal" and "non-personal."

of this dissertation, a few names and writings are worth mentioning at the outset, especially those who emphasized a personal God as the ground or source of morality.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

Although there were precursors to Immanuel Kant, such as Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas, among others,[6] the moral argument largely emerged on the philosophical scene through the writings of Kant. There are two key thoughts regarding Kant's work on the moral argument that are worth noting in light of the present project. First, there is a type of moral argument stemming from Kant that will be emphasized in chapter 6 when the category of moral transformation is discussed. The argument goes something like this:

> (1) Morality requires human beings to achieve a standard that is beyond their reach without some sort of outside assistance—this presents what John Hare calls "the moral gap."

> (2) Exaggerating human capacities, lowering the moral demand, or locating a secular form of assistance are inadequate for closing the moral gap.

> (3) Divine assistance is sufficient to close the moral gap.

> (4) Therefore, it is rational to postulate God's existence.[7]

Kant's "argument from grace" is intimately connected with concepts such as human guilt, hope of moral transformation, and divine forgiveness, which are themselves seemingly personal concepts and therefore potential indicators that God (or the source of the moral law—whoever or whatever it may be) is personal as well.

---

[6] In addition to these precursors, Baggett and Walls present a number of other luminaries in the field throughout their *Moral Argument: A History* who have made present work on the moral argument possible and fruitful. To date, this is the best, and really the only extended treatment of the historical development of the moral argument.

[7] This "argument from grace" is laid out in Baggett and Walls, *The Moral Argument: A History*, 24. For a thorough detailed look at this argument by Kant, see John Hare, *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

Second, moral apologists also have Kant to thank for his "categorical imperative," which has three versions and provides a helpful basis for speaking on topics related to morality, such as moral realism. These are the three versions of Kant's categorical imperative: (1) Act as if the laws of your actions should become, by your will, universal laws; (2) Regard humanity, whether in your own person or in that of others, as ends and never as means only; and (3) Act as a member of a kingdom of ends.[8] Of course, it is possible to list and debate the pros and cons of Kant's categorical imperative,[9] but that is not the purpose here; rather, the purpose is to simply acknowledge Kant as an important contributor in this field—and by many accounts, its *most* important. Kant is likely a harbinger to much of what moral apologists have said following his death, and many of the contemporary conversations on the moral argument would simply not occur without his influence.

William Sorley (1855-1935)

William Sorley is one of the first moral apologists to connect morality with a personal God, and to do so at length.[10] In his *Moral Values and the Idea of God*, Sorley lays out the argument that moral values, such as goodness, love, and justice, are objective realities and also person-dependent. Moral values are universally and eternally valid, yet the moral ideal does not fully reside in any finite person because there are no finite persons who fully actualize the ideal or possess a wholly objective mind. Therefore, there must be a Mind that actualizes the moral

---

[8] Actually, this is Hastings Rashdall's helpful summary of Kant's categorical imperative. Hastings Rashdall, *The Theory of Good and Evil*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), chapter 5.

[9] For example, see chapter 5 in Rashdall's *The Theory of Good and Evil*, vol. 1.

[10] It is important to note here that Clement C. J. Webb points out that he first finds the expression "Personality of God" in the writings of William Paley and Friedrich Schleiermacher. He also notes that Kant speaks of God as a "Person" and of God's "Personality" in his *Opus Postumum*. Clement C. J. Webb, *Kant's Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), 181-182.

ideal, and such a mind must also be personal and eternal—which led Sorley postulate an eternal Person that is God himself.[11] Sorley's tethering of moral values to a personal God will become clearer in chapter 4 when moral values are discussed.

Hastings Rashdall (1858-1935)

Hastings Rashdall is another early moral apologist to ground morality in a personal God. Although others speak on what it means for God to be personal, Rashdall provides a helpful definition—a definition that largely shapes how "personal God" is defined in this dissertation—when he states,

> Is God a Person? . . . If we are justified in thinking of God after the analogy of a human soul—if we are justified in thinking of Him as a self-conscious Being who thinks, feels, and wills, and who is, moreover in relation with, capable of loving and being loved by other such beings—then it seems most natural to speak of God's existence as personal. For to be a self-conscious being—conscious of itself and other beings, thinking, willing, feeling, loving—is what we mean by being a person.[12]

According to Rashdall, key attributes of a "personal God" include self-consciousness; the ability to think, feel, will; and One who is capable of loving and being loved by other persons. There are many areas where Rashdall draws the connection between morality and a personal God, including moral motivation, moral obligation, and moral transformation. There is more that needs to be said regarding Rashdall's influence on the development of this particular moral argument for a personal God, but there is too much to say here. As a result, Rashdall's thoughts will appear throughout this dissertation.

Clement C. J. Webb (1865-1954)

Clement C. J. Webb, like Rashdall, is a key figure when it comes to arguing from morality to a personal God. His writings are literally filled with references to the personality of

---

[11] William Sorley, *Moral Values and the Idea of God*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: MacMillan, 1930).

[12] Hastings Rashdall, *Philosophy and Religion*, (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), 55.

God. In fact, this is evident from the mere titles of two of his books: *Divine Personality and Human Life* and *God and Personality*.[13] In *God and Personality*, Webb attempts to examine what is involved in the demand for a personal God, while also identifying what is involved in denying that demand—with the ultimate goal of establishing rights and wrongs of those who ascribe Personality to God and those who refuse to do so.[14] Moreover, Webb maintains that "Personality and Morality go together," and that Christianity is "the only religion which has expressly affirm[ed] Personality to be *in* God . . . in connexion [*sic*] with the doctrine of the Trinity."[15] To be fair, there are other religions that view God or the gods as personal, as Webb himself knows. However, what Webb claims is that a Trinitarian view of God powerfully accounts for the personhood or personal nature of God, likely better than the other "personal God" religions. Webb's thought on this connection—morality with a Trinitarian God—will surface more in chapter 7 when personal metaphysical belief systems are discussed, and then, more specifically, when the Trinitarian nature of the Christian God is considered. As with Rashdall, there are numerous places where Webb's ideas are important, especially considering the version of the moral argument that follows, which is why he is referenced at numerous junctures throughout the present work.

H. H. Farmer (1892-1981)

H. H. Farmer's two books, *The World and God* and *Towards Belief in God*,[16] are packed with references to God's personal nature, which makes sense considering his claim: "[T]o

---

[13] Clement C. J. Webb, *Divine Personality and Human Life* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1920). Clement C. J. Webb, *God and Personality* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1919).

[14] Webb, *God and Personality*, 19.

[15] Webb, *God and Personality*, 10-11.

[16] H. H Farmer, *The World and God: A Study of Prayer, Providence and Miracle in Christian Experience* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1933). H. H. Farmer, *Towards Belief in God* (London: SCM, 1942).

expound the thought of God as personal, and to help to restore it to a more living and central place in the experience of Christian men and women, is one of the major tasks of the theologian today."[17] Whereas thinkers like Sorley, Rashdall, and Webb, along with H. P. Owen, go to great lengths to link morality with God, Farmer is particularly helpful on understanding the fundamental importance of God's personhood for religious belief in general, and, more specifically, how Christian revelation provides a robust account of the intrinsically personal, Trinitarian nature of God. As a result, he is a thinker that cannot be overlooked.

C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)

C. S. Lewis's version of the moral argument, located mainly in Book 1 of *Mere Christianity*,[18] did more to generate interest in the moral argument than any other writing ever produced.[19] Lewis's version of the argument essentially rests upon two key premises: (1) There is an objective moral law; and (2) Humans have fallen short of the objective moral law. Therefore, Lewis proposes that there must be something like a Mind behind the moral law (to explain the first premise), and that only if this Mind forgives can human beings be alleviated of their guilty status (to deal with premise two). Lewis's claims that the moral law is basically a "set of instructions" for living, and his talk of divine forgiveness eventually lead him to conceptualize a personal God, One who makes possible personal actions such as instruction-giving and forgiving.[20] Although Lewis's main argument is found within the first part of *Mere Christianity*,

---

[17] Farmer, *The World and God*, 15.

[18] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001).

[19] On a personal note, it was originally the thought of C. S. Lewis that triggered my interest in the moral argument. My copy of *Mere Christianity* is filled with notes in the margins that eventually developed into what became this dissertation.

[20] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 160-165 (Book 4, Chapter 2).

there many other places where he addresses the moral argument, like in his *The Abolition of Man*, *Miracles*, *The Problem of Pain*, and *God in the Dock*.[21]

H. P. Owen (1926-1996)

H. P. Owen's *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism* aims to show that morality provides firm grounds for believing not just in "a transcendent, *personal* and holy God,"[22] but in God of Christianity more specifically, which makes his version of the argument more than an inference to generic theism. There are several ways Owen's argument points to the personal God of Christian theism, including his thoughts on the personal nature of various moral categories, including moral order, obligation, guilt, and the apparent pull or attractiveness of the moral law, to name a few. As with Rashdall, Webb, and Farmer, Owen has much to say about morality and the personal nature of God. Consequently, his voice will be heard again in the conversations that follow.

Other Historical Thinkers

There are other historical figures in the field of moral apologetics who are worth mentioning here, including John Henry Newman (1801-1890) and A. E. Taylor (1869-1945), who both speak on the personal nature of guilt, among other things. Henry Sidgwick (1838-1900) also provides helpful insight on the personal concept of moral motivation, and W. G. De Burgh (1866-1943) provides helpful discussions on moral values, moral duties, and reverence for the moral law. There are certainly other important figures playing significant roles in the

---

[21] C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001). C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001). C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001). C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014).

[22] H. P. Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1965), 7. Emphasis is added here to "personal."

development of the argument, many of which will be mentioned at some point in this dissertation.

<div align="center">Contemporary Thinkers</div>

In addition to the historical moral apologists, there are several contemporary thinkers who deserve special attention as well. William Lane Craig (1949-present), one of the foremost Christian apologists of the present day, claims that the moral argument, although not his favorite of the classical theistic arguments, is the most persuasive theistic argument in his opinion.[23] Craig is one of the contemporary thinkers who connects morality with a personal God by insisting, for instance, that moral values, such as justice, exist as properties of persons and cannot be reduced to mere abstractions.[24] Jerry L. Walls (1955-present) and David Baggett (1965-present) deserve special attention here, as they have co-authored three books on the moral argument, with a fourth in the works. Although they have written a trilogy of books on the moral argument thus far, it is in *The Moral Argument: A History* where Walls and Baggett provide numerous connections between morality and a personal God.[25] Moreover, Baggett has also co-authored a book with his wife, Marybeth Baggett (1972-present), entitled *The Morals of the Story*, where the personal nature of God is a focal point.[26] Another contemporary philosopher,

---

[23] Craig admits, "In my experience, the moral argument is the most effective of all the arguments for the existence of God. I say this grudgingly because my favorite is the cosmological argument. But cosmological and teleological arguments don't touch people where they live. The moral argument cannot be so easily brushed aside. For every day you get up you answer the question of whether there are objective moral values and duties by how you live. It's unavoidable." William Lane Craig, *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2010), 144.

[24] William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 179.

[25] David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016). David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011). Baggett and Walls, *The Moral Argument: A History*.

[26] David Baggett and Marybeth Baggett, *The Morals of the Story: Good News About a Good God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018).

Mark D. Linville (1957-present), notes how theism is well situated and equipped to account for human persons, moral agency, and personal dignity.[27] Finally, Paul Copan (1962-present) ties morality and personhood together, and, more specifically, maintains that moral categories, such as moral values, are only actualized if a personal God exists.[28] Copan also argues that human guilt felt before an abstract, impersonal (or non-personal) moral code seems odd and even misguided.[29] As with the historical thinkers, there are surely other modern thinkers who provide helpful thoughts on morality and the personhood of God,[30] some of whom will be mentioned in the pages to come.

Again, without the writings of these individuals, the moral argument would not possess the sort of widespread appeal and philosophical force that it enjoys today. It is because of these named individuals, and others, that the moral argument has been given a seat at the philosophical table of discussion where the big questions of life, such as God's existence, are debated. Over the past few decades, in particular, the resurgence of interest in the moral argument has been exciting to see.

---

[27] Linville has written a helpful encyclopedia article on the history of the moral argument. Mark D. Linville, "Moral Argument" in Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Religion* (Blackwell). Another substantive piece is Linville's "God is Necessary for Morality" in Michael Peterson and Ray VanArragon, eds., *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2019).

[28] Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), 211. Copan has also authored a very helpful book on the topic with Matthew Flannagan. See Paul Copan and Matthew Flannagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide? Coming to Terms with the Justice of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2014).

[29] Paul Copan, *True For You, But Not For Me* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1998), 62. Copan also wrote a widely anthologized piece on the moral argument with Mark D. Linville. See Paul Copan and Mark D. Linville, *The Moral Argument* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011).

[30] Robert M. Adams, C. Stephen Evans, and Mark Murphy deserve special mention here. Each of these individuals have offered significant contributions to moral philosophy.

The Moral Argument and God's Character

According to Farmer, "[T]he important question is, what is the *character* of God, what is the character of this ultimate, underived, unifying reality which we seem compelled to think of as the ground of the existence of the multitudinous 'bits and pieces' of reality which make up our everyday world?"[31] One "bit" or "piece" of reality that Farmer refers to is morality, and morality, or more specifically, the moral argument, greatly aids in the quest to determine the character of its ground or source. Not only is God non-contingent first cause, maximally great, and intelligent—as the cosmological, ontological, and teleological arguments demonstrate—the moral argument points to God as essentially good and loving, as well as transcendent yet deeply personal.[32] Moral evidence, perhaps unlike or better than evidence from nature, reveals and points to a God who is worthy of worship since a God who is worthy of worship must be morally perfect and seek what is best for humans (i.e., their redemption).[33] In all monotheistic traditions, God is presented as a Being who is worthy of worship; to posit a God or god who is not worthy of worship is to lower the bar, and one should not lower the bar or standard when it comes to the divine. The God that results from the cosmological, ontological, and teleological arguments might be the first cause, maximally great, or intelligent, but it at least seems possible that this God might also be morally imperfect, altogether averse to humans, or worse, a vindictive ruler or

---

[31] Farmer, *Towards Belief in God*, 16.

[32] One might object by pointing out an alleged contradiction between divine *transcendence* and divine *immanence*. However, it is important to note that Christian theism, for example, maintains the transcendence as well as the immanence (personal nature) of God (e.g., Jer. 23:23-24). As Clement Webb states, "Theism is not the doctrine of a merely 'transcendent' God (it is presumably to indicate that the word 'Deism' is often used in distinction from 'Theism' to express such a doctrine); the recognition of divine immanence is as indispensable to a genuine Theism as that of divine transcendence." Clement C. J. Webb, *Religion and Theism* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1934), 142.

[33] It is important to note that if there is a God who seeks what is best for humans—chiefly, their redemption—he is One who is personal in nature. This will be discussed more in chapter 6 when the category of moral transformation is examined.

cosmic bully. This is not to say that these arguments are not helpful. The point is that *it is the moral argument* that reveals or points to a God who is morally perfect, essentially loving, transcendent, and personal—and therefore, worthy of worship and devotion.[34]

Generally speaking, classical arguments for God's existence do not get one to the God of any particular religion, but it appears that the moral argument may be able to move one closer to than the other arguments to a particular conception of God due to its ability to reveal more of who God is (e.g., good, loving, personal, etc.). As Lewis says, there are basically two bits of evidence for God in the universe: (1) the universe God has made; and (2) the moral law. And according to Lewis, the moral law "is a better bit of evidence than the other, because it is inside information. You find out more about God from the Moral Law than from the universe in general just as you find out more about a man by listening to his conversation than by looking at a house he has built."[35] Similarly, Baggett and Walls suggest, "The moral argument is practically unique among the arguments from natural theology, in furnishing us warrant to infer not just that God exists, but that a God of a particular character exists."[36] This is significant because *who* God *is* is just as important as *that* God is, and if the moral argument is able to reveal more of God's particular character, it possesses a distinct advantage over the other arguments in this area.[37]

---

[34] Credit for some of these ideas goes to Paul K. Moser, who shares these concepts in this YouTube video: https://youtu.be/qiClbtO_qLI. Kant also speaks on this advantage of the moral argument in his *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004), 148-150.

[35] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 29.

[36] Baggett and Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality*, 49-50.

[37] The most powerful approach is cumulative in nature, utilizing all of the arguments for God's existence in an effort to demonstrate his existence and better understand what he is like. The goal here is not to suggest that the arguments are in competition with one another; rather, it is to point out a distinctive advantage of the moral argument.

The Debate Over God as Person and God as Personal

The concept that God is personal is an important part of religious belief. If God were not personal, it would be odd to think of him as moral or loving. It would also seem counterintuitive to speak of him as One with whom humans can have a personal relationship, One who can be trusted, cares for the people he created, listens to their prayers, acts on their behalf, has their best interests at heart, and so on. In short, to talk of such matters in a sensible manner and to experience them in everyday life seemingly requires that God is personal.

Numerous religious belief systems describe God as a person or claim that he is personal in some sense. For example, in Hinduism, Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva are represented in person-like form. In Islam, Allah possesses a face and two hands (Surah 38:75), has the ability to see and sits on a throne (Surah 57:4), is compassionate and merciful (Surah 1:3), and responds to the prayers of his people (Surah 11:61). In the Hebrew Bible (or Old Testament), God is One who decides to create (Gen. 1:1), walks in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:8), expresses emotions (Ex. 33:19; Is. 61:8), disciplines (Deut. 8:5), converses with human beings (Job 38-41), and reasons (Is. 1:18). The New Testament describes God's desire to be in relationship with those he has created (Jn. 15:13-15; Jas. 4:8; 1 Pet. 3:18; 1 Jn. 3:1), displays compassion (Mt. 9:36), judges (Jas. 4:12), loves (1 Jn. 4:10), and responds to prayers (Mt. 7:7-8; Mk. 11:24).[38]

Of course, there are those who argue that God cannot be "a person." For instance, Brian Davies argues that in order for one to be classified as a person, he or she must have a body, and since God is a disembodied spirit or force, God cannot be a person.[39] Others, such as Keith

---

[38] Elizabeth Burns, "Must Theists Believe in a Personal God?" *The Royal Institute of Philosophy, Think* 23, vol. 8 (Autumn 2009): 77-86.

[39] Brian Davies, *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil* (London, Continuum, 2006), 61. One might respond to this objection by simply stating that God is a person without a body, as Richard Swinburne has done in *The Coherence of Theism*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 101. Arguing from a Christian view of

Ward, argue that God lacks certain attributes that persons usually possess, such as the inability to think abstractly since divine knowledge is "complete and intuitive."[40] Davies also argues that God cannot experience emotions because to experience emotions is to be changed by something other than oneself.[41] Moreover, Ward contends that there are other attributes that God possesses that persons do not normally feature, such as the notion that he is a supremely perfect being and creator of everything not himself.[42] For Davies, the latter is problematic because persons are parts of creation, and God is the creator, so he cannot be a person (because he is not *part* of creation; persons are *created* beings in Davies' estimation).[43] Another problem that Ward assumes is that the person model implies that God and human persons are distinct things of the same kind, which seemingly fails to do justice to the idea that God is within human beings, or that human beings are one with God.[44]

In an attempt to clarify the debate over God as person/personal, in the literature there are three main ways God is classified on this score: (1) God is a person and so personal; (2) God is non-personal, and so is not a person; or (3) God is a personal non-person.[45] The first two views are probably more familiar positions, as the first is the position held by most contemporary

God, one could even say that God, more specifically, the Second Person of the Trinity (i.e., Jesus Christ, God's Son), *does* possess a body.

[40] Keith Ward, "Is God a Person?" in Gijsbert van den Brink, Luco J. van den Bron, and Marcel Sarot, eds., *Christian Faith and Philosophical Theology: Essays in Honour of Vincent Brummer* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1992), 261.

[41] Davies, *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil*, 209.

[42] Ward, "Is God a Person?", 262.

[43] Davies, *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil*, 62-68.

[44] Ward, "Is God a Person?" 264.

[45] For an overview of these three views, and for a defense of the first (that God is a person and so personal), see Ben Page, "Wherein Lies the Debate? Concerning Whether God is a Person," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 85 (June 2019): 297-317. The first view is the view that the present moral argument for a personal God assumes. It also needs to be noted that a fourth option actually exists, especially for Christian philosophers, as they believe God is three Persons and thus personal.

monotheist philosophers[46] and the second by those who are pantheists. The third view, which is likely less familiar to many, states that if God is not "a person," it is at least possible to refer to God as "personal."[47] This approach would accept that God has some person-like characteristics, and that he has them to a greater extent than human persons do. But, this begs the question regarding how many, or what specific attributes God needs in order to be described as personal. What are the necessary and sufficient conditions of personhood, and where does God stand on that score? Also, one must explain exactly what is meant by the term "personal."

The sticking point for many who apparently hold the third view, such as Ward and Davies, is over what it means to be a "person." However, Ward and Davies conflate personhood with humanity and then project this view onto God, which then makes it impossible, or at least very difficult, to call God a "person." An alternate view might maintain that if God is the Creator of human persons, one *should begin with God* in their attempt to understand and define personhood, and then project that understanding onto human persons. This view would make it possible to refer to God as a *divine* Person and human beings as *human* persons, since humans are created by God and therefore bear some resemblance to him. Instead of a bottom-up approach (like the approaches utilized by Ward and Davies), this is a top-down approach, and is closely related to Anselm's understanding of God as the perfect being possessing all of the "omni" qualities.

---

[46] For example, see T. J. Mawson, *Belief in God: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 14; Brian Leftow, "Is God an Abstract Object?" *Nous*, 24 (1990), 590; Swinburne, *The Coherence of* Theism, 104; J. E. Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity," in Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 106; and Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), vii.

[47] Those who hold this view prefer referring to God as a "principle," "ground," or in some other similar way. Graham Oppy, *Describing Gods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 10.

In this entire debate, it is important to note that claiming God is a person is not the exact same as claiming that human beings are persons. It is to say that God, like human persons, necessarily possesses the attributes found within human persons, albeit in the fullest sense possible.[48] As T. J. Mawson writes, God is "more of a person than any of us could ever hope to be."[49] Similarly, Brian Leftow claims, "If God is a person of an extraordinary sort, He is still a person."[50] If this view is adopted, it is at least possible to speak of God as a person,[51] although the goal of this section is not to solve the matter entirely; rather, it is to simply introduce the issue, which will be dealt with more appropriately later.[52]

---

[48] Stephen T. Davis, "God's Actions," in R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas, *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 164. Utilizing a top-down approach, this would mean that if God possess personhood and a personal nature in the fullest sense possible, then humans possess personhood and a personal nature in virtue of being created by God, although in a much less sense than God himself, who is the supreme Person and personal to the highest degree attainable. See Brian Leftow, "Anselm's Perfect-Being Theology," in Brian Davies and Brian Leftow, eds., *Cambridge Companion to Anselm* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 134; and Thomas Aquinas, *De Potentia Dei*, q.9, a.3, co. Also see Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986). Morris argues that God has the attributes of humanity, but not of mere humanity.

[49] Mawson, *Belief in God*, 20; T. J. Mawson, *The Divine Attributes* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 18.

[50] Brian Leftow, "Naturalistic Pantheism," in Andrei A. Buckareff and Yujin Nagasawa, eds., *Alternative Concepts of God: Essays on the Metaphysics of the Divine* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 73.

[51] Some would say that by viewing God as the perfect or ultimate "person," such as what is being suggested here, God's transcendence is denigrated and he becomes too anthropomorphic. See Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 120; Oppy, *Describing Gods*, 311; and J. L. Schellenberg, "God for All Time: From Theism to Ultimism," in Buckareff and Nagasawa, *Alternative Concepts of God*, 173-174.

[52] This issue will be discussed more in chapter 7, when metaphysical systems that posit a personal God are examined. One interesting conversation surrounding the debate over God as a Person involves the Christian understanding that God is actually *three Persons*. This is one of the challenges that will be discussed later.

The Definition of Key Terms

Person

In order to clarify and to set the stage for the argument that follows, a few key terms need defining, such as "person," "personal," "personhood," and "personality." As a side note, there are some things that seem to resist definition, or are at least difficult to "pin down" or define precisely. For instance, how should one define terms like "beauty," "music," or "green?" Obviously, one might *provide examples* of these things such as roses, a guitar being played, or grass in the spring—but this is not *defining* the terms except ostensively. In some ways, the task of defining "person," "personhood," "personal," and other corresponding terms is similar in this regard.[53] This is one reason why the task of defining personhood has been taken up by philosophers for thousands of years.[54] In order to better understand the meaning of the English word "person," which is of Greek and Latin origins, one must examine the Greek and Latin

---

[53] The difficulty involved with defining what it means to be a "person," although tricky, is a task that must not be ignored or overlooked. It is of extreme importance to define this term because how it is defined will play a crucial role in how persons are viewed and treated—both the unborn (or preborn) and born. History is replete with examples of personhood or humanity being denied or reduced in order to justify atrocious treatment—slavery, the Holocaust, abortion, etc. On a different note, Socrates was notorious for pushing his interlocutors to define certain realities almost impossibly difficult to explain with precision, which likely detracted from his popularity.

[54] A few words from Stephen T. Davis are helpful here. Davis says, "*Person* is one of those words that probably cannot be defined rigorously. Nevertheless, let us loosely define the term as 'a conscious purposive agent.' *Conscious* means that persons are things that engage in 'mental' or 'conscious' acts like thinking, feeling, desiring, willing, believing and knowing. *Purposive* means that persons are things that have certain desires, intentions or aims, and set out to achieve them. *Agent* means that persons are things that have the ability to act, to do or to achieve things in the world. Obviously, there are limitations on what human agents can achieve. No matter how badly I might want to leap over a tall building, I could not do it. But if I wanted to walk to the library or telephone my wife, I almost certainly could do those things. There are perhaps other notions that are constitutive of our concept of persons. For example, a person can be harmed or benefited; a person is able to make moral judgments; a person is a member of a linguistic community; and a person is able to formulate second-order desires or wants (that is, wants about wants, like the desire to cease desiring cigarettes). Accordingly, let us say that a person is a conscious, purposive agent that possesses a significant number of the properties just mentioned." Stephen T. Davis, "God's Actions," in Geivett and Habermas, *In Defense of Miracles*, 164.

terms. The chart below contains definitions of two terms: the Greek "πρόσωπον" and the Latin

"*persona*."[55]

Greek	Latin
πρόσωπον: person; a less technical term than ὑπόστασις or *subsistentia* used to refer to the three persons of the Trinity.[56] The original meaning of πρόσωπον was "face" or "expression," but by the time the Greek fathers appropriated the word for its use in Trinitarian theology, πρόσωπον had taken on the connotation of "role," as in a play, and of the individual person indicated by the role.	*persona*: person; a person is, according to Boethius' definition, an individual substance of a rational nature. Like πρόσωπον, *persona* carries the connotation of a dramatic role in a play or a mask worn by an actor while playing a role.[57]

The goal of this section is less to argue what is meant by "person" on a human level, but rather what the term implies when directed toward God.[58] If God exists, he is the One who establishes personhood. He is "the premier person, the first and chief exemplar of personhood . . . and the properties most important for an understanding of our personhood are properties we share with him."[59] If God is the very standard of personhood, humans are arguably persons only insofar as they imitate or at least possess the ability to imitate him. Therefore, yet again, when

---

[55] Definitions for each term taken from Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017). The purpose of this chart is to serve as a reference point for the ensuing discussion.

[56] Interestingly, the notion of personhood most clearly first arose in the context of figuring out what the doctrine of the Trinity meant. Clement Webb argues that "it is beyond question that historically it was in connexion [sic] with the doctrine of the Trinity that the words 'person' and 'personality' came to be used of the Divine Being." Webb, *God and Personality*, 61. Webb provides a helpful discussion of the history of the notion of personhood (which he says first arises in discussions pertaining to the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity) in *God and Personality*, 35-60.

[57] The historical development of this term, particularly from the fourth century on, contains lots of twists and turns. For a detailed discussion of this, see "*persona*" in Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*.

[58] Though these questions may be intimately related, the goal is not necessarily to provide a solution here.

[59] Alvin Plantinga, "Advice to Christian Philosophers," *Faith and Philosophy*: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers, vol. 1, issue 3 (1984): 253-271.

defining "person" in relation to God, one must avoid importing the idea of "person" as one thinks of it in terms of a human being. Rather, the point is that when seeking to define "person," one ought to use a top-down approach by starting with God rather than man. In sum, although there are various ways of defining "person," there is a general consensus that a person is a self-conscious being who thinks, feels, and wills, and who is capable of loving and being loved by other persons. As a result, this is how "person" will be understood here.

<center>*Personal*[60]</center>

There are important characteristics of a God who is personal, including his ability to think, feel, will, and perhaps most importantly, his ability to enter into *personal relationship* with others (i.e., human persons) outside himself.[61] When speaking of God as "personal," one has in mind what is always possible of personal relations—worship, trust, and love—between oneself and God.[62] Even the idea of humans directing emotion toward the Supreme Reality, which regularly occurs, is not easily describable apart from reference to a personal God.[63] Thus, on the whole, although other characteristics are required of a personal God, one ought not speak of a personal God unless it is supposed that he or she can stand in *personal relation* to him.[64]

---

[60] Throughout this dissertation, terms such as "personhood" and "personality" are largely used synonymously with the term "personal." On the other hand, "non-personal" and "impersonal" are used as antonyms of "personal" and other similar terms.

[61] Hastings Rashdall, *Philosophy and Religion*, (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), 55. Similarly, Webb notes that God (the "personal Absolute") is "a Being with whom persons can stand in personal relations." Webb, *God and Personality*, 123, 126.

[62] Webb, *God and Personality*, 70.

[63] Clement C. J. Webb, *Divine Personality and Human Life* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1920), 17-18.

[64] What constitutes a personal relationship? According to Farmer, "The answer would seem to be that he is recognized as one with a right and claim to speak and to be spoken *to*, and not merely to be spoken *about*, to be consulted, a right and a claim which must be met so soon as the physical situation permits it. Everything is focused in this idea of speech *to* a person and not merely *about* him. Thus 'speech to' presupposes that the person addressed has rational intelligence, does not lack what is sometimes called, in a very significant sense, *discourse* of reason; that he is a self-directing and responsible will who can engage, in the light of his own rational judgment, in an answering

Other characteristics are usually associated with the term "personal," such as self-consciousness, along with the capacity to reason, experience emotions, make decisions, and act. According to Nancy Pearcey, a personal being is "a conscious agent with the capacity to think, feel, choose, and act—in contrast to an unconscious principle or substance that operates by blind, automatic forces (such as the forces of nature)."[65] If it is justifiable to think of God as a self-conscious Being who thinks, feels, wills, and who is capable of loving and being loved by other persons, then it seems natural to think and speak of God's existence as *personal*. For to exist as "a self-conscious being—conscious of itself and other beings, thinking, willing, feeling, loving—is what we mean by being a person."[66]

---

activity of speech, indeed in any activity relevant and significant to the situation; that he is in a measure not dependent on merely external forces playing upon him and manipulating him by impact, as a leaf is blown by the wind, but can recognize and respond to what I *mean*. All this, implicit in our awareness of the other to whom we speak, is implicit also in our awareness of ourselves as speaking; for if there were no possibility of being spoken to in return, though it be only by a nod or a shake of the head, we would not speak at all. The shortest way to sum the whole matter up is the one which has come much to the fore in recent thought, namely to say that in a specifically personal relationship a living being is a 'thou' to us, and we are a 'thou' to him. It is an 'I-thou' relationship, or a 'thou-thou' relationship. An impersonal relationship is an 'I-it' or an 'it-it' relationship. Or in more technical language, the difference between a personal and an impersonal relationship is the difference between a subject-subject relationship and a subject-object relationship. Where the other being is fully grasped and treated as a subject and not as an object, there is apprehension of him as personal. But the best way undoubtedly is to use the idea of 'thou,' the second person, as over against 'he, she or it,' the third person. The collocation 'he, she or it' is significant. 'He' or 'she' we say are *personal* pronouns, 'it' is impersonal; yet in conjugating the verb we put them together. Why? Precisely because 'he' and 'she' refer to persons, i.e. are *about* persons, they are just for that reason *pro tanto* impersonal in the relation they indicate, and are indistinguishable from 'it.' That is why sensitive people have an instinctive recoil from saying things behind other people's backs which they would not be prepared to say to their face. They sense the impersonality of it. They feel that the only protection against this impersonality is always to test 'speech about' in the light of 'speech to.'" H. H. Farmer, *Towards Belief in God* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1942), 34-35. The "face-to-face" dynamic is key. The *face* is key to understanding personhood, it would seem (at least etymologically, but likely in a stronger sense). It is interesting that on the Judeo-Christian view one cannot see God's *face* and live. Face-to-face interactions serve to constrain humanity's rudeness—this is why internet interactions are so often hideous; there is something awful within humans that is usually only latent and held in check by the strictures of personal encounters; remove the constraints and the ugliness so often ensues.

[65] Nancy Pearcey, *Finding Truth: 5 Principles for Unmasking Atheism, Secularism, and Other God Substitutes* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2015), 29.

[66] Rashdall, *Philosophy of Religion*, 55.

The Flow of Things

The universe and everything contained within it is either the result of a personal God (or gods) or a non-personal essence, force, or set of natural processes. Ultimate reality is either personal or non-personal, and everything within the universe flows from one or the other. This leads to the question: What best explains the observable data in the universe, such as cosmological constants, DNA, human personality, and morality?[67] Are these things the result of a personal God or a non-personal essence, force, or set of natural processes?

When gathering evidence for God, it is important to note that an effect cannot have a quality the cause did not have to give (principle of causality). For instance, a horse cannot produce a 2021 Ford Bronco, simply because a horse does not possess the inherent qualities

---

[67] Although the present argument focuses on morality, there are indicators from design that a personal God likely exists, such as contrivance, for example. First, according to William Paley, "Contrivance, if established, appears to me to prove every thing which we wish to prove. Amongst other things it proves the *personality* of the Deity, as distinguished from what is sometimes called nature, sometimes called a principle. . . . Now that which can contrive, which can design, must be a person. These capacities constitute personality, for they imply consciousness and thought. They require that which can perceive an end or purpose; as well as the power of providing means, and of directing them to their end. They require a centre [*sic*] in which perceptions unite, and from which volitions flow; which is a mind. The acts of a mind prove the existence of a mind: and in whatever a mind resides is a person." William Paley, *Natural Theology: Or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of The Deity, Collected From the Appearances of Nature* (London: Wilks and Taylor, 1803), 439-440. In Paley's estimation, contrivance—the act of inventing, devising or planning—implies a personal Deity that is distinct from nature. If the universe includes what Paley calls "marks of contrivance," then there is likely a personal Designer both prior to and beyond the universe itself. Why would this Designer exist prior to and beyond the universe? To answer this question, Paley uses an analogy involving the existence of an animal and explains that an animal could not have contrived its own limbs and senses. In other words, an animal could not have invented, planned, or devised its own physical makeup, senses, and so on. Likewise, the universe could not have produced itself because whatever is contrived cannot exist eternally—or, at the very least, prior to itself. This suggests that whatever bears "marks of contrivance" points to a pre-existent *Contriver* or, as Paley says, "an *intelligent* author." Additionally, the order evidenced in nature also points to the existence of a divine *Contriver*. In sum, if there are "marks of contrivance" observed in the universe, they are best explained in terms of a personal God because nature itself does not have the ability to invent, devise, or plan its own existence. Inventing, devising, and planning are entirely personal acts and are carried out by beings possessing a volition or will (i.e., persons). Paley, *Natural Theology*, 443-452. Yet other indicators from design suggest a personal Designer, including (but not limited to): design implies purpose and purpose points to a personal will; the earth is optimally suited for human life which indicates not just intentional design but that the Designer cares—and caring is a personal attribute; information, such as what is found in DNA, points to a personal intelligence; and the design of the universe evokes a sense of awe, wonder, and reverence in human persons—which seems to make more sense when directed toward a personal God. Also see Stephen C. Meyer's *Return of the God Hypothesis*, which presents evidence from design for the existence of a personal God. Stephen C. Meyer, *Return of the God Hypothesis: Three Scientific Discoveries That Reveal the Mind Behind the Universe* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2021).

necessary for producing a car of any type, let alone a 2021 Ford Bronco. As Lewis says, "Descent, downward movement, is the key word. The march of all things is from higher to lower. The rude and imperfect always springs from something perfect and developed."[68] In short, a stream cannot rise higher than its source.[69] This means that if something such as morality is personal, it must come from something that is personal. Certainly, something that is non-personal or impersonal can come from something that is personal (e.g., a painting from an artist), but something that is personal cannot come from something that is non-personal or impersonal (e.g., an artist from a painting).[70] Simply put, ". . . impersonal cannot account for personal being . . ."[71] What this means for the argument at hand is that if moral facts exist, and if they are personal in nature, they strongly point in the direction of a personal God.

Approach

Although there are several ways for one to go about arguing from morality to the existence of God,[72] something resembling an abductive methodology is utilized throughout this work. A method of this sort gathers the available data or evidence, analyzes it, and then makes an inference to the best explanation. This is not a knockdown approach or a form of arguing that

---

[68] Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 227.

[69] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 48.

[70] The former is an example of a stream *not* rising above its source, whereas the latter is an instance where a stream *does* rise above its source.

[71] Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism*, 71.

[72] One common approach involves arguing deductively, as William Lane Craig oftentimes does. Craig's argument is deductive in nature, which means, if valid, that the conclusion follows with airtight certainty from the premises. Craig's moral argument looks like this: (P1) If God does not exist, then objective moral values and duties do not exist; (P2) Objective moral values and duties do exist; (C) Therefore, God exists. Craig, *On Guard*, 129.

produces certainty, but rather one that results in plausibility or probability.[73] Applying this method to the current project, several categories of moral phenomena/evidence will be examined, such as moral knowledge, moral values, moral obligations, and moral transformation. Data will be identified, and then the data or evidence will be explained by several possible explanation candidates in an effort to determine which hypothesis possesses the most explanatory power, widest explanatory scope, is the most plausible, and so on.[74] In discursive format, an abductive moral argument looks something like this:

P1) There are objective moral values and duties.

P2) The best explanation of objective moral values and duties is God.

C) Therefore, (plausibly or probably) God exists.

There are several reasons for adopting this sort of approach for the task at hand. First, it is a modest, humble approach. It recognizes that there are other possible explanations, that there is more work to be done, and that knowledge of ultimate reality, especially apart from special revelation, is virtually impossible to attain. Second, it is likely more charitable and respectful,

---

[73] Edward John Carnell defines probability in this way: "Probability is that state of coherence in which more evidence can be corralled for a given hypothesis than can be amassed against it. The more the evidences increase, the more the strength of probability increases." Edward John Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), 113.

[74] For further explanations of abduction, see Michael R. Licona, "Arguments to the Best Explanation" in *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 108-114; and Baggett and Walls, "The Case for Abduction" in *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning*, 54-78. In *God and Cosmos*, Baggett and Walls explain an abductive approach to the moral argument in this manner: "This world may well have been created and infused with meaning by God; suspend judgment on that for the moment. Take a look at this world and see what you can do by way of explaining morality and its distinctive features, and don't be surprised if you find that you can make some progress. But then, remind yourself of the fuller range of moral facts in need of explanation—values and duties to be sure, but also moral freedom, knowledge, responsibility, moral regrets, shame, forgiveness, the prescriptive power and rational authority of morality, the desire for the congruence of happiness and holiness, the needed resources for moral transformation, human dignity and equality and worth—and ask yourself this question: What better explains this full range of moral facts? This world alone? Or the conjunction of this world and its Creator, who made us in his image, created us for a purpose, invested us with the capacity for empathy and rationality and moral apprehension? This world, counterpossibly assuming its existence without God, certainly has the resources to explain some things about morality, but God and this world together better explain morality." Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, 77.

gentle and kind. It recognizes that there are real people behind the arguments, and that the goal is not necessarily to win an argument or crush an opponent, but to listen and learn, and strive ultimately to win a person. As the apostle Peter says in 1 Peter 3:15, one ought to "always [be] prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with *gentleness and respect*" (emphasis added). Elsewhere, in Colossians 4:6, the apostle Paul says something similar when he states, "*Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt*, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person" (emphasis added). Third, this kind of approach recognizes that there is common ground among people of various belief systems. In fact, arguing in this manner likely makes points of convergence, overlap, and resonance with competing theories more likely—which then, in turn, provides opportunities for more meaningful conversation. For these reasons, and others, something akin to an abductive approach is preferred.[75]

Format, Goals, and Key Questions of this Moral Argument

Format

The approach being taken here, as noted above, is more abductive in nature, where several of the features of morality are examined and then an attempt is made to locate the likely best source of the moral law. Arguments of this variety are oftentimes not provided in discursive format; however, out of a desire to clearly lay out the ensuing argument, the argument is provided below in the clearest form possible:

P1) There are objective moral facts.

---

[75] To be honest and clear, a full abductive case cannot be taken on in one dissertation on a topic of this magnitude. There are simply too many alternatives to consider. Therefore, the desire in this project is to simply contribute to what is a much larger project. There are many more parts to the larger project that have to be undertaken in order to make a more complete abductive case.

P2) Objective moral facts possess many features that are personal in nature.

P3) The best explanation of objective moral facts, which possess a personal nature, is a personal source (i.e., a personal God).

P4) Naturalism, which is non-personal, is likely unable to account for the personal nature of morality. Platonism, which is also non-personal, faces a challenge when attempting to account for the personal nature of morality.

P5) Although there are several metaphysical systems that describe God as personal, Christianity is unique in its Trinitarian description of God as an intrinsically personal Being from all eternity.

C) Therefore, Christianity is a plausible and even robust explanation of the personal nature of objective moral facts.

Goals

There are essentially three overarching goals of this particular moral argument: (1) provide reasons for taking objective morality seriously; (2) examine the nature of morality by considering four moral categories—moral knowledge, moral values, moral obligations, and moral transformation; and (3) locate the likely best source of morality given its personal or non-personal nature.

Key Questions

Every dissertation involves attempting to answer key questions. There are essentially three key questions that this dissertation seeks to answer:

(1) Are there objective moral facts?

(2) What is the nature of objective moral facts, particularly the various categories of morality in general: non-personal or personal?

(3) Given the personal or non-personal nature of objective moral categories, what is their likely best source?

A Few Brief Clarifications

Before proceeding further, stressing the following point is of great importance: The goal of this version of the moral argument is not to say that God's personhood is *the key* to the moral argument, but that God's personhood renders him the *likely best explanation* of various moral phenomena, including moral knowledge, values, duties, and transformation. There are various reasons for avoiding language that hints at saying the personal nature of God is *the key* to the moral argument. First, God's personhood is largely built into the operative conception of theology on several belief systems. For example, when the Jewish, Islamic, or Christian conception of God is in view, the personality of God is typically presupposed in every reference to God that one makes.[76] Second, the personhood of God alone does not distinguish between rival conceptions of the divine. What is needed is the God of the "omni" qualities (per Anselm), which indicates that "personality" is among other attributes that one needs in his or her right theology. While the moral argument may reveal that God is essentially personal, as well as essentially loving, holy, just and sovereign, along with lots of other things, other classical arguments may be able to more effectively show that God is, say, omnipotent and omnipresent.[77] This is why the moral argument, while powerful on its own, is most effective when part of a cumulative case.[78] Third, the personhood of God is one among other features of God that render

---

[76] On this score, Farmer explains, "We propose the thesis that to uncover what is central in the awareness of God as personal is to uncover what is the essence of living religion all down the ages. The *essence of religion in all its forms is a response to the ultimate as personal. To* one who believes that God is in fact personal such a conclusion is, indeed, unavoidable." Farmer, *The World and God*, 32.

[77] This is not to say that it is altogether impossible for the moral argument to suggest the full panoply of great-making characteristics. Admittedly, it may not be as *obvious* that the moral argument leads to God's non-moral attributes (e.g., omnipotence and omnipresence), but the door should not be slammed shut on this possibility. There is undoubtedly more work that needs to be done in moral apologetics, which is an exciting endeavor involving a community of believers, and one that is certainly capable of producing new results and possibilities.

[78] To use an analogy, the moral argument is not a one-man team. Rather, it belongs on a team with other capable players/arguments that must be utilized appropriately (e.g., the cosmological, teleological, and ontological arguments—in addition to the minimal facts argument, the argument from aesthetics, and so on). Rather than falling

him the likely best explanation of moral facts. Accordingly, rather than viewing a project on the personality of God as a stand-alone project, it ought to be viewed as a small part of a much larger community effort. God's personal nature may very well provide substantial insight into various moral categories, and may even be necessary for other attributes of God to retain sensibility, but his personality alone does not entail that he is essentially loving, holy and sovereign, among other things. Fourth, maintaining that the personhood of God is *the key* to the moral argument lacks epistemic humility and ignores the fact that there is always more work to accomplish when it comes to comprehending the ineffable character of God. Again, for these reasons, the aim of this project is not to say that God's personality is *the key* or *the bridge* that allows one to move from the moral argument to the God of a particular religion (e.g., Christian theism), although it will be shown that it is certainly relevant to that further step.[79]

Overview of Chapters

Following the introduction (chapter 1), chapter 2 seeks to provide fifteen reasons for believing in objective morality, and then considers a few matters that frame the remainder of the dissertation, including the nature and origin of moral facts. Chapter 3 focuses on the first of four moral categories to be examined in the present work, moral knowledge. Since there are skeptics who contend moral knowledge is not possible, a few responses are provided in an effort to at least allow for the possibility of moral knowledge. A few reasons for believing in the possibility

---

prey to partisanship, one ought to admit—regardless of his or her favorite argument—that the arguments actually work together in order form an even stronger team.

[79] Another important note involves my approach to this project as a Christian. Each person carries out his or her work through a specific framework; we all wear "glasses" that inevitably shape our thoughts and efforts. The goal throughout this dissertation is to remain as objective as possible, but there are admittedly times when I engage in something akin to philosophical theology (especially in chapters 6 and 7) as I ultimately desire to demonstrate that Christianity provides a robust account of the nature of morality.

of moral knowledge are provided, and then the nature of moral knowledge is considered, with emphasis on whether moral knowledge is personal or non-personal, and therefore pointings in the direction of a personal or non-personal source. In chapter 4, the category of moral values is examined in an effort to determine the nature of moral values, and thus, their source. Chapter 5 deals with moral obligations or duties, considers the possibility of them being commands from God, and then seeks to determine if they point more in the direction of a personal or non-personal source. In chapter 6, the fourth moral category, moral transformation, is analyzed, with the goal of determining whether it points more in the direction of a personal or non-personal source. In the conclusion (chapter 7), the evidence gathered throughout the dissertation is summarized, and then weighed against several belief systems, with the ultimate goal being to demonstrate that Christian theism is the most plausible candidate for grounding the personal nature of morality, particularly given Christianity's conception of God as an *intrinsically* personal Being from all eternity.

CHAPTER TWO: OBJECTIVE MORALITY AND ITS SOURCE

Introduction

The cornerstone of the moral argument is the existence of objective moral facts. If there really are moral facts that hold true regardless of human opinions and emotions, the moral argument has the ability to convince. However, apart from the existence of objective moral facts, moral arguments for God's existence quickly lose their persuasive power. If morality is merely an illusion, or social construction, a relativistic matter, an emotional projection, or worse yet—an enormous mistake—then there is no real fodder for constructing the argument.

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche claims, "There are altogether no moral facts."[80] Elsewhere, he maintains that morality "has truth only if God is the truth—it stands or falls with faith in God."[81] Various versions of the moral argument for God's existence basically utilize Nietzsche's claims as its two premises.[82] For example, consider this general abductive version of the moral argument:

P1) There are objective moral facts.

P2) The likely best explanation of objective moral facts is God.

C) Therefore, (plausibly) God exists.

Contra Nietzsche, Premise 1 states that there are objective moral facts (i.e., values and duties, to start with). If Nietzsche is right—that there are no moral facts—then the argument above

---

[80] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter A. Kaufmann and Reginald J. Hollingdale (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1968), 55. Also see Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* in Walter Kaufmann, ed. and trans., *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1982), 501.

[81] Ibid., 70.

[82] Mark Linville introduces the moral argument in a similar way in Mark D. Linville, "The Moral Argument," in William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 392.

collapses. On the other hand, if Nietzsche is wrong—if there are moral facts, indeed—then the moral argument is able to get off the ground. For this reason, before considering how morality points to a particular source (e.g., God), one must first establish reasons for believing in objective morality. Therefore, in an effort to address these matters (at least briefly) and to provide a bit of fuel to get the moral argument moving, this chapter's chief focus is on providing reasons for believing in objective moral facts, or at least, for taking the notion of objective morality seriously.[83] At the end of this chapter, a few words will be mentioned regarding the source of the moral law. These words will serve the purpose of setting up or framing the chapters that follow.

Objective Moral Facts and Moral Realism

Prior to delving into the various reasons for believing in objective moral facts, it is important to first understand what they are. There are several important features of moral facts worth noting. First, moral facts are not dependent on humans; they are discovered by humans. This means that morality is similar to scientific laws, notes in music, or mathematical formulas—all of which enjoy objectivity and are thus discovered rather than invented by humans. Second, moral facts are objective in the sense that they are true regardless of what any human being anywhere thinks, feels, or believes about them. In other words, even if human beings disagree with moral facts, the facts hold true.[84] Third, believing there are objective moral facts does not

---

[83] Whereas this chapter (chapter 2) focuses on premise 1 of this argument, chapters 3-6 essentially focus on premise 2, with special attention given to "which God" best fits the moral data (this is the primary aim of chapter 7). There is a brief word on premise 2 at the end of this chapter.

[84] Even if *all* human beings everywhere disagreed with the existence of objective moral facts, the facts would *still* hold true. It is important to note that human belief does not determine truth. To be clear, humans ought to believe (or at least desire to believe) what is true—but it is not on the basis of a person's belief that something is true or false.

necessarily imply moral absolutism. For example, just because one is a moral realist does not mean that one always thinks it is wrong to perform certain actions, such as killing. Of course, it is objectively wrong to kill someone for pleasure. However, there are times when taking the life of another person may well be the right thing to do. For instance, it is arguably objectively right to take the life of a person who is holding a gun to an innocent child, in order to save the life of the child. Fourth, moral realism is at least *prima facie* agnostic on the nature and origin of moral facts. So, for example, being a moral realist does not necessarily mean that one is also a theist.[85] In order to determine the most likely source of moral facts, one has to examine the various moral properties. Fifth, there are many different versions of moral realism, and no single description can adequately account for all of the theories that have taken the label. Despite the differences, it is possible to define moral realism in a general sense.

When one is speaking of objective moral facts, he is speaking as a moral realist. What is moral realism? According to Russ Shafer-Landau, "Moral realism is the theory that moral judgments enjoy a special sort of objectivity: such as judgments, where true, are so independently of what any human being, anywhere, in any circumstance whatever, thinks of them."[86] Andrew Fisher explains, "Realism holds that moral judgments can be true or false, that sometimes they are true and that what makes them true is independent from people's (or groups of people's) beliefs, judgments, or desires."[87] Generally speaking, despite the various labels the theory of moral realism receives, moral realism is the view that, among other things perhaps, there really is an objective standard of right and wrong that holds true regardless of human

---

[85] One must consider various moral properties in order to gain an understanding of the nature of moral facts and then, in turn, begin considering the most likely explanation for their origin. This issue will be mentioned at the end of this chapter, but is essentially the aim of chapters 3-6 in this work.

[86] Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2.

[87] Andrew Fisher, *Metaethics: An Introduction* (Durham: Acumen, 2011), 77.

opinions, emotions, beliefs, or judgments. For example, one might think it is permissible to join a racially motivated group whose mission involves killing people of a different race; however, this does not change the fact that this person's decision is morally wrong. Likewise, even if some people understand rape to be morally acceptable in certain situations, this does not undermine the wrongness of rape in virtually all situations.

The two examples above bring up an interesting parallel between the study of science and moral realism. With science, it is assumed there are actual facts about the universe that are discoverable. These facts are not the product of human invention; rather, they are objective features of the universe that prompt further study and promote human learning. If there are no objective features of the universe, there is no basis for scientific inquiry. The same is true with morality. As moral realism assumes, there are moral facts within the universe that are discoverable. Such facts are not invented; instead, they are objective features of the universe that provide a set of moral guidelines or instructions that define and prescribe how humans ought to live their lives. With science, there may be disagreement over which theory best explains a set of evidence; however, this does not suggest there is no *true* theory. It only means that human persons have not yet mastered the particular area of scientific inquiry. The same is true with morality. Disagreements that result over moral issues among cultures does not reveal that moral realism is false; it probably only reveals that humankind has not yet mastered or lived up to the moral law in the fullest sense. Now that the argument has been introduced and the theory of moral realism has been briefly explained, it is time to determine whether there are good reasons for believing in objective moral facts.

Reasons for Taking Objective Morality Seriously[88]

When considering reasons for believing in something, it is wise to gather and weigh evidence before coming to a firm conclusion. To illustrate, consider what is involved when serving on a jury in a murder case. A task such as this involves listening to testimonies and examining various evidences presented, determining the facts that flow from the evidence, and drawing inferences from the facts—all of which forms the basis for one's decision. So it is with the case for objective morality: one first considers the reasons (or evidences) for believing in objective morality and then draws inferences from the data. This leads to the question: Is there evidence for objective moral facts? When examining the moral landscape, at least fifteen reasons surface for taking objective morality seriously.[89]

Reason 1: Obviousness

Some would say that an argument for objective morality is unnecessary because certain moral facts are *just plain obvious*. One likely does not need an argument in order to be convinced of the wrongness of, say, torturing a child for fun; such an act is obviously deplorable. In fact, it is just as obvious that something like child torture is morally wrong as it is that $2 + 2 = 4$, especially if one understands the nature of children, torture, and fun. These three things simply do not go together; they are an awful fit. On this score, Michael Ruse, a naturalistic philosopher, states, "The man who says that it is morally acceptable to rape little children is just as mistaken as the man who says, $2 + 2 = 5$."[90] Moral intuition reveals that one could insert *any* number of

---

[88] An earlier version of this discussion appears here: Stephen S. Jordan, "C. S. Lewis and 8 Reasons for Believing in Objective Morality," *Moral Apologetics*, published January 18, 2019, accessed January 26, 2020, https://www.moralapologetics.com/wordpress/2019/1/18/c-s-lewis-and-8-reasons-for-believing-in-objective-morality.

[89] This chapter does not necessarily establish moral realism, as the alternate views would have to be taken on in order to properly establish moral realism. Instead, the goal of this chapter is to offer a number of suggestive considerations for taking moral realism seriously.

morally unacceptable acts in the place of "rape little children" and the statement would still hold

true. Similarly, atheist philosopher Kai Nielsen, acknowledges:

> It is more reasonable to believe such elemental things [wife-beating, child abuse] to be
> evil than to believe any skeptical theory that tells us we cannot know or reasonably
> believe any of these things to be evil. . . . I firmly believe that this is bedrock and right
> and that anyone who does not believe it cannot have probed deeply enough into the
> grounds of his moral beliefs.[91]

Many moral facts are deeply intuitive, which suggests that they are oftentimes self-evident.[92] As

Ruse and Nielson indicate above, the wrongness of certain acts is as obvious and easy to figure

out as basic math. In addition to the overwhelming obviousness that certain acts *are wrong*, there

are many other acts and values that are *obviously right*, such as helping an elderly neighbor who

cannot afford groceries or viewing all human persons as possessing intrinsic worth.

Ultimately, due to the intuitive nature of moral facts, the burden of proof rests upon the

skeptic to show that moral intuitions are misguided or altogether fallacious. If humanity's moral

starting point is wrong, the skeptic must demonstrate how. As David Brink says,

> Our moral thinking and discourse might be systematically mistaken. But this would be a
> revisionary conclusion, to be accepted only as the result of extended and compelling
> argument that the commitments of ethical objectivity are unsustainable. In the meantime,
> we should treat the objectivity of ethics as a kind of default assumption or working
> hypothesis.[93]

What Brink is saying is that unless there is evidence against ethical objectivity, one is justified in

holding the moral realist position by default. Unless there are compelling defeaters of moral

---

[90] Michael Ruse, *Darwinism Defended* (London: Addison-Wesley, 1982), 275.

[91] Kai Nielson, *Ethics without God* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1990), 10-11.

[92] Some moral questions are subtle, involving delicate balances of values in tension; there still may be a moral fact of the matter. To be clear, self-evidence in some moral cases does not imply that a full-blown intuitionist theory must be adopted. Actually, intuitions are (at most) penultimate in the quest for moral knowledge.

[93] David Brink, *The Autonomy of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 9.

realism, moral realism ought to at least be assumed as true. In everyday life, one does not assume skepticism about her experience in the physical world, that is, unless she is given reason to do so. If this is the case, why should one accept a skeptical attack on *moral intuition* if there is no evidence to support it? One should not doubt one's moral intuitions unless one has good reasons for doing so. For example, unless someone can provide a persuasive reason for the moral permissibility of something along the lines of murdering deformed infants, one is justified in believing that it is objectively wrong to do so. Simply put, humanity's general moral intuitions are usually right, which means they should be viewed and treated as "innocent until proven guilty."

Is morality as obvious as is being suggested here? What about psychopaths or sociopaths, who do not possess the requisite moral capacity for recognizing the wrongness of acts that the majority of people deem morally abhorrent? When considering this objection, one should consider the story of David Wood, a diagnosed psychopath who once tried to murder his own father with a hammer. Wood, though lacking the moral capacity to *feel* that certain things are either right or wrong, is able to *recognize through reasoning* the rightness or wrongness of certain deeds.[94] Though some may raise arguments against objective morality, such as the psychopath objection, there are adequate responses available. As atheist philosopher Peter Cave maintains, "[W]hatever skeptical arguments may be brought against our belief that killing the innocent is morally wrong, we are more certain that the killing is morally wrong than that the argument is sound. . . . Torturing an innocent child for the sheer fun of it is morally wrong."[95] Yet again, some moral facts are *just plain obvious*.

---

[94] For David Wood's story and a response to the psychopath objection, see David Baggett, "On *Psychopathy* and Moral Apologetics," *Moral Apologetics*, published December 11, 2014, accessed February 24, 2020, https://www.moralapologetics.com/wordpress/on-psychopathy-and-moral-apologetics?rq=psychopath.

The argument could basically pause here, waiting for a good response from a skeptic who holds to a moral anti-realist view. However, out of a desire to provide a more substantive case for moral realism, additional reasons for believing in objective morality will be provided.[96]

Reason 2: General Consensus

If an objective moral standard is as obvious as suggested above, there ought to be a general consensus on what is right and wrong. This is not to say that truth is determined by what the majority says is true or right, as there are countless examples throughout history where the majority got it wrong (e.g., the majority of Americans once thought slavery was morally acceptable). Nevertheless, if one is suggesting that morality is obvious, then it makes sense to ask if morality is *this obvious* to virtually everyone. Is there some sort of general consensus on what is right and wrong? If not, the first reason for believing in objective morality (i.e., it is obvious) likely fails.[97]

Does mankind generally agree, as C. S. Lewis suggests, that a "human idea of decent behavior [is] obvious to everyone?"[98] Are there things that nearly everyone agrees are either right or wrong? Although there are various ways to answer this question, Lewis poses an

---

[95] Peter Cave, *Humanism* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2009), 146.

[96] J. L. Mackie, a prominent moral skeptic, maintains that anyone who is committed to objective values must also be committed to intuitionism and, on Mackie's view, claiming that morality is obvious or intuitive is "a travesty of actual moral thinking." As Mackie states, "[T]he suggestion that moral judgements are made or moral problems solved by just sitting down and having an ethical intuition is *a travesty of actual moral thinking.*" Since chapter 3 deals with moral knowledge, and because intuitionism will be discussed, Mackie's objection will be addressed in more detail there. However, perhaps this brief note is helpful here for clarification purposes: One can affirm the power of moral intuitions without putting all his or her eggs in the intuitionist basket, contra Mackie's claim. Of course, Robert Audi has done a lot of work in defending full-fledged intuitionism, and some of his thoughts on the matter will appear in chapter 3. J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, reprint (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 38.

[97] The very definition of the term "obvious" implies that *the majority* of people can easily perceive or understand something.

[98] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001), 5.

interesting solution in his appendix to *The Abolition of Man*, where he lists numerous examples

of various groups of people throughout the world and human history labeling actions such as

murder, lying, slandering, stealing, abusing women, and adultery as morally wrong and actions

like compassion, care for parents and the elderly in general, care for orphans and the weak,

honesty, self-sacrifice, and love as morally upright.[99] Elsewhere, R. Scott Smith, in his *In Search*

of Moral Knowledge, lists several moral principles and virtues that are widely, if not universally,

accepted. These moral principles and virtues include: (1) Murder is wrong; (2) Rape is wrong;

(3) Torturing babies for fun is wrong; (4) Love is a virtue; and (5) Justice is a virtue.[100]

According to Lewis and Smith, there certainly appear to be moral values and duties that are

widely regarded as good or evil, right or wrong, virtue or vice.

     To be fair, the claim that there is a general consensus on morality is not without its

critics.[101] A common argument against this notion, and moral realism in general, is that different

people groups (whether religions or cultures) disagree on what morality actually is. For example,

certain sects of Islam agree that it is morally acceptable to enslave women, and specific African

tribes believe that it is appropriate to murder deformed infants. According to moral skeptics,

examples such as these indicate that morality is defined by religious groups or cultures, and that

there is no overarching agreement or general consensus that transcends various religious groups

and cultures. Actually, this is a *non sequitur*; it does not follow that because there are differing

views on morality at times among religious groups and cultures, there is no such thing as truth on

moral matters. Disagreement over what is right *does not* indicate that there is no right thing at all;

---

[99] C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001), 83-101.

[100] R. Scott Smith, *In Search of Moral Knowledge: Overcoming the Fact-Value Dichotomy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 312. For Smith's response to objections that skeptics are likely to raise in response to his five principles and virtues, see pp. 312-315.

[101] For instance, see Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York, NY: Mariner Books, 2008).

it only reveals that humanity has yet to master or fully live up to the standard of the moral law. In reality, once factual errors underlying moral beliefs—such as the enslavement of women or murder of deformed infants—are corrected, one is able to see that there is wide agreement on basic moral facts. In short, there is more convergence on moral issues than some might initially realize. Fisher presents an intriguing scenario that may illustrate this very point:

> Imagine we put fifty people from around the world in individual rooms and ask them to think up the ten most important moral rules. I suspect there will be a large amount of convergence. For example, they all might write that it is wrong to steal, or wrong to kill children, or wrong to enslave people. Although the lists would not be identical there would certainly be much overlap. . . . A good reason would be that there really are certain moral properties and that they have been recognized by the people in the rooms.[102]

Fisher's scenario is an interesting one, especially considering the claim that skeptics raise about the alleged problem of moral convergence. If Fisher's scenario is accurate, it suggests that moral convergence, or a general consensus on morality, is probable—and if this is the case, it provides some evidence for the actual existence of an objective moral law. Of course, since there are rival explanations, more evidence for moral objectivity is called for.

Reason 3: Moral Reasoning

There are several reasons for tying moral reasoning to a moral realist view. First, not only do humans live as if moral realism is true, they also converse as if it is true. On a daily basis, humans reason over moral issues, debating the rightness or wrongness of moral issues—from private conversations between two people to courts of law, where the outcomes of such conversations have significant ramifications for large numbers of people. Interestingly, when human persons reason over moral issues—regardless of the level (private conversation or court of law)—an objective standard of right and wrong *is assumed*.[103] If there is no objective

---

[102] Fisher, *Metaethics: An Introduction*, 57-58.

[103] C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001), 54.

standard, then reasoning over moral issues is on the same level as one arguing with his friends over the best flavor of ice cream at the local shop (e.g., "I prefer this," "I don't like that"). Imagine a world where discussions on moral issues like adultery, sexuality, abortion, immigration, drugs, bullying, stealing, and so on become a matter of preference or nothing more than an emotional projection (e.g., "I prefer not to bully," or "Boo! Stealing!").[104] Furthermore, if there is no objective standard of morality, all views become equally valid and immoral acts such as stealing for personal pleasure cannot be deemed wrong. If all moral views are equal—which is only possible if there is *no objective moral law*—the possibility of moral reasoning on any meaningful level likely goes out the window. Something seems amiss when talking of moral issues in this manner. The watering down of moral issues to the point where they no longer possess significant meaning does not fit with what is known about these issues in reality. In this way, moral discourse itself provides a measure of evidence for what seems to be most congenial with moral objectivism, something that Mackie freely conceded.

Second, heated discussions oftentimes ensue over moral issues, which becomes odd, if not altogether nonsensical, if morality is a matter of preference or an emotional projection. Again, when two or more individuals reason, or even argue, over moral issues, the existence of an objective standard of right and wrong *is presupposed*—a standard that each person is aware of and one has allegedly broken. Arguing, by definition, involves attempting to show another person that he or she is in the wrong, and, after all, one cannot be objectively wrong unless some sort of objective standard exists that defines what *is* wrong. Moral objectivity in this way safeguards the possibility of genuine moral disagreements, an important moral datum in need of adequate explaining, rather than explaining away. As Lewis points out, there is no point in

---

[104] This is the theory of emotivism, which is briefly addressed in chapter 3.

calling someone "wrong" unless there is some sort of agreement as to what right and wrong actually are—just like there is no point in saying a football player has committed a foul if there is no agreement about the rules of football.[105] Therefore, in order for discussions and even arguments over moral issues to matter on any level, an objective standard of right and wrong must be assumed.

Third, in an effort to further illustrate, consider the following scenario. Imagine one claims that genocide of a certain people group infected by a virus is morally right while another maintains that it is wrong. Common sense suggests that both of these individuals cannot be right, and that one of these individuals must be mistaken. If moral realism is false and genocide does not have the property of being right or wrong, then it is difficult to understand why both of the individuals in the scenario cannot both be right. Perhaps moral realism is the best explanation for why it is appropriate to contend that an act such as genocide cannot both be right and non-right, both good and not-good.[106] How would moral reasoning be possible if everyone's views on moral issues were thought to be equally valid?

Fourth, consider how the process of reasoning allows human beings to come to realize that some views or acts are morally detestable. For example, slavery was widely accepted for years—not only in America, but also throughout the world— but through the process of moral reasoning, a great swath of people the world over came to realize the detestable nature of slavery and have since vigorously condemned it. However, if there is no objective moral standard, the ability to reason morally breaks down, and thus humans *cannot come to realize anything morally*, at least not in any meaningful sense.

---

[105] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 4.

[106] For a similar discussion, see Fisher, *Metaethics: An Introduction*, 58-59.

41

Reason 4: Moral Order

Turning on the television, scrolling through social media, or visiting any news outlet reveals that the world is a place filled with violence, anger, and mistreatment. However, a deeper look at the world reveals a world where moral order prevails. Even though there are moral atrocities committed on a daily basis, this does not discredit or undermine the reality of a world that possesses a sense of moral order. Were it not for a standard of moral order existing, the world would plausibly be a much worse place for humans to dwell than it currently is. Unlike a world where moral anti-realism prevails, a world where moral realism exists provides a suitable home for human beings, particularly regarding how they relate to themselves and treat one another. In short, the existence of an objective moral law is what makes a world with moral order possible.

Although an argument for God or any sort of moral lawgiver is not the purpose of this chapter, it is important to note that moral order implies the existence of a ruler who enforces certain laws whereas disorder implies the absence of such a ruler. An example of this on a human level can be seen in movies, such as older Westerns where the phrase "the sheriff is back in town," or something similar, emphasizes two key points: (1) the presence of a ruler makes moral order possible; and (2) the absence of a ruler leads to moral disorder. "The sheriff is back in town" is a phrase that conveys that a particular town was in a state of moral disorder in the absence of the sheriff but has now regained its sense of moral order because the sheriff is back to enforce the laws and set things right. One could also use the example of a king ruling over his kingdom. When the king is present within his kingdom, there is usually moral order—but when the king is away from his kingdom, moral disorder ensues. Similarly, a universe that displays

42

moral order and harmony seemingly points to a moral lawgiver, perhaps God, the governor of it all.[107]

Reason 5: Unlivable World

A major issue with denying objective morality is that it presumably leads to an unlivable world. One of the quickest ways to establish the importance of an objective moral law involves contemplating what the world might be like if such a law did not exist.[108] This type of consideration thus constitutes something of a counterfactual argument. When this approach is applied to moral anti-realism—again, the view that there is no objective moral law—a number of issue surface. First, if there is no such thing as objective morality, then virtually everything falls to the realm of subjective preference. No longer are there things such as justice, fairness, accountability, good or evil, right or wrong, praise or blame, tolerance, meaningful moral conversations, moral improvement, and so on. Second, if there is no objective moral law, then the world in which humans reside is amoral; nothing can be objectively defined as "moral" or "immoral." This presents a dilemma, especially considering the apparent obviousness that certain acts *really* are right or wrong, good or bad. For instance, could anyone persuasively argue that moral values such as love and justice are mere preferences, or refer to an event like the Holocaust as anything less than an *atrocity*? Third, if morality is not objective, there is no way to describe how individuals should behave. In fact, the moment one makes such an attempt (to describe how a person or group of persons should behave), they invoke the notion of objective morality—which is the very thing that moral anti-realists deny. Certainly, there are other

---

[107] See L. Russ Bush, "Athanasius," in *Classical Readings in Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 146.

[108] In many ways, this reason for believing in objective morality is basically a summary of many of the other reasons provided in this chapter.

problems stemming from a world where there is no objective moral law. The important matter is for those who reject the concept of objective morality to face the reality of a world that functions similarly to the one just described.[109] A world where there is no objective morality is likely a world full of chaos and is therefore totally unlivable. To be fair, some might wish to suggest this carries no evidential force, just prudential reasons to act as if objective morality obtains; but if a view entails such impracticality, requiring for practical purposes that we treat it as false, this seems to suggest that there is something evidential at play after all.

What is particularly interesting on this score is that *people really live as if moral realism is true*. If moral realism were false, people probably would not live as if moral facts really exist—but people do live as if moral facts exist—which suggests that moral realism is likely true. An individual might disagree at this point, claiming that there are indeed practical reasons for assuming realism, but that this alone does not entail that moral realism is true. Therefore, arguably the better explanation that people act as though moral realism is true is that it is actually true, rather than that they merely for pragmatic and practical reasons alone act as if it were true. Moral realism, for example, conceivably better accounts for the depth of moral convictions, their ineliminability in certain circumstances, and the level of their ingression, than merely pretending would explain. Clearly, one may deny realism with his words, but his actions probably reveal what he really believes about morality.[110] As the old saying goes, actions speak louder than words—and in this case, the actions of human beings are telling.

---

[109] For a more thorough treatment of this matter, see Jeremiah J. Johnston, *Unimaginable: What Our World Would Be Like without Christianity* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2017). Also see Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (New York, NY: Random House, 2005).

[110] For more on this, see "Reason 11: Mistreatment" in this chapter. Admittedly, this is not a knock-down argument, but rather a dispositional point worth making. That someone who denies belief in moral objectivity shows by their actions that they really believe in it after all does not necessarily show moral realism to be true—only what this person really *believes* to be true. In some situations, there are some who really do not believe in moral realism,

Here is another way to put it: there are basically three tests for truth, which posed in question form look like this: (1) Does it make sense? In other words, are there any logical contradictions? (2) Is there evidence for it? If so, where does the evidence lead? (3) Does it work in real life? In other words, is it livable? The third test for truth is the one being emphasized here. A world with no objective moral law is a world that is *unlivable*. The point is that the widespread convictions about moral realism are more likely on the assumption of moral realism than on its denial. Of course, this is not a hard proof for moral realism, but one piece of a large puzzle based on widespread moral experience.

Reason 6: Measuring Value Systems

Oftentimes individuals evaluate or measure value systems, concluding that some value systems are better or worse than others. For the present discussion, it is important to note that when an individual states that one value system is better than another, or attempts to replace a particular value system with a better one, that person assumes an objective standard of judgment. This objective standard of judgment, which is different from either value system, helps a person conclude that one value system conforms more closely to the moral standard than another. Without an objective measuring stick for value systems, there is no way to conclude that civilized morality, where humans treat one another with dignity and respect, is better than something akin to savage morality, where humans brutally murder one another, even within their own tribes at times, for various reasons.[111]

---

and are not afraid to show it in their actions. In other situations, there are people who think this idea is altogether bunk but that there are good pragmatic or practical reasons for responding morally when mistreated (e.g., this person may not wish to alienate those with whom they live and converse daily—even if these people have presumably mistreated them).

[111] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 13. Of course, some objective standards will not help the theistic cause quite as much as others. Someone might simply suggest that moral standards are constituted by that which conduces best to human flourishing, or something like that. It is an objective standard, but not anything that will particularly help

Virtually everyone recognizes that some value systems are better than others. For instance, the value systems of Joseph Stalin (1878-1953) and Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) are commonly viewed as categorically repugnant, whereas the value system of someone like Mother Teresa (1910-1997) is celebrated and held in high regard. As David Beck notes, denying the existence of an objective moral standard of judgment is problematic when it comes time to measure value systems. According to Beck, "That Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin were not really morally wrong, that we cannot judge a society to be truly guilty if it practices genocide or if it causes needless environmental damage are such repugnant proposals that we find it impossible to believe that they could be true."[112] In short, one must affirm the existence of an objective moral standard in order to evaluate value systems.

Attempting to illustrate the practical importance of such a standard, Lewis shares a relevant example:

> The reason why your idea of New York can be truer or less true than mine is that New York is a real place, existing quite apart from what either of us thinks. If when each of us said 'New York' each means merely 'The town I am imagining in my own head,' how could one of us have truer ideas than the other? There would be no question of truth or falsehood at all.[113]

Likewise, if there is no objective moral standard, then there is no sense in saying that any one value system has ever been morally good or morally bad, or morally superior or inferior to other value systems. Without an objective reference point, there is no way for one value system to be recognized as good, more closely resembling the moral law, while another value system is bad, straying far from what the moral law requires.

---

build the moral argument. To get the latter, particularly sorts of moral objectivity are needed, such as moral authoritativeness, essential human equality, intrinsic value for persons, etc.

[112] W. David Beck, "God's Existence," in R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas, eds., *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997), 160.

[113] Ibid., 13-14.

It appears that if moral realism is false, then people would not disagree with other value systems (because all value systems would be equally valid on moral anti-realism—or equally invalid on error theory, as all moral theories are false on this view). However, people do disagree with other value systems. The logical conclusion here is that moral realism is true. This is not a strict deductive proof, but rather a simple way of stating how the measuring of value systems indicates the existence of an objective moral standard.

Reason 7: Societal Reform

Stemming from the previous reason above, unless there is an objective moral standard, it is difficult to think there is an adequate basis for societal reform. There are numerous examples of individuals throughout history, such as William Wilberforce who have sought to reform corrupt societies or policies within those societies.[114] Presumably, the reason why individuals like Wilberforce are able to recognize that what a society deems moral can, in fact, be immoral is because there is an objective moral standard that transcends the laws of a particular society. Throughout history, societal reformers have frequently appealed to this higher standard when attempting to make their case.[115] An example of this is Martin Luther King, Jr., who repeatedly appealed to the higher standard as the basis for human rights and equality. If there is no higher standard, whatever a society says is moral by definition within that particular society and no

---

[114] See Eric Metaxas, *Amazing Grace: William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2007).

[115] To be fair, one may think this "standard" is nothing more than social utility, and one who holds this position may still carry out a great deal of social reform. An example is Jeremy Bentham, a utilitarian who was an advocate for numerous social issues and a catalyst for social reform in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Two such areas of social reform Bentham fought for include annual elections and a woman's right to vote. However, there is a common difficulty with utilitarianism that deserves mentioning here, especially in light of "Reason 8" in this chapter. The difficulty or challenge in mind here is the notion that utilitarianism likely fails to sufficiently take into account ultimate justice. By following what is perhaps the most notable mantra of utilitarianism—"do the greatest good for the greatest number"—it is possible for a certain course of action to produce benefits for the majority of people within a society or group, while at the same time being unjust. For instance, a slave society might produce "the greatest good for the greatest number" (assuming the "slaves" are in the minority), but to have a slave society is unjust.

society can judge another society for their moral wrongdoings because all societies are essentially their own judges. If societies decide what is right and wrong and there is no objective moral law, one's attempt to call things like slavery and segregation immoral faces challenges. Based on this discussion, four important points are worth highlighting: (1) societies do not ultimately decide what is right and wrong—legality is not an infallible guide to morality; (2) if societies do not ultimately decide what is right and wrong, one needs to look elsewhere for an objective or ultimate standard of right and wrong; (3) a plausible place to look is to a moral standard or law that transcends societal laws; and (4) such a moral standard or law provides an objective basis for societal reform.

Reason 8: Justice, Injustice, and Punishment

If there is no objective moral law, there is arguably no such thing as ultimate justice. This was understood all too well by the state torturers in Soviet prisons during World War II. Richard Wurmbrand, a Romanian minister of Jewish descent who was captured by the secret police in the late 1940s, reports,

> The cruelty of atheism is hard to believe when man has no faith in the reward of good or the punishment of evil. There is no reason to be human. There is no restraint from the depths of evil which is in man. The Communist torturers often said, "There is no God, no hereafter, no punishment for evil. We can do what we wish." I have heard one torturer even say, "I thank God, in whom I don't believe, that I have lived to this hour when I can express all the evil in my heart." He expressed it in unbelievable brutality and torture inflected on prisoners.[116]

Although Wurmbrand advances the argument a bit further than this chapter intends to take it, it is important to note the extreme ramifications of denying objective morality (and God's existence as the moral lawgiver, as Wurmbrand suggests), especially in light of how people typically live

---

[116] Richard Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1967), 34.

their lives when they assume there is no moral law to define how they should live and no God to judge or punish them in the afterlife.

On the other hand, if anti-realism is true, there is arguably no reliable basis for speaking out against injustice—at least not in any objective sense anyway.[117] Humans regularly speak out against others in the world for doing things that they should stop doing, regardless of what they (the ones performing the immoral acts) believe about their own behavior. An example of this is the terrorist group known as *ISIS*. People around the world have spoken out against the actions of this group for their corrupt ideology and immoral acts—even though the members of the group itself do not seem to find fault with what they are themselves doing. Occurrences such as this suggests that most humans typically believe there is some sort of moral reality that is: (1) not defined by humans; and (2) must be abided by, regardless of what human persons think.

Yet another example of this is when skeptics level the charge against those who believe in God, asserting that his alleged indifference in the face of injustice points to either his non-existence or imperfect nature in some way (e.g., he is not all-powerful, not entirely good, etc.).[118] Lewis's insight is particularly helpful here, as he admits: "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. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?"[119] What Lewis's admission shows is that moral anti-

---

[117] It is true that one could speak out against unjust things simply because they do not personally like them and want to dissuade others from practicing them. Joel Marks is one who does this. See Joel Marks, *Ethics without Morals: In Defence of Amorality* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013); and Joel Marks, *Hard Atheism and the Ethics of Desire: An Alternative to Morality* (Gewerbestrasse: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

[118] Skeptics usually phrase this objection along these lines: "If God existed, then he would do something about the evil that exists in the world." This is nothing new; rather, it is a general statement on the classic objection known as the problem of evil.

[119] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 13. Now, Lewis is using thick concepts of morality here—like justice—which admittedly requires more than mere objectivity.

realists *borrow* from the moral realist view when they call something "just" or "unjust."[120] Do terms such as "justice" and "injustice" retain their meaning and significance on an anti-realist view? According to Lewis, they do not. Unless one has an idea "of a straight line" (i.e., objective standard of goodness), she cannot "call a line crooked."

Reason 9: Standard of Behavior

Morality is a code of conduct describing, and even prescribing, how individuals ought to behave toward themselves and others. It is concerned with the principles of right and wrong behavior and the goodness or badness of the character of human persons. If there is no objective standard of behavior, there is no sufficient way to argue for how humans should or should not behave. Accordingly, Lewis notes that two of the most obvious facts about reality deal with the concept of how humans ought to behave. As he says, "First . . . human beings, all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to *behave* in a certain way. . . . Secondly . . . they do not in fact *behave* that way. . . . These two facts are the foundation of all clear thinking about ourselves and the universe we live in" (emphasis added).[121] Elsewhere, he maintains, "The moralities accepted among men may differ—though not, at bottom, so widely as is often claimed—but they all agree in prescribing a behaviour which their adherents fail to practice."[122] Lewis recognizes the universal acceptance of two fundamental realities: (1) there is a moral law that prescribes how humans ought to behave; and (2) humans fail to behave this way. Unless there is an

---

[120] This is not to say that atheists cannot be moral objectivists. There are plenty of atheists who are moral objectivists. They may be Platonists, for example, who think justice is an ultimate unmoored value. Contrary to what has been a popular opinion held by many theists for years, not all atheists are moral relativists.

[121] Ibid., 8.

[122] C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001), 11.

objective standard of behavior, it would be challenging to explain how humans should behave and difficult to recognize when humans fail to live up to the moral standard or ideal.

<p style="text-align:center;">*Reason 10: Praise and Blame*</p>

Praise and blame are common responses by human persons to both moral and immoral behaviors. A person is praiseworthy when that person is morally responsible for behavior that is right or good, whereas a person is blameworthy when that person is morally responsible for something that is wrong or bad. For example, when someone courageously stands up to injustice or willingly sacrifices themselves in order to save others, praise is the appropriate response. On the other hand, when an individual physically abuses his wife or mistreats small children, blame is the proper response. However, unless an objective moral standard exists, determining what is praiseworthy and blameworthy becomes incredibly difficult.

One who lays out a case that praise and blame make more sense from the perspective of moral realism is Daniel Robinson. In his book, *Praise and Blame: Moral Realism and Its Applications*, Robinson carefully examines the nature of both praise and blame, closely identifying these two forms of moral appraisal with other moral properties such as responsibility, punishment, and forgiveness. He also considers various views attempting to account for these two forms of moral appraisal, including what he calls "moral luck." His main targets are reductive naturalism and any sort of Humean theory of action that dissolves moral principles into biological mechanisms. According to Robinson, none of the opposing views possesses the same explanatory power as moral realism.[123]

---

[123] See Daniel N. Robinson, *Praise and Blame: Moral Realism and Its Applications* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

Reason 11: Mistreatment

One may say that he does not believe in objective morality; however, the moment he is mistreated he will often *react* as if such a standard does, in fact, exist. For instance, when one who denies the existence of an objective standard of behavior is cut off in traffic or has unfound rumors spread about him among his friends, he will quickly complain, "Hey, you cannot do that! That is wrong! What are you thinking?" Sean McDowell relays another example of this when he shares a story involving J. P. Moreland taking the stereo of a University of Vermont student who denies the existence of objective morality in favor of moral relativism. As Moreland shares the gospel with the university student, the student responds by saying that he (Moreland) could not force his views on others because "everything is relative." Following this claim, in an effort to reveal what the student *really* believes about moral issues, Moreland picks up the student's stereo from his dorm room and begins walking down the hallway with it in hand, when the student suddenly shouts, "Hey, what are you doing? You can't do that!"[124] Again, one might deny the existence of an objective standard of behavior through their words or actions, but that person will always reveal what they *really* believe through their *reactions* when mistreated.[125]

---

[124] Sean McDowell, *Ethix: Being Bold in a Whatever World* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2006), 45-46. Also see J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1997), 153.

[125] Lewis says that one who is mistreated will readily exclaim, "'It's not fair!' before you can say Jack Robinson." Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 6. Though it's true that behaviors often reflect one's truest beliefs, behaviors can change. Some might respond here by saying it's just hard to get to the place of holding the right belief. This discussion on mistreatment is probably not a strong proof for moral realism, but rather evidence that people (even those who deny moral realism) tend to retain a remnant of moral realism in their beliefs. Providing evidence for something that is true versus something that someone believes is true are two different ventures. However, it is significant to point out that many, perhaps even most, people possess an innate disposition towards moral realism. This potentially points to the axiomatic nature of moral realism.

Reason 12: Moral Obligations

A common experience among human persons when dealing with moral matters is the sense of obligation that arises.[126] There are situations that cause individuals to feel the overwhelming duty to perform certain actions and other circumstances where individuals recognize they should avoid doing something. The words "ought" and "ought not" imply the existence of an objective moral law that mankind recognizes and feels obligated to follow.[127] For example, practically all humans would agree that one *ought* to try to save the life of a drowning child and that one *ought not* kill innocent people for sheer amusement. It does not seem appropriate to lessen the force of obligations such as these. To illustrate, it does not seem forceful enough to say, "I 'prefer' or 'do not prefer' to save a child from drowning" or "Boo! Killing innocent people for fun!" It is not only duties that seem obligatory, there are also values that possess the same sort of "oughtness" or "ought not-ness." For instance, it is perfectly intelligible to believe that humans are morally obligated to possess (or acquire) values or traits such as compassion, mercifulness, generosity, and courage, while avoiding or removing negative traits like pride, greed, lust, and dishonesty.[128]

Reason 13: Guilt

Guilt is not merely a felt emotion that is entirely subjective. In a very real sense, guilt is oftentimes objective in nature. Of course, it is possible for one to feel guilty when he is not actually guilty—this is called "false guilt." Conversely, it is also possible for one to be objectively guilty without experiencing any feelings of guilt whatsoever, but the lack of

---

[126] See Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 10.

[127] Of course, this is not true in every case. Sometimes "ought" is used in nonmoral ways or in merely instrumental ways or in rational ways, etc.

[128] C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press), 2-3.

subjective guilt feelings has no bearing on whether one is *truly* guilty in an objective sense. One's feelings do not always accurately reveal if one is a moral lawbreaker. For example, consider again the psychopath who does not feel guilty after committing an immoral act. If a psychopath committed a murder, one could still say that this person is guilty of breaking the law, despite the absence of guilt and regret in the psychopath's thought process. This is one reason why it is appropriate to talk of guilt in objective terms. Apart from the existence of an objective standard of right and wrong, guilt is likely nothing more than an emotional projection.

A. E. Taylor, a key thinker in the history of the moral argument, identifies five characteristics of guilt, including:

> (1) Human guilt involves true condemnation and not merely discontentment with surroundings or circumstances.[129]

> (2) Moral guilt is indelible; even punishment does not get rid of it. Guilt cannot be "brushed aside." Only one "with the 'mentality' of the animal can reconcile himself to the comfortable view that what he has done amiss is 'washed off' by punishment, or 'made good' by subsequent better conduct."[130]

> (3) Humans recognize that their guilt deserves punishment. One's guilty status demands retribution so that justice is served.[131]

> (4) Humans recognize that sin (and thus, moral guilt) makes them dirty and pollutes them in a very real way. This means that one's guilt must be dealt with somehow.[132]

> (5) Guilt does not seem to be the violation of an impersonal principle; rather, humans sense that they have sinned against a person who transcends humanity.[133]

---

[129] A. E. Taylor, *The Faith of a Moralist*, series 1 (London: MacMillan and Co., 1930), 171-173.

[130] Ibid., 173-182. It is important to note that even once one has been punished, he still oftentimes continues to recognize his past moral failings. An example of this in the Christian faith is the Apostle Paul, who continually spoke of his past moral failures even after he had become a Christian himself (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13-14)

[131] Ibid., 182-191. As Taylor indicates, retribution (not revenge) is essential to true morality. Humans allegedly sense this, acknowledging that it is right that wrongdoing deserves correction or punishment. Perhaps one could even say that humanity possesses a deeply felt desire for perfect justice.

[132] Ibid., 191-206. On naturalism, it is difficult to account for this sense of uncleanness besides merely brushing it off as a subjective illusion that humans have evolved to experience.

Taylor's five characteristics of guilt provide additional evidence for the reality of objective guilt (and thus, an objective moral standard or law). First, to speak of things like "true condemnation" and not merely the lack of contentment with one's circumstances invokes the notion of objective guilt. Second, that one's transgression cannot merely be "washed off" or "brushed aside" speaks to the real, objective nature of guilt. If guilt were merely a feeling (rather than an objective reality), it seems as if it *could* be "washed off" or "brushed aside." Third, humanity's admission that their guilty status demands punishment or retribution is seemingly acknowledgement that an objective moral law has been broken.[134] There are other reasons for believing in objective guilt, but Taylor's characteristics certainly provide a helpful starting point.

Reason 14: Making Excuses

Why does one who denies the existence of an objective standard of behavior become anxious to make excuses for how he has behaved in a given circumstance? If there is no objective moral standard, one ought to just go on with his life without defending himself. After all, a person does not have to defend himself if there is no standard for him to fall short of or completely break. Consider how criminals oftentimes respond by stringing together a list of excuses when they are caught breaking the law. Although there are more serious examples, think about a law that is broken every day by a large number of people: driving over the posted speed limit on a particular road. After being pulled over by a police officer on duty for breaking the speed limit, people frequently respond, "I did not know the posted speed limit for this road," or

---

[133] Ibid., 206-210. Taylor's fifth characteristic will be dealt with in greater detail in chapter 6, which covers the category of moral transformation.

[134] Rather than dealing with Taylor's fourth and fifth characteristics of guilt here, these will be dealt with in chapter 6 when the category of moral transformation is examined.

"I am late for work and I am in a hurry." Why does one feel the need to provide excuses such as these if they have not broken a law?[135] Perhaps, as Lewis says, "The truth is, we believe in decency so much—we feel the Rule of Law pressing on us so—that we cannot bear to face the fact that we are breaking it, and consequently we try to shift the responsibility."[136]

Reason 15: Moral Progress/Improvement

Throughout history there are examples of moral progress. For instance, there are now rights for women, whereas women used to have virtually no rights. If things like this are considered progress, then it makes sense to posit an objective moral standard that humanity as a whole is slowly moving toward. According to Fisher, "[I]f there is progress this seems to imply that we are somehow moving closer to the truth of how the world actually ought to be. But if moral realism is false then it seems that there could be no standard or benchmark, and it is hard to see why we would think moral progress was possible at all."[137] Like science is advancing the human race to deeper understanding of how the universe operates, moral progress is moving the human race closer to how humans ought to live their lives.

On a personal level, countless individuals regularly determine to improve themselves morally—usually after a major moral failure or around New Year's Day—while others possess an innate awareness that they ought to be better people than they presently are. Certainly, no sane person wakes up each morning and declares, "My goal for today is to become more immoral!"[138]

---

[135] The point here is not that criminals reject belief in objective morality, and that all are moral anti-realists or something of that sort. Rather, these examples serve to further highlight the previously emphasized point that moral realism is a default, innate position to hold.

[136] Ibid.

[137] Fisher, *Metaphysics: An Introduction*, 59.

[138] Even if someone's goal is to become more immoral, that person *still needs* an objective standard to measure the level of his or her badness.

If there is no objective standard of good that exists, then talk of moral improvement is nonsensical and actual moral progress is impossible. If no ultimate standard of right and wrong exists, then one might *change* his morality, but he can never *improve* it. As, Immanuel Kant points out, "A man who has transgressed against the moral law, *but still recognizes it in its purity, can be improved* because *he still has a pure law before his eyes*; but a man who has invented for himself a favourable [*sic*] and false law has a principle in his wickedness, and in his case *we can hope for no improvement*" (emphasis added).[139]

Recognizing that there is hope of moral improvement, one should seek to identify where the standard of moral improvement lies. The objective standard of good—the ruler that measures moral progress and target for humans to aim their moral efforts at—exists above and outside the process of improvement itself. Without an objective standard of behavior, then "[t]here is no sense in talking of 'becoming better' if better means simply 'what we are becoming'—it is like congratulating yourself on reaching your destination and defining destination as 'the place you have reached.'"[140] The point is that if real moral progress is being made, or if moral improvement is being encouraged, then moral realism is implied.

---

[139] Immanuel Kant, *Lectures in Ethics*, trans. Louis Infield (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1963), 137.

[140] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 8. Also see C. S. Lewis, "Evil and God," in *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014), 3-4.

Morality and Its Source

Different Types of Moral Realism[141]

Having been offered fifteen reasons for taking objective morality seriously, the focus

now shifts to the second part of the abductive moral argument sketched at the beginning of this

chapter.[142] What (or who) is the best explanation for moral facts? What is their source? Someone

like Nietzsche, who was quoted at the outset of this chapter as saying that morality "has truth

only if God is the truth—it stands and falls with faith in God" readily links morality with God.[143]

Others, like Mackie, are a bit less certain, stating, "[I]f there are objective values, they make the

existence of a god *more probable* than it would have been without them. Thus we have a

defensible argument from morality to the existence of a god" (emphasis added).[144] Then there are

those like Erik Wielenberg, while affirming the existence of objective moral facts, attempt to

explain them apart from reference to God. In Wielenberg's case, Platonism is the answer.[145]

---

[141] As a side note, if there are objective moral facts, non-realist views such as error theory, relativism, expressivism, emotivism, quasi-realism, and prescriptivism are dealt a powerful blow. Nevertheless, it is certainly unwise and imprudent to dismiss each of these views this quickly, casting each to the philosophical trash pile after a few brief words. Time and space simply do not allow each of these views a thorough treatment in this dissertation. For this reason, a few resources are provided here. For responses to nihilism, expressivism, and reductionism, see Terence Cuneo, *The Normative Web: An Argument for Moral Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). For responses to emotivism, prescriptivism, error theory, and norm-expressivism, see John E. Hare, *God's Call: Moral Realism, God's Commands, and Human Autonomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 1-48. For responses to emotivism, error theory, quasi-realism, and moral relativism, see Fisher, *Metaethics*, 25-126.

[142] There is certainly more work that needs to be done in order for moral realism to be firmly established. Several philosophical works to establish moral realism are referenced throughout this chapter (i.e., Brink, Cuneo, DeLapp, Fisher, Shafer-Landau, etc.), but again, there is still more work to do.

[143] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 70. Interestingly, Nietzsche, even though a moral anti-realist, acknowledged a seemingly unbreakable link between God and morality. For Nietzsche, if there is no God, there is no morality, and since there is no God, there is no morality. Richard Taylor, an eminent ethicist, agrees with Nietzsche when he writes, "The modern age, more or less repudiating the idea of a divine lawgiver, has nevertheless tried to retain the ideas of moral right and wrong, not noticing that, in casting God aside, they have also abolished the conditions of meaningfulness for moral right and wrong as well." Richard Taylor, *Ethics, Faith, and Reason* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1985), 2-3.

[144] J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 115-116. Mackie, an error theorist, admits that God's existence becomes more probable if objective moral values exist.

Finally, there are individuals who attempt to explain moral realism via ethical naturalism, such as Kevin DeLapp.[146] What these varying views on how to ground moral realism reveal is that even though there may be good reasons for believing in objective moral facts, it does not necessarily follow that God exists. There are many views that fall under the umbrella of moral realism,[147] and in order to claim that God is the best explanation, each of these views must be analyzed and shown to possess less explanatory power than the God hypothesis.[148]

Locating the Source of Morality

As humanist philosopher Paul Kurtz points out, "The central question about moral and ethical principles concerns this ontological foundation. If they are neither derived from God nor anchored in some transcendent ground, are they purely ephemeral?"[149] When attempting to identify and locate the ontological foundation of moral principles, there are a few things to keep in mind.

First, it is important to stress again that moral realism is silent on the nature and origin of moral categories. One moves too quickly when concluding that because there is an objective moral law, a particular belief system, like Christianity, is true. A belief system such as Christianity might be able to account for objective moral facts, but this alone does not mean it is

---

[145] Erik J. Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 160.

[146] See Kevin DeLapp, *Moral Realism* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

[147] The two main camps within moral realism are ethical naturalism and ethical non-naturalism.

[148] This is essentially the task taken up in David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016). In this dissertation, all of the alternatives cannot reasonably be taken on, which is why the desire here is to contribute one piece to the larger puzzle or project. There are lots of other parts to the project that have to be undertaken, which is an exciting thought and one that will undoubtedly require more thinkers to take up the task of moral apologetics.

[149] Paul Kurtz, *Forbidden Fruit* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1988), 65.

the best explanation for morality as a whole. Moral realism simply shows that there are, indeed, objective moral facts. In order to continue moving the argument, one then has to turn to the various moral categories themselves—namely, moral knowledge, values, obligations, and transformation—in order to gain an understanding of the nature of the moral data. Then, by gaining a better understanding of the nature of the categories, one can, in turn, attempt to identify their proper source.

Second, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, one of the unique features of the moral argument is that it is able, likely better than other arguments from natural theology, to furnish warrant to infer not just that a source of morality exists, but that a source of a particular character exists.[150] If this is true, what sort of characteristics does the source of morality need to possess? David Baggett and Jerry Walls suggest that the source must be "perfectly good" in order to account for morality.[151] Similarly, A. C. Ewing contends that a being in whom the whole moral law resides cannot fail to be less than perfectly good.[152] Others, like Mackie, propose, "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."[153] In addition to perfect goodness and infinite power, there are other characteristics that the source of morality will likely need to have, such as transcendence. It seems that the source of morality needs to be transcendent in order to adequately account for the objectivity of the moral law. Furthermore, if

---

[150] David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 49-50.

[151] Ibid., 50.

[152] A. C. Ewing, *Value and Reality: The Philosophical Case for Theism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973), 199.

[153] Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism*, 115.

morality is "the sphere of personal relations,"[154] does the source also need to be personal? Does morality make better sense deriving from a personal source?

Third, harkening back to the introduction, when attempting to identify the best explanation for morality, it is important to realize that the source of morality, whatever it may be, must at least possess the same features as morality because a stream cannot rise above its source.[155] In this case, the moral law cannot rise above its source in terms of the features it possesses. Emphasizing that "[d]escent, downward movement is the key word . . . [t]he march of all things is from higher to lower" is key here.[156] For instance, suppose morality is understood in terms of what is good and right. If this is true, it appears logical to postulate a "perfectly good" being.[157] Stated differently, a Being (e.g., theism) or even a group of beings (e.g., polytheism) who are flawed would not be able to account for moral goodness or the rightness of certain acts—since this would be an example of "a stream rising above its source" or "upward movement."

Non-Personal or Personal Source

It is easy for one to become overwhelmed by the vast number of religions and philosophies being expounded in the marketplace of ideas today. However, the task becomes easier when one realizes that all belief systems can be grouped into two fundamental categories: those that begin with a non-personal force or essence and those that begin with a personal being

[154] Clement C. J. Webb, *God and Personality* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1919), 105.

[155] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 48.

[156] C. S. Lewis, "Two Lectures," in *God in the Dock*, 227.

[157] Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 50. A. C. Ewing, *Value and Reality*, 199.

or set of beings.[158] Typically, the term "non-personal" is used to refer to secular belief systems like naturalism, but this category also includes non-personal religious conceptions of God. On the other hand, the term "personal" is used to refer to belief systems that understand God as a personal Being, like Christianity, for example.

Presumably, something that is personal cannot come from something that is non-personal—which means that something like morality, if personal, likely makes better sense deriving from a personal source.[159] Therefore, one approach in the quest to locate the source of morality, involves asking the question: Does morality point more in the direction of a non-personal or personal source? Humanity and the world in which human persons dwell is either the result of non-personal or personal; ultimate reality is either non-personal or personal—there are no other options. Which view best explains the moral data? Over the next four chapters (chapters 3-6), the question of whether morality points in the direction of a non-personal or personal source will be taken up, with the ultimate goal being to show that the latter is most likely. Then, in chapter 7, a few worldviews will be examined in an effort to determine which view is most plausible in light of the personal nature of morality.

Summary

This chapter began by laying out a general abductive moral argument for the existence of God. The first premise of the argument states, "There are objective moral facts." Although the fifteen reasons provided above do not cover all of the reasons for believing in objective moral

---

[158] Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 387-388. Claiming that grouping various belief systems into the categories of non-personal and personal does not mean that "personhood" is the key to the moral argument. Rather, this is one way, among many other ways, to frame the moral argument.

[159] H. P. Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1965), 71.

facts,[160] they provide a starting point nonetheless. Of course, a whole book could be written on moral realism alone, but for the present purposes the reasons provided here should suffice. If the discussion presented in this chapter on reasons for believing in an objective moral standard or law is valid,[161] then the moral argument for God's existence has the ability to at least get off the ground.

Because the argument in this chapter focuses only on providing valid reasons for believing in objective moral facts (i.e., moral realism), and since an argument of this sort is silent on the nature and origin of moral facts, one must turn to examining the moral categories themselves in order to discover their nature and draw a conclusion as to their most likely source. Although there are a countless number of religions and philosophies that exist today, the task of locating and identifying the source of morality becomes more manageable when one realizes that the various belief systems can be grouped into two fundamental categories: (1) those that begin with a non-personal force or essence; and (2) those that begin with a personal being or set of beings. This leads to two questions: (1) What is the nature of morality: non-personal or personal? (2) Given the nature of morality, what is its most likely source?

---

[160] An example of another argument for objective moral facts is Terence Cuneo's "if epistemic facts exist, then moral facts exist." If one is a moral non-realist and has ever claimed someone has done something objectively wrong by misrepresenting an argument, then the non-realist has assumed epistemic virtues or duties while arguing such duties are either subjective or not real. How is this? By identifying intellectual honesty as an epistemic virtue, one is also admitting the reality of a moral virtue (i.e., moral honesty). Although there are other examples available to illustrate what is being stated here, the bottom line is this: Epistemic facts and moral facts cannot be separated; therefore, the existence of the former points to the existence of the latter. Cuneo, *The Normative Web*.

[161] Or if there are discussions *anywhere* that provide reason for believing there are objective moral facts.

CHAPTER THREE: MORAL KNOWLEDGE

Introduction

Fifteen reasons for believing in objective morality were provided in the previous chapter. Again, if moral realism is true, the moral argument is able to get off the ground. As Angus Ritchie maintains, "The [moral] argument . . . only has force if the 'pull of objectivism' needs to be respected."[162] In order to continue moving the argument forward, one has to turn to several moral phenomena or categories, examining them to gain a better understanding of the nature of morality. Then, one is better positioned to locate and identify their most likely source.

The first moral category under examination is moral knowledge. The previous chapter implicitly gestured toward moral knowledge. But this chapter will discuss moral knowledge more thoroughly and explicitly, while extending the conversation on moral realism.[163] Moral experience arguably suggests that virtually all humans have knowledge of right and wrong, at least on a basic level. For example, imagine turning on the television and watching a documentary on Ted Bundy, an American serial killer who kidnapped, raped, and murdered over thirty women throughout the 1970s across at least seven different states. What seems evident to many if not most throughout the documentary is that Bundy's actions are morally abhorrent on every level. Even one who has failed to see the documentary is likely to agree that kidnapping, raping, and murdering innocent women is utterly reprehensible and unjustifiable on any level. This moral *knowledge* seems immediate and involuntary. Phenomenologically, it seems less like

---

[162] Angus Ritchie, *From Morality to Metaphysics: The Theistic Implications of our Ethical Commitments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 5.

[163] Although the chapter is entitled "Moral Knowledge," in many ways it continues the discussion on moral realism, while bringing in some epistemological components along the way. It is in no way a full or decisive treatment of moral knowledge.

an inference than an inviolable intuition. That a serial killer like Bundy is morally wrong appears *knowable* for practically all human beings. Conversely, that famine relief is morally right seems just as *knowable*. If these examples are accurate, if such seemingly reliable deliverances of moral experience are indeed veridical, then moral knowledge is possible.

However, moral skeptics argue there are good reasons for thinking that moral knowledge is *not possible*. They argue that one cannot *know* Bundy's actions are morally abhorrent or that famine relief is morally upright. Additionally, some skeptics, like J. L. Mackie, indicate that if one *could* be aware of objective moral values and duties that "it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else."[164] Therefore, the aim of this chapter is threefold: (1) considering objections to moral knowledge; (2) analyzing some potential ways in which moral knowledge is acquired; and (3) considering the nature of moral knowledge and whether it points more in the direction of a personal or non-personal source.

Objections to Moral Knowledge

Atheist philosopher Louise Antony notes, "Any argument for moral skepticism will be based upon premises which are less obvious than the existence of objective moral values themselves."[165] This is certainly an insightful admission from an atheist such as Antony. However, to be fair, one could respond by saying that because something is *less obvious*, that

---

[164] J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, reprint (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 38.

[165] William Lane Craig records this Louise Antony quote in William Lane Craig and Joe Gorra, *A Reasonable Response: Answers to Tough Questions on God, Christianity, and the Bible* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2013). Louise Antony actually said this in a debate with William Lane Craig on the following topic: "Is God Necessary for Morality?" The two parts of the debate can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6WnliSKrR4 (part 1) and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gt9KuK8lL48 (part 2), posted on April 24, 2012, accessed on April 22, 2020.

does not mean it is false. For instance, it may have been *less obvious* thousands of years ago that the world is actually a sphere, but that does not change the fact that it is, and has always been, a sphere.

The task of the first part of this chapter involves examining and responding to several objections moral skeptics raise against the possibility of moral knowledge. This is in no way an exhaustive treatment on the matter; rather, it is more of a survey or an attempt to deal with several common objections before moving on to other discussions related to moral knowledge.[166]

Objection 1: Ethical Non-Cognitivism

There are various types of knowledge, but the relevant sort of knowledge that morality is most customarily concerned with is propositional knowledge.[167] Propositional knowledge is, as it sounds, knowledge of propositions, which involves claims that are either true or false. An example of a propositional moral claim would be something like this: It is true that feeding or housing someone who is homeless is a good or right thing to do.

At this point, a non-cognitivist would likely retort by claiming that morality does not possess *truth-apt status*. In other words, morality is not about truth; moral claims are neither true nor false. Ethical non-cognitivists, in opposition to ethical cognitivists, claim that moral discourse does not assert genuine propositions that can be evaluated as true or false in any

---

[166] Ritchie deals with several objections to moral knowledge in *From Morality to Metaphysics*. For more on responding to challenges raised against moral knowledge, one may also find it helpful to see the following works: David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 179-212; Mark D. Linville, "The Moral Argument" in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, eds. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009), 393-417; and R. Scott Smith, *In Search of Moral Knowledge: Overcoming the Fact-Value Dichotomy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 107-156.

[167] Of course, there are other types of knowledge involved when it comes to acquiring knowledge of morality, such as acquaintance knowledge, for example. Arguably, moral knowledge ineliminably requires moral experience, and specifically an experience of goodness before the force of the moral argument is felt. The experiential aspects of moral knowledge often contribute to a richness and thickness of moral apprehensions—the sort of thing that stories are effective at promulgating, often more so than arguments alone.

stance-independent way.[168] Therefore, for non-cognitivists, moral claims are not factual claims. They are neither true nor false in any sense; they are basically desires or emotional projections— and thus, not propositional in nature.[169]

Various forms of non-cognitivism have surfaced throughout the twentieth century, including: emotivism,[170] expressivism,[171] prescriptivism,[172] and a bit more loosely, quasi-realism.[173] In a nutshell, emotivists, expressivists, prescriptivists, quasi-realists, and other non-cognitivist positions deny the possibility of moral knowledge. Some philosophers even view expressivism as a penumbral term under which fall the various non-cognitivist accounts.[174] Again, each of the non-cognitivist views contend that, in some way, moral judgments or claims

---

[168] Ibid.

[169] For a helpful introduction to cognitivism and non-cognitivism, see Matthew S. Bedke, "Cognitivism and Non-Cognitivism," in Tristram McPherson and David Plunkett, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 292-307.

[170] See A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (London: Gollancz, 1936); and Charles L. Stevenson, *Ethics and Language* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1944). Emotivism, as espoused by A. J. Ayer and Charles L. Stevenson, is the view that when one makes a moral judgment, he or she is actually expressing an emotion or attitude rather than describing something that is either true or false.

[171] See Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings. A Theory of Normative Judgement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990). Expressivism, a view advanced by Allan Gibbard, understands moral sentences as conventional devices for expressing approval or disapproval towards certain things. In a broad sense, expressivists insist that moral terms function much like "hooray" and "boo." For instance, to say "Murder is wrong" is akin to saying, "Boo! Murder!"

[172] See R. M. Hare, *The Language of Morals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952); R. M. Hare, *Moral Thinkings: Its Levels, Methods and Point* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); R. M. Hare, *Essays in Ethical Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); and R. M. Hare, *Sorting Out Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). Prescriptivism, as held by R. M. Hare, is the view that moral judgments are not primarily fact-stating, but, rather, expressions of universal prescriptions or recommendations. For example, to say "Murder is wrong" is like saying "Murder is bad; don't murder."

[173] See Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word: Groundings in the Philosophy of Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); and Simon Blackburn, *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). Quasi-realism, as explained by Simon Blackburn, maintains that individuals should pay respect to the realist-seeming nature of moral practice by *acting* as if moral realism is true, when in fact it is not.

[174] Terence Cuneo, Russ Shafer-Landau, C. Stephen Evans, David Baggett, and Jerry Walls are examples.

are not *truth apt*; they are not true or false. Rather, they are expressions of desires, emotions, or other non-belief-like states.[175]

Response to Objection 1: Ethical Non-Cognitivism

Due to space constraints, each of the non-cognitivist views cannot be addressed here. Consequently, a few general responses to non-cognitivism as a whole will be offered.[176] First, non-cognitivism is, as most would agree, deeply counterintuitive. This was one among the fifteen reasons earlier adduced for believing in objective morality. The first reason dealt with the "obviousness" of objective morality; in other words, the intuitive nature of morality. According to Kevin DeLapp,

> Suffice to say that as a descriptive thesis, noncognitivism appears exceptionally counterintuitive. Most speakers of most languages presumably do not mean by 'killing innocents is wrong' merely that they do not approve of it, or even that they are simply endorsing a norm, no matter how universal in form. Rather most speakers think that they mean what they say, namely that killing innocents is literally wrong.[177]

---

[175] Labels like "emotivism," "expressivism," "prescriptivism," and "quasi-realism" have been used in a variety of ways historically. However, for the purposes of this chapter, the label "non-cognitivism" will be used as a "catch-all" for the varying views of Ayer, Stevenson, Gibbard, Hare, and Blackburn. For a useful introduction to several non-cognitivist views, see McPherson and Plunkett, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics*, 58-134, 626-642.

[176] For more specific responses to the different non-cognitivist views, refer to the following resources. For a response to Simon Blackburn's quasi-realism, see Nicholas Unwin, "Quasi-Realism, Negation and the Frege-Geach Problem," *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 49, issue 196 (July 1999): 337-352; G. F. Schueler, "Modus Ponens and Moral Realism," *Ethics*, vol. 98, no. 3 (April 1988): 492-500; and M. H. Brighouse, "Blackburn's Projectivism: An Objection," *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 59 (1990): 225-233. For a response to Allan Gibbard's expressivism, see Nicholas Unwin, "Norms and Negation: A Problem for Gibbard's Logic," *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 51, issue 202 (January 2001): 60-75; also see Terence Cuneo, "Saying What We Mean: An Argument Against Expressivism," in Russ Shafer-Landau, ed., *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 35-71. For a response to emotivism, see John Lemos, "The Problems with Emotivism," *Journal of Philosophical Research*, vol. 25 (January 2000): 285-309; also see Alasdair Macintyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007). For a response to prescriptivism, see Macintyre's *After Virtue*; also see Ralph McInerny, "The Poverty of Prescriptivism," *Am. J. Juris*, vol. 17, (1972). It is also important to note that the Frege-Geach problem is a problem for prescriptivists, emotivists, expressivists, and others who hold non-cognitive views. See discussion below for helpful resources on the Frege-Geach problem.

[177] DeLapp, *Moral Realism*, 26.

DeLapp captures the sort of thought process involved with the intuitiveness of morality by using the example of "killing innocents." It seems intuitive, or obvious, that killing an innocent person is "literally wrong." To say that killing an innocent person is morally wrong, even downright abhorrent, seems more appropriate than saying something equivalent to "I don't like killing innocents and I don't want you to like it either" or "Boo! Murdering innocent people!"

Admittedly, this is no knock-down argument; non-cognitivists will not readily concede the point, likely replying that this is a specific instance of a dichotomy between appearance and reality. Moreover, so-called second and third-wave expressivists and non-cognitivists have devoted considerable efforts to address this point and make better sense of why human beings are so inclined to interpret moral discourse assertorically. Still, though, in their very efforts to do so, they are acknowledging that there is a substantive *prima facie* challenge their theories encounter and need to surmount.[178]

Now, this might raise a question in the reader's mind: If non-cognitivism is so ineffective at making sense of why human beings are inclined to interpret moral discourse as propositional, what motivation is there to even entertain such a view as a possibility? Most concede that the best reason to take non-cognitivism seriously is that it makes clear why there is such a tight connection between our moral discourse and what motivates us. If such discourse in one way or another is closely connected to a person's attitudes, inclinations, and emotions, these are just the dynamics that tend to motivate one to act. This is, for many, the salient and unique strength of a non-cognitivist construal of ethics. However, Shafer-Landau raises a concern on this score when he notes that ". . . any judgement that fails to motivate, according to non-cognitivism, cannot

---

[178] The burden of proof rests *not* upon the cognitivist to show that moral intuitions are correct, but rather upon the non-cognitivist to show that moral intuitions are misguided or altogether untrustworthy, at least arguably. Again, one should not doubt his or her moral intuitions unless he or she has good reasons for doing so. Every day, there are many things that must be assumed, such as the general reliability of a person's five senses.

possibly be a moral judgement."[179] One problem with this non-cognitivist claim is that it is possible to issue a moral judgment and not be motivated. For instance, imagine someone who has been mentally beaten down by a bad experience or set of experiences; this person may have become completely empathetic to the moral judgments that they believe are true. This seemingly indicates that it is possible to divorce moral judgments from motivation or an outward expression.[180]

Second, a factor demonstrating the intuitive truth-apt nature of cognitivism is that virtually all moral psychology points toward cognitivism. A cognitivist approach is more effective in terms of character building and moral progress. In fact, this is the default position that parents typically hold when raising their children. Parents allow their children to experiment with trial and error, communicate to them consequences of actions, and ultimately help them understand what is right and wrong—all of which presupposes the *truth-aptness* of the moral enterprise.

Third, the history of moral theory seems to tell against non-cognitivism. With the exception of non-cognitivism itself, moral codes and expressions across cultures have historically shared an understanding of morality as something external to a particular person's feelings and attitudes. To be clear, this is not to say that necessarily these conceptions are true, but rather that non-cognitivism has been taken to be *prima facie* false for the overwhelming majority of ethical theories throughout history.[181] Again, this is not a knock-down argument,

---

[179] Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, 26.

[180] For more, see chapter 6 in Shafer-Landau's *Moral Realism*.

[181] DeLapp, *Moral Realism*, 28.

though collectively the arguments within this chapter arguably provide good evidence in favor of moral realism and perhaps moral knowledge as well.

Lastly, there are several additional challenges facing non-cognitivism, including the Frege-Geach problem,[182] Terence Cuneo's illocutionary act-intention argument,[183] the problem of identifying outward expressions of things solely as emotions,[184] and the problem of moral motivation.[185] Without elaborating further, these problems are acknowledged here so that readers are aware of them, and so that non-cognitivists understand there are additional challenges for non-cognitivism to overcome.

Objection 2: Problems with Intuitionism

Non-cognitivists frequently issue the charge (like the cognitivist and error theorist Mackie did) that moral objectivism requires a commitment to intuitionism, which is then said to face several challenges.[186] First, according to moral skeptics, intuitionism is nothing more than

---

[182] For a helpful overview of the Frege-Geach problem, see Mark Schroeder, "What is the Frege-Geach Problem?" *Philosophy Compass*, vol. 3, issue 4 (July 2008): 703-720. For the classic formulation of the objection, see P. T. Geach, "Ascriptivism," *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 69, no. 2 (April 1960): 221-225; and P. T. Geach, "Assertion," *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 74, no. 4 (October 1965): 449-465.

[183] According to Cuneo, "It is false that, in ordinary optimal conditions, when an agent performs the sentential act of sincerely uttering a moral sentence, that agent does not thereby intend to assert a moral proposition, but intends to express an attitude toward a non-moral state of affairs or object." For an extended look at this objection to non-cognitivism, see Terence Cuneo, "Saying what we Mean," in Russ Shafer-Landau, ed., *Oxford Studies in Metaethics,* vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 35-71.

[184] If non-cognitivism is true, any moral claim is just an emotion or expression of a non-representational attitude towards the state of affairs of something. If one were to say an action is virtuous, mean, desirable, terrible, or fine—under non-cognitivism he is experiencing a different emotion with each of these. As Shafer-Landau reports, "If, as it seems, we convey and mean something slightly different when we say of an action that it is virtuous, right, mandatory, supererogatory, kind, beneficial, admirable, conscientious, attractive, desirable, laudable, saintly, or fine, then non-cognitivists must explain this by citing a different attitude that received expression in each case. But our attitudes don't seem nearly as diverse or fine-grained as the predicates we standardly reply in moral assessments. Cognitivists straightforwardly account for these differences by referring to different meanings, content, or properties that are exemplified when these different assessments are true. Expressivists must either deny that these predicates signify different assessments, or identify a different attitude for each predicate. Neither route seems very promising." Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, 25.

[185] This problem is briefly referenced a bit earlier in this chapter.

sheer arrogance or mere stubbornness. It is arrogant for one to say that he or she has access to

something as significant as a moral law that supposedly guides the behaviors of all people, and to

condemn others who have opposing views (such as those who deny the existence of an objective

moral standard). Additionally, when one challenges a person holding to intuitionism, and the

intuitionist responds by saying something like, "Well, I *just know* that _____ is wrong," he or

she is being stubborn. Second, moral skeptics often level the charge that intuitionism is a license

to claim moral knowledge about anything. For example, if morality is recognized intuitively, a

person might claim that something like cutting his or her neighbors up and feeding them to

sharks is morally acceptable. Third, moral skeptics state that intuitionism seemingly requires

some sort of special faculty that allows for one to acquire non-inferentially justified beliefs. This

is one reason why Mackie thinks intuitionism should be rejected.[187] Fourth, intuitionism is an

excuse one makes for not thinking for himself or herself.[188] Basically, as mentioned above, it is a

stubborn refusal to think individually. As Singer and others maintain, it is easy to say, "I *just*

know" or "It *feels* wrong" without actually knowing why or how something is known, but it is far

more difficult to actually do the research for oneself and then arrive at an evidence-based

conclusion.

---

[186] As mentioned in chapter 2, it is helpful to note that one can be a moral realist without putting all of his or her eggs in the intuitionist basket. That being said, the intuitionist challenge is something that a moral realist needs to respond to since he or she will presumably have to suggest that morality is obvious or intuitive at least one some level.

[187] Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, 38.

[188] In this article, Peter Singer provides several reasons why one ought to think for himself or herself instead of merely listening to his or her own intuitions: Peter Singer, "Should We Trust Our Moral Intuitions?" Project Syndicate, published March 2007, accessed June 30, 2019, https://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/200703--.htm.

Response to Objection 2: Problems with Intuitionism

In response to the charges leveled against intuitionism, a few things are worth considering. First, if there is nothing that is known intuitively, nothing can be proven. As Lewis clearly states, "If nothing is self-evident, nothing can be proved."[189] It certainly appears that some things are objectively self-evident or properly basic,[190] such as rules in mathematics or laws of logic, which are valid irrespective of anyone's opinions or feelings.[191] As mentioned in the previous chapter, in his *In Search of Moral Knowledge* R. Scott Smith shares a few examples of moral principles that seemingly qualify as self-evident, including: (1) murder is wrong; (2) rape is wrong; (3) torturing babies for fun is wrong; (4) love is a virtue; and (5) justice is a virtue.[192] There seems to be widespread agreement about these moral facts. Another example is the famous quotation found within the United States Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be *self-evident*, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" (emphasis added).[193] On a slightly less famous note, Shafer-Landau explains, "It

---

[189] C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001), 40.

[190] Properly basic beliefs are not believed on the evidential basis of other propositions; rather, they are simply seen as true and one accepts them. Properly basic beliefs are starting points that make it possible to legitimately infer other beliefs. This brings to mind Alvin Plantinga's trilogy on warrant: Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[191] Immanuel Kant, *Lectures in Ethics*, trans. Louis Infield (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1963), 13-14, 74.

[192] If there are certain intuitions in ethics that are foundational, these seem to be good candidates. It seems that in one's moral analysis, he or she can hold these intuitions as foundational without putting all of his or her eggs in the intuitionist basket, as someone like Robert Audi does. R. Scott Smith, *In Search of Moral Knowledge: Overcoming the Fact-Value Dichotomy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 312.

[193] This is interesting for several reasons. Here are three points by way of reflection: (1) The epistemology here is said to be self-evident, but notice how the appeal to God gestures at the underlying ontology of the matter, which is different. (2) Historically, belief in such a thing as inalienable rights or essential equality was a minority position; this does not vitiate the possibility that they are a function of intuitions; perhaps intuitions were clouded by

seems to me self-evident that, other things being equal, it is wrong to take pleasure in another's pain, to taunt and threaten the vulnerable, to prosecute and punish those known to be innocent, and to sell another's secrets for personal gain."[194] In sum, there appear to be some moral principles that are rock-bottom beliefs that need no further justification.

Second, stemming from the first, without a legitimate starting point, one is caught in an infinite regress. If every belief is required to be based on a prior belief, then each belief must be justified by an infinite number of beliefs. This goes for moral knowledge as well.[195] If there are certain rock-bottom, fundamental truths, it appears "that at least some such axiomatic moral propositions hold."[196] A good candidate for an axiomatic moral proposition or non-inferentially justified belief would be the commonly used statement: "Torturing innocent children for fun is morally wrong." Morally speaking, if anything is obviously wrong, this fits the bill. There are other examples, such as, "Blowing up the pizza delivery guy for bringing you the incorrect pizza is morally wrong." It is not only what is radically morally wrong that is obvious, some things are clearly morally right. For instance, it is morally right to help a young girl who is drowning in the community swimming pool, and it is better to love others than murder them.

Third, to be clear, to say that morality is intuitive is not to say that everything pertaining to how humans should behave is intuitively clear. There are some things that are more obvious

---

bad conditioning; still, the minority status of such convictions historically poses at least a *prima facie* case that needs to be addressed for those who insist such views are clear deliverances of intuitions. (3) David Bentley Hart argues in his *Atheist Delusions* that such views are less a function of general revelation than special revelation; that it was the influence of the Judeo-Christian tradition that over time inculcated such convictions. This is remarkably interesting. If Newman is right about special revelation performing an ampliative function, perhaps it is in general revelation at least inchoately, but special revelation gives the finer grained and more explicit analysis.

[194] Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, 248.

[195] David and Marybeth Baggett, *The Morals of the Story: Good News About a Good God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 162.

[196] Ibid.

than others, and some things that are not obvious at all without moral training. Undoubtedly, some things must be taught and learned, and moral training aids in the process of coming to realize what is right and wrong, and thus, how one ought to live his or her life accordingly.

Fourth, defending moral intuitionism is not a license to claim moral knowledge about anything. As Robert Audi notes in his work, there are a number of misconceptions about self-evidence or, more specifically, *a priori* intuitionism. Audi explains three key points: (1) that self-evidence does not entail infallibility; (2) one can change his or her mind about what is self-evident; and (3) that self-evidence does not rule out inferential justification.[197] Regarding Audi's first point, intuitionism is not a license to claim moral knowledge about just anything—one can actually be wrong about what he or she thinks is a self-evident moral belief. This leads to Audi's second point, which suggests that one can (and even should) change his or her mind about what is self-evident if it is found that this belief is, in fact, misguided in some way. Pertaining to Audi's third point, it is important to note that it is possible for an individual to provide reasons for coming to believe or recognize that a particular moral belief is true. In fact, if a self-evident belief is true, the evidence should eventually come to support it—and it would be unwise for one to ignore evidence that would only serve to strengthen his or her self-evident belief.[198]

---

[197] Robert Audi, "Moderate Intuitionism and the Epistemology of Moral Judgment," *Ethical Theory and Practice*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1998): 15-44. Audi's aim in this article is to improve upon the intuitionism of W. D. Ross as spelled out in *The Right and the Good*, which contains a statement of intuitionism frequently referred to by writers in ethics.

[198] Another relevant response concerns how Mackie points out that intuitionists need some sort of special faculty in order to acquire non-inferentially justified beliefs (i.e., self-evident beliefs). Although Mackie makes this claim, he does not seem to elaborate on it or develop it in any significant way, besides saying that the "queerness" of morality seemingly requires a special faculty unlike other faculties that help individuals come to acquire knowledge of other things in daily living. A full response to Mackie will not be attempted here, but it is important to point out the objection he raises, especially considering that his is a prominent voice in ethical discussions pertaining to objectivity, cognitivism, non-cognitivism, and so on. For a response (drawing upon natural law theory) on why Mackie's argument fails due to a deficient epistemological approach, see Michael Bissex, "The Objectivity of Ethics: A Response to J. L. Mackie's Error Theory," *The Catholic Social Science Review*, vol. 24 (2019): 75-89. For thoughts on why Mackie's arguments from disagreement and queerness present no special problems for moral

Objection 3: Moral Disagreement Among Cultures

This objection is based on the claim by realists that at least some moral principles are self-evident. As moral skeptics commonly ask: If moral principles are self-evident, why is there so much disagreement about them? Mackie calls this the *argument from relativity* and explains that the basic premise of the argument involves "the well-known variation in moral codes from one society to another and from one period to another, and also the differences in moral beliefs between different groups and classes within a complex community."[199]

Response to Objection 3: Moral Disagreement Among Cultures

Since this objection was actually addressed in chapter 2, it will not be addressed at length again here. A couple of brief reminders are in order, however. Harkening back to Reason 2 for believing in objective morality, there are actually numerous examples of various groups of people classifying similar actions as right or wrong. This would suggest *moral agreement* (not disagreement) among cultures and people groups.[200] Additionally, as the Fisher scenario involving putting fifty people in a room and asking them to write down the ten most important moral rules suggests, there may be more convergence on moral issues than some might initially realize.[201]

---

realism, see David O. Brink, "Moral Realism and the Sceptical Arguments from Disagreement and Queerness," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 62, no. 2 (1984): 111-125.

[199] Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, 36. There are a number of other important points that can be made about this. For example, as Evans notes, the "queerness" goes away on theism. Even Mackie admitted as much. For more, see C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 118-123.

[200] Again, refer to the appendix of C. S. Lewis's *The Abolition of Man*. Similarly, R. Scott Smith provides some examples of this in his *Moral Knowledge*.

[201] Fisher, *Metaethics: An Introduction*, 57-58.

Reasons for Moral Knowledge

In the previous section, three general objections to moral knowledge were presented, and a response was provided to each objection.[202] If there are valid reasons to support the realist position,[203] then one ought to at least consider the possibility or plausibility of moral knowledge.[204] This leads one to consider the epistemic source of the moral law.

Key Features of the Moral Law

If moral knowledge is possible, what is its source? Where does moral knowledge come from, and how do humans acquire it? There are several potential answers to this question, including: (1) intuition or conscience; (2) moral experience; (3) moral training; (4) different cultures or societies; (5) a transcendent mind; and/or (6) divine revelation. One might even understand the source of moral knowledge and humanity's ability to acquire it to be the result of one or more, or even all of the above, options.

However, before attempting to move in the direction of the likely source of moral knowledge, it is helpful first to consider a few key features of morality itself. What is it like? What are some of its key features? Learning more about objective morality better positions one to consider its possible source. For purposes of this discussion, the topic under consideration will be referred to as the "moral law," while recognizing that such language is not without

---

[202] For responses to additional challenges that moral skeptics raise against moral knowledge, see Baggett and Walls, "Moral Knowledge," in *God and Cosmos*, 179-212; Ritchie, *From Morality to Metaphysics*, 69-157; and Smith, *In Search of Moral Knowledge*, 107-204.

[203] To be fair, arguments for moral realism do not always function as arguments for moral knowledge. Knowledge requires, most say, justification, truth, and belief. (Some, of course, replace justification with warrant.) An argument for moral realism is an argument for the truth part, but not necessarily the justification part. Again, this chapter focuses on continuing the conversation about moral realism while bringing in some epistemological components throughout.

[204] For a robust defense of moral knowledge, see Ritchie's *From Morality to Metaphysics*.

controversy. What this dissertation has argued so far is that there are several reasons to take moral objectivity seriously. Taken collectively, this set of reasons seemingly points to a moral standard that is authoritative, binding, and objective.

There are arguably key features of the moral law itself that are worth noting, especially if the ultimate goal is to get all the way to the source of moral knowledge. This is an important step because the source of moral knowledge must be able to account for and explain the features of the moral law in a most robust manner. Attentiveness to the moral phenomena in question is a crucial piece of the puzzle; inattentiveness, domestication, or too casual a look at the moral evidence in question risks missing its potential for evidential import. Therefore, such key features will be considered in turn.

First, the moral law is basically information—information on how humans ought to live and what humans ought to become. Actually, the moral law is "inside information" that only humans can acquire.[205] In everyday experience, information is shared and transmitted in a number of different ways (e.g., through the medium of technology), but it is always the product of a conscious, intelligent mind (i.e., a human person). For instance, if one were walking on the beach and saw the words "marry me" spelled out in the sand,[206] it would be natural to assume that this instance of specified complexity and information was *not* the result of a natural mechanism like waves that washed on the beach and somehow arranged the letters in sequence. Rather, one would understand this phrase to be the result of a human person, of *someone*

---

[205] Animals do not likely have access to the moral law, and therefore operate apart from it. Work by primatologist Franz de Waal challenges such a view, but his view faces several challenges, as argued by Baggett and Walls in *God and Cosmos*. What distinguishes human morality from the prosociality, empathy, and altruism in other primates is humankind's ability to reflect about such matters, build systems of justification, and generalize morality into a system of abstractions. For other issues with De Waal's view, see Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, 155-158.

[206] This is actually how I proposed to my wife in June of 2011, on Father's Day nonetheless.

possessing intelligence. Similarly, the great works of literature originated in the minds of human persons—Homer, Hemingway, and Twain, among others. There are a number of other examples to use here, but this much is clear: *information always derives from personal intelligence*. As Stephen Meyer notes, "Our experience of the world shows that what we recognize as information invariably reflects the prior activity of conscious and intelligent persons."[207] What, then, should be made of the presence of information in the moral law? How did this information get there? What does the presence of information in the moral law imply about its origin? Who or what is the author of the moral law?[208]

Second, the moral law indicates that its source cares deeply about how humans behave toward themselves and others. Like caring parents establish clear guidelines for their children regarding right and wrong—details regarding what their children can and cannot do—the moral law provides similar guidelines for how human beings, in general, ought to live their lives. A parent who did not care deeply for their children would ignore the importance of establishing a basis of right and wrong and instead allow their children to do whatever they wanted to do. Likewise, if there is no God, no personal source of the moral law, it might be expected that there is no such thing as an objective moral law. But there is evidence of an objective moral law. Therefore, there is a measure of evidence not only that God exists, but that he cares about how humans live, and caring is a personal characteristic requiring at least two persons: the one doing

---

[207] Stephen C. Meyer, *Signature in the Cell: DNA and the Evidence for Intelligent Design* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2009), 16.

[208] An important challenge here pertains to how one construes a word like "ought." An important distinction exists between instrumental and intrinsic oughts. Instrumental oughts tell what one should do to arrive at some further goal—like one ought to exercise more to get into better shape. But intrinsic or (to use Kant's word) categorical oughts (or imperatives) tell one what one should do in and of itself. Now, instrumental oughts are easy enough to envision without a conscious mind foisting them on human beings. They are just a function of means/ends rationality. Categorical oughts, on the other hand, are harder to make sense of so easily. The line of thought here follows Kant on the issue of categorical oughtness as an important part of morality. Of course, Kant thought it was the very essence and perhaps even the sum of the moral law.

the caring and an "other" receiving the care. It would be odd to say that matter, energy, or particles care; it makes considerably better sense to say that a personal being cares.[209] Caring also reveals that the caring-one is conscious and affectionate, has purposes and preferences, as well as a desire to see the one being cared for improved or provided for in some manner. If the source of the moral law cares, as is implied by the personal instructions contained within the moral law, and if the source is conscious and affectionate, has purposes and preferences, as well as a desire to see others improved or provided for, it is reasonable to assume that the source of the moral law is personal.

Third, the moral law implies purpose. There are a few things that purpose suggests. First, purpose suggests that a goal exists, and in the case of the moral law, the goal is to help human beings reach their maximum moral potential, to become like God, or something along those lines. If there were no goal or ultimate aim of the moral law, what would be the point of the moral law to begin with?[210] Second, in addition to purpose suggesting an ultimate goal, anytime there is purpose, there is intent, and intent reveals a personal will. Third, purpose also reveals wisdom, and wisdom comes from a personal intelligence. The point here is that if there is purpose, there must be a "purposer" since purpose does not arise out of thin air. Therefore, *purpose*, which stands behind the moral law, presumably points in the direction of a *divine*

---

[209] There is another option according to the secularists. Some secularists claim that there are principles and guidelines that, objectively speaking, better conduce to human flourishing. There is no transcendent mind required. Those who claim as much may be right, but one of the major issues is that by adopting such an approach, they lose the "authority" of morality. Secularists oftentimes replace talk of authority with "reasons for action," which is a way to water morality down. More will be said on the "authority" issue in the chapter on moral obligations (chapter 5).

[210] The goal of the moral law is incredibly high, and it is undoubtedly true that humans fall miserably short of achieving or reaching this high goal. This failure to live up to the moral law creates what is called a "moral gap" (i.e., humans know how they ought to live and they fail to live that way—this is the "gap"). The logical question that follows here pertains to how humans can best live up to the high standard and also close the "gap." This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6 on moral transformation.

"*Purposer*," at the least, or perhaps more specifically, an all-wise personal God who has a high moral goal in mind when it comes to human beings.[211]

These three features of the moral law—its information-like nature, its ability to point to a source that cares, and the implied purpose behind it—shed light on the possible source of moral knowledge, revealing that the source, among other things, is plausibly thought to be personal.

The Source of Moral Knowledge

Where does moral knowledge come from? Certainly, there are a number of factors involved with an individual's understanding of morality, including parental training, the sort of education received, media influences, a person's friends, and so on. However, the question that is being asked here regarding moral knowledge is not about how an individual acquires moral knowledge, per se, but where morality and the possibility of moral knowledge come from in general. If there are objective moral facts of the sorts described, and if moral knowledge is possible, one explanatory candidate is a transcendent mind of sorts.[212] The source is presumably transcendent because it is difficult to account for true objectivity[213] apart from such a source, and the source seemingly possesses a mind because the moral law is arguably a set of instructions on how to live. Moral knowledge, too, is arguably well explained in terms of a mind and, due to the

---

[211] This discussion on "purpose" will be continued in chapter 4 when moral values are examined.

[212] Some may consider this move to consider a transcendent mind to be a bit too swift or hasty. This move is made in light of the three things discussed in the previous section. It is also made because the overarching goal of this dissertation is to suggest how morality points to the existence of a God with a specific set of attributes, to include both transcendence and personality. Of course, there are alternate explanations, but time and space do not allow for their thorough treatment here.

[213] Admittedly, the phrase "true objectivity" implies something like authoritativeness. Yet again, one might settle for nonabsolute morality or explain morality in terms of instrumentally effective rules—but these approaches seem to water down the demands of the moral standard or law that exists.

objectivity of morality, most appropriately "a mind from which all reality is derived."[214] As

Lewis says, "the Something which is directing the universe…is more like a mind than it is like

anything else we know—because after all the only other thing we know is matter and you can

hardly imagine a bit of matter giving instructions."[215]

As evidenced by the discussion above on key features of the moral law, it is at least

plausible to assume that the source of moral knowledge is a transcendent personal mind.[216] If this

is the case—that moral knowledge is ultimately housed in a transcendent personal mind—how

do humans come to acquire moral knowledge? If the source of moral knowledge is transcendent,

then neither cultures nor societies, nor even individuals, can account for the transmission of

moral knowledge.[217] If the source is personal and possesses a mind, it is difficult to imagine

something like Platonic free-floating forms as the source.[218] Although there are other

---

[214] Baggett and Baggett, *The Morals of the Story: Good News about a Good God*, 72.

[215] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2007), 25.

[216] A comment on the personal nature of knowledge in general is helpful here: "The third thesis of the Enlightenment model of knowing is that knowledge is impersonal. Since knowing is objective, knowledge claims are person-interchangeable. What one sees or knows another should be able to see and know in the same way as well. Hence, the frequent use of the language of 'demonstration' and 'proof' as objective terms, even in the sciences. Rejecting the misattributed ideal of scientific detachment, philosopher of science Michael Polanyi contends that knowing involves the passionate, personal participation of the knower. Knowing is an act of commitment in which we bring ourselves to the experience in a variety of ways. We bring theories to the knowing experience because we cannot understand the date apart from theories. We bring our bodies to the knowing experience since our very thought processes originate from and are shaped by our body. Even the process of discovery is personal, for from beginning to end it is guided by our 'personal vision and sustained by a personal conviction.'" Bruce R. Reichenbach, "Knowledge, Truth, and Value in the Narnian Chronicles" in David Baggett, Gary R. Habermas, and Jerry L. Walls, eds., *C. S. Lewis as Philosopher: Knowledge, Truth, and Beauty* (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University Press, 2017), 143.

[217] Of course, humans can certainly transmit (or pass down) moral teachings to others, such as parents to their children. However, the question here is whether humans are able are able to account for the overarching authority of the moral law itself, the objective nature of the moral law, etc.

[218] John Rist talks about how weird such things would be. According to Rist, "Plato's account of the 'Forms' (including the Good) as moral exemplars leaves them in metaphysical limbo. They would exist as essentially intelligible ideas even if there were no mind, human or divine, to recognize them: as objects of thought, not mere constructs or concepts. But, as Augustine learned, and as the Greek Neoplatonists had asserted, the notion of an eternal object of thought (and thus for Plato a cause of thought) without a ceaseless thinking subject is unintelligible. Intelligible Forms, never proposed as mere concepts, cannot be proposed as Plato originally proposed

possibilities to consider, one possibility that should not be ignored is a personal God, One who is transcendent in nature and One who also possess a mind.

Divine Revelation

If moral instructions are ultimately contained within a transcendent personal mind—perhaps even within the mind of a transcendent yet personal God—a likely way for humans to acquire moral knowledge is divine revelation.[219] In light of the potential charge that talk of revelation is moving too quickly in the direction of a particular religion, it needs to be pointed out that revelation, in one form or another, is characteristic of *all religion*.[220] Because humans are finite and God is infinite, if humans are to know God, then God must take the initiative to make himself known.[221] As Peter Kreeft suggests, "It takes divine revelation to give us knowledge of God."[222] Thus, it is probably safe to infer that it also takes divine revelation to give individuals knowledge of morality—if God is its ultimate source.

---

them, as free-floating metaphysical items." John M. Rist, *Real Ethics: Rethinking the Foundations of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 40.

[219] Lewis's earlier point can be applied to the present argument to suggest that "you can hardly imagine a bit of matter" dispensing knowledge, particularly moral knowledge. It is difficult to see how a mindless "Something" has the ability to dispense, or reveal, knowledge. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 25.

[220] H. H Farmer, *The World and God: A Study of Prayer, Providence and Miracle in Christian Experience* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1933), 76. Another helpful comment comes from Lewis in his introductory chapter to *The Problem of Pain*. As Lewis lays out four strands or elements of religion in the introductory chapter, in the second strand he speaks of the possibility of divine revelation as a means of explaining moral knowledge in this way: "The moralities accepted among men may differ—though not, at bottom, so widely as is often claimed—but they all agree in prescribing a behaviour which their adherents fail to practise. All men alike stand condemned, not by alien codes of ethics, but by their own, and all men therefore are conscious of guilt. The second element in religion is the consciousness not merely of a moral law, but of a moral law at once approved and disobeyed. *This consciousness is neither a logical, nor an illogical, inference from the facts of experience; if we did not bring it to our experience we could not find it there. It is either inexplicable illusion, or else revelation*" (emphasis added). C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2001), 11.

[221] Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 122.

[222] Peter Kreeft, "Lewis's Philosophy of Truth, Goodness and Beauty" in *C. S. Lewis as Philosopher: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty*, 26.

There are two basic types of revelation: general revelation and special revelation. General revelation is God's disclosure of himself to all persons through nature, the human conscience, and perhaps other means as well.[223] The term "general" indicates that adherents of various religious traditions, and even atheists and agnostics, can receive this type of revelation.[224] Special revelation involves God's particular communication and manifestation of himself to specific people groups and persons, as recorded within the pages of religious texts, like the Bible.[225] As such, "special revelation is an important source of moral knowledge."[226] It deepens the insight that general revelation itself affords; it provides more specific, direct insight into the nature of moral epistemology as a whole.[227]

Divine Revelation and God's Personal Nature

Interestingly, God's revelation of moral knowledge is further evidence of his personal nature in at least four ways. First, if moral knowledge is ultimately contained within the mind of God, and if God has chosen to reveal such knowledge to humans, then the act of revelation itself provides warrant to infer that God is personal. Divine revelation is essentially God's communication of himself to human persons, and communication is a personal task that is typically carried out by persons. Actually, revelation implies at least two persons: the revealer

---

[223] Ibid. Again, there are various ways that humans come to acquire moral knowledge—intuition/conscience, moral experience, moral training, different cultures or societies, etc.—but these means are arguably only possible because of general and special revelation. How else could humans have access to the mind of a transcendent God, unless God chose to reveal himself?

[224] Robert Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 364.

[225] Ibid.

[226] Evans, *God and Moral Obligation*, 2. Evans denies that all moral knowledge must be derived from special revelation because even non-Christians can have knowledge of morality on some level. The human conscience, for example, is one way that all people generally have access to the content of the moral law.

[227] H. P. Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1965), 118.

and the one receiving the revelation (the "revealee," for lack of a better term). Thus, revelation is personal in nature.

Second, if objective morality is ultimately a reflection of God's character[228] and God has chosen to reveal this information to humans, it follows that: (1) morality is extremely important to God (it is who he is at his core; he is holy, good, loving, etc.)[229]; (2) God expects humans to be moral beings (he has revealed this knowledge to humans, not animals or nature)[230]; and (3) God cares deeply about human beings (living according to God's standard of morality is what makes it possible for humans to truly flourish).[231] In the words of Clement Webb, "In recognizing the Law we find ourselves in God's presence; and the language of personal intercourse is no longer forbidden us as involving an inadmissible severance of God from his Law; *for the Law itself is the revelation of his Personality*" (emphasis added).[232] Again, this is an important reason why the moral argument is able to reveal more of God's character than other classical theistic arguments: it is not just an argument for God's existence, but an argument for his character.[233]

---

[228] The view that morality is a reflection of God's character is a core component of divine command theory (DCT). For detailed explanations and defenses of divine command theory, see Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*; John E. Hare, *God's Command* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); and Baggett and Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality*, 103-123. Divine command theory will also be discussed more in chapter 5.

[229] When one reveals who they are at the core of their being to another person, it is a deeply personal and even *intimate* act. Newman on conscience is deeply personalist. The human conscience on his view is the very voice of God, enabling real, not merely notional, knowledge of God.

[230] As far as we know, God has not revealed himself to animals or nature, but *exclusively* to human persons. Therefore, he expects persons to live according to his divine (and therefore, objective) standard of morality.

[231] Smith, *In Search of Moral Knowledge: Overcoming the Fact-Value Dichotomy*, 334.

[232] Clement C. J. Webb, *Kant's Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), 192.

[233] An objection that some raise is the Ockhamist challenge—if morality is whatever God says it is, then morality becomes a relative matter and nothing is learned about God's character. And if one wants to say God's character is good, then the challenge he faces from some is this: Is this not appealing to a standard external to God by which to characterize him as good? For more on this, see chapter 4 on moral values and perhaps even chapter 5 on moral obligations.

Third, by means of general revelation, God has disclosed a basic understanding of morality (moral knowledge) to all people, primarily by giving each person a conscience, which helps them judge whether something is right or wrong. This means that the data of morality are readily available to virtually everyone possessing a conscience, which typically requires for its proper functioning that a person be adequately socialized, although there may be examples where one realizes something via his conscience that he has not been taught or learned in a social setting (e.g., when one realizes the need to love his enemies). Therefore, since morality has been generally disclosed to virtually all human persons via their conscience, everyone is familiar, at least to some extent and at some level, with the issues posed by good and evil, right and wrong. Usually, conscience is spoken of in a negative sense, particularly as a person's conscience causes one to feel guilt when that person has done something wrong, but there are also occasions where one's conscience can push or motivate one to do what is right.

As referenced previously, another possible connection between moral knowledge, the human conscience, and a personal God is found in Lewis's *Mere Christianity*. Lewis indicates that there are two bits of evidence for God: the universe God has made and the moral law that God has put into the minds of human persons. He goes on to say that the latter is better evidence for God because it is "inside information." This "inside information" demonstrates that the One behind the universe is "intensely interested in right conduct—in fair play, unselfishness, courage, good faith, honesty and truthfulness." This reveals that God is good, yes, but it also suggests that he is personal. Therefore, the human conscience, serving as a sort of channel through which God has communicated the moral law (at least on a basic level), is further evidence that God is personal.[234]

---

[234] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 29-30.

Fourth, one might speculate on the reasons why God chooses to dispense moral knowledge to human persons, but one possibility flows out of his desire to be in relationship with those whom he has created.[235] According to Paul Moser, "God's dispensing of vital knowledge of God is truly gracious, a genuine gift calling for grateful reception. How we may know God depends on what God lovingly wants for us and from us. Primarily God wants us to become, *in relationship with God*, humbly loving as God is."[236] If the primary purpose God has for revealing moral knowledge to mankind is for the sake of being "in relationship with God" as Moser states, then certainly this reveals the personal nature of such knowledge.

Actually, one might even be able to argue that knowledge in general is a relationship. As Bruce Reichenbach says, "Knowing is a relationship between the knower and the known, such that each contributes to the task; it is a balancing act between the contributions of the valuing knower and the valued known."[237] With moral knowledge, if God is the ultimate source, then his dispensing of moral knowledge is essentially a relational or personal act—establishing the possibility of a relationship between the knower (a human person) and the known (God himself).

As a side note, it can be argued, especially on a Judeo-Christian view, that God's revelation of his moral expectations (e.g., the *Torah*) was (and is) more than a statutory enactment or even a purely ethical imperative; it was (and is) the teaching given by God to his people, essentially outlining his "way" in which they were (and are) to live their lives.[238] Furthermore, as Webb maintains, it "would be absurd to deny that a religion has a personal God

---

[236] Paul K. Moser, "Cognitive Idolatry and Divine Hiding," in Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul K. Moser, eds., *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 127.

[237] Reichenbach, "Knowledge, Truth, and Value in the Narnian Chronicles" in *C. S. Lewis as Philosopher: Knowledge, Truth, and Beauty*, 140.

[238] Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism*, 110.

which has ever taken as its ideal the great Lawgiver to whom his God 'spake face to face as a man speaketh unto his friend.'"[239] Not only is the *Torah* God's personal moral guidelines that he expects his people to follow, the Old Testament law is primarily a *covenant* that God established between himself and his people,[240] and covenants are *radically personal* agreements that occur between two or more persons. The Divine Lawgiver, rather than forcefully demanding obedience from his people,[241] developed a covenant with his people, whereby he gave them laws to follow in an effort to lead them along the right path and ultimately back to himself and his moral standard of holiness.[242] The bottom line is that if God revealed his law to the people of Israel, and charged them to obey the law, not just for duty's sake, as Kant later claimed, but rather to make possible a relationship between God and man, this is evidence of a personal God allowing human persons the opportunity to demonstrate and cultivate personal loyalty to God himself.[243]

---

[239] Clement C. J. Webb, *God and Personality* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1919), 86. See Exodus 33:11.

[240] Examples of covenants in the OT include the Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and even the New Covenant.

[241] This may be the approach utilized by Allah in the Quran. Even still, as Clement Webb notes with Islam, "the tendency…is to reduce the personal relations which can exist between man and God to the lowest terms, to those, namely, which may exist between a slave and a master of absolutely unlimited power. Still this is a personal relation, and on the whole it would seem best to describe the God of [Islam] as a personal God." Webb, *God and Personality*, 86-87. Not everyone agrees with Webb's conclusion that the God of Islam is a personal being. For example, see Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 387-388; also see Rodney Stark, "Why Gods Should Matter in Social Science," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 49, no. 39 (June 6, 2003): B7.

[242] This point becomes progressively clearer when one takes time to study the morality, or lack thereof, of pagan nations surrounding Israel in the Ancient Near East. As one moves through the Scriptures, a moral advance is witnessed—in opposition to pagan morality—in an effort to restore the Genesis ideals. For a more thorough discussion on this, see Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker, 2011).

[243] Smith, *In Search of Moral Knowledge: Overcoming the Fact-Value Dichotomy*, 26.

Summary

This chapter has dealt with an important category in ethics: moral knowledge. This chapter began by canvassing three objections to moral knowledge, continuing with a discussion of where knowledge of morality comes from. Finally, it considered the nature of moral knowledge, with the goal of determining if moral knowledge points more in the direction of a personal or non-personal source.

Seven key pieces of evidence were presented in this chapter. First, the moral law itself is basically information—perhaps even "inside information"—and information is typically the product of a conscious, intelligent mind (i.e., a person). If the information that makes up the moral law cannot be accounted for on a purely human level, one may postulate the existence of a personal God in order to explain it. Second, the moral law indicates that its source cares deeply about how humans live their lives, assuming there is a source and a moral law. Like a caring parent who establishes clear guidelines for his or her children, perhaps it can be said that the source of the moral law has established guidelines within the moral law for a similar reason. Caring is a personal trait requiring at least two persons: the one doing the caring and an "other" receiving the care. It would be odd to say that matter, energy, or particles care; it makes more sense to say that a personal being cares. Third, the moral law itself implies purpose, and purpose involves intent, and intent reveals a personal will. Additionally, purpose likely reveals wisdom, and wisdom comes from a personal intelligence. Fourth, if moral knowledge is ultimately contained within the mind of God, and if God has chosen to reveal such knowledge to human persons, then the act of revelation itself provides warrant to infer that God is personal. Fifth, if morality is ultimately a reflection of God's character and if God has chosen to reveal this information to humans, it follows: (1) that morality is extremely important to God (it is who he is

at the core of his Being); (2) that God expects humans to be moral beings; and (3) that God cares deeply about human beings. Sixth, the human conscience, if it serves as a channel through which God has communicated the moral law, is evidence that God is personal. Seventh, perhaps one reason why God chose to dispense moral knowledge to human persons flows from his desire to be in relationship with them. One might even argue that knowledge in general is a relationship (i.e., a relationship between the knower and the known). In sum, *the seven pieces of evidence from chapter 3 point in the direction of a personal God.*

If this is the case—that the category of moral knowledge makes more sense housed in and flowing from a transcendent personal mind, or a personal God—then ethical naturalism is in a tough spot, facing a difficult challenge that warrants further response from naturalists. This is not to say that this chapter has successfully defeated ethical naturalism or anything like that, but rather to say that if what this chapter has presented is true, then ethical naturalism will likely have a difficult time accounting for the personal nature of moral knowledge, and more specifically, a transcendent personal mind of sorts. This chapter, although containing references to God, and in some cases, comments pertaining to specific belief systems,[244] is not an argument for any specific conception of the divine—but rather an attempt to better understand the nature of moral knowledge, which is particularly helpful when striving to determine the nature of its source. In sum, if moral knowledge is personal for the reasons mentioned in this chapter, or for any reasons at all, then the source of moral knowledge is most likely personal as well—perhaps even the result of a personal God.

---

[244] Talk of this kind is difficult to avoid when speaking on the possibility of divine revelation and related matters.

CHAPTER FOUR: MORAL VALUES

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the possibility of moral knowledge was raised, a few objections were considered, and several ways in which moral knowledge points in the direction of a personal God were provided. Now, in this chapter, the second category—namely, moral values— will be discussed in an effort to further examine whether morality points in the direction of a personal God. Moral values are usually taken for granted by human beings, as their existence and objectivity allow for human well-being and flourishing. It is values like goodness, justice, love, and gratitude, among others, that make human well-being and flourishing possible in the fullest sense.

This chapter begins by defining and describing a few key features of moral values, moves toward responding to one general objection to moral values, looks at the nature of values, and concludes by seeking to determine whether the source or ground of moral values is most likely personal or non-personal. First, what are moral values? Second, are values the result of social convention, personal preference, evolution, God, or perhaps something else? In other words, do certain objections to grounding moral values in God render God unnecessary in talks pertaining to such values? Is it convincing to explain moral values solely on the human level, or does talk of moral values (particularly their basis) introduce the possibility of the transcendent or divine? Third, what is the nature of moral values? Are they objective or subjective? What about personal or non-personal? Fourth, in light of the discussions in this chapter, is the most plausible source of moral values personal or non-personal?

Defining and Describing Moral Values

Before moving further, it is important to define moral values and describe a few key features of them, as well as draw a few distinctions between values and duties, among other things. First, moral values are what people care about and even hold dear, what motivates their behavior, what grounds their judgments regarding what is morally good or bad. In any given moment, by attempting to determine what (or even *who* at times) is good or bad, better or worse, honorable or dishonorable, worthy or unworthy, one makes a judgment that involves values in one way or another. Additionally, moral values play a role in shaping the character and personality of individuals, and oftentimes with children, these values are usually modeled in stories where children are introduced to the important concepts of good and evil.

Second, agreeing there are things that are either good or bad, morally better or worse, honorable or dishonorable, worthy or unworthy assumes the objectivity of moral values. To say that there are *objective* moral values is to say that there are things that are good or bad regardless of what people think, believe, or feel.[245] So, for example, claiming that stealing from a homeless person for fun is bad is to say that an act such as this is bad or evil despite what anyone thinks, believes, or how one feels about it. One may concede this point but then suggest that if there is such a thing as objective moral values, then people would live them out. However, even if moral values are not recognized or if they are ignored, and even if they are not fully lived out in the life of any particular person, they are not abrogated in any sense. Furthermore, moral values are more than personal preferences; they are the objective guiding forces that drive a person's behavior

---

[245] The validity of moral values does not depend upon their recognition by human persons. If it is true that moral values are objective and eternal, it is challenging to understand how they could fully reside in any finite mind. Interestingly, this is why Sorley argues that there is an eternal mind wherein moral values exist. For Sorley, the eternal mind is God himself. W. R. Sorley, *Moral Values and the Idea of God: The Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of Aberdeen in 1914 and 1915* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918), 352-353.

towards himself and others. Properly construed, values are intimately connected with the facts about reality and not divorced from them as some might assume.[246] What confronts human beings in life is neither facts without value nor values apart from the facts themselves. If values are merely preferences, they are unable to provide a window of insight into the nature of ultimate reality. On the other hand, if values are tethered to the facts, they retain their meaning and potentially serve as a helpful tool for tapping into the nature of reality itself. This is something that A. E. Taylor recognized, which is why he went to such great lengths in order to salvage an intimate connection between facts and values.

Third, there is a key distinction between values and duties. Values relate to whether something is good or bad, whereas duties have to do with whether something is right or wrong. Robert M. Adams states that "good" actually provides the proper foundation or framework for thinking about "right," and not the other way around. In other words, the good possesses a conceptual priority over its opposite that the right does not have. Badness should be understood in relation to the good whereas rightness is usually understood in relation to wrong. However, attempting to understand the word "right" in relation to the "wrong" is difficult. In fact, the word "right" sometimes comes across as ambiguous in relation to the "wrong." Therefore, it is probably more appropriate to think of what is right in terms of how it relates to the good.[247]

Not only does the good provide the proper foundation for thinking about the right, there are other reasons for drawing a distinction between the terms. For example, aspiring to become a nurse is a good thing, but one is not morally obligated to become a nurse. Likewise, striving to get a college degree in order to become an engineer or a math teacher or a medical doctor is good

---

[246] See A. E. Taylor, *The Faith of a Moralist* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1951), 24-66.

[247] Robert Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999).

as well, but again, it is not necessarily one's duty to pursue one of these careers despite the fact that each is a good career.[248]

Drawing a distinction between values and duties, what is good and what is right, is also particularly helpful when defending divine command theory (DCT) and responding to the Euthyphro dilemma. If one applies the previous discussion regarding the foundational role of the good to God by understanding God as *the good*, one can determine what is right by looking to the unchanging standard of the good: God himself. When the two are separated—God from the good—saying that God is independent of the good in some way, one runs into all sorts of problems, particularly the ones involving the Euthyphro dilemma.[249] Since the next chapter (chapter 5) focuses on moral obligations, more will be said there about DCT and the Euthyphro dilemma. For now, it is helpful to simply introduce the idea that if God is the exemplar of the good, and his character serves as the foundation for the right, one positions himself to better understand the distinction between moral values and duties, and how values, properly construed, serve as a foundation or framework for duties.

In sum, moral values are what people care about and hold dear, what motivates their behavior, what grounds their judgments regarding what is good or bad. Again, if one assumes that there are things that are either good or bad, morally speaking, one assumes the objectivity of moral values (because one needs an objective reference point for classifying something as good or bad). Finally, the good serves as the foundation or framework for thinking about the right, and

---

[248] William Lane Craig uses a similar example in *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2010), 130. Not everything that is good is dutiful. In addition to the examples shared in this paragraph, another example is supererogation—where something is morally good but not dutiful.

[249] One could arguably say that it is possible to get around the Euthyphro objections by God's being good—he does not need to be "the good" as stated here.

if God is the exemplar of the good, and his character serves as the foundation for the right, then one is likely more equipped to defend DCT and respond to the Euthyphro dilemma.

Objection to Moral Values

Objection 1: The Social Objection

Before considering the nature of moral values, at least one brief objection needs addressing; it is the social objection, which asks: Do values derive from society, culture, parents, school and friends? Of course, it is true that people commonly learn and come to hold moral values as a result of their parents and teachers. No one ought to deny this. However, it does not follow that because of this, moral values are solely the product of human convention.

As Lewis indicates, something like the multiplication table is learned at school or home, and a child who grew up on a deserted island would likely not know it. "But," according to Lewis, "it does not follow that the multiplication table is simply a human convention, something human beings have made up for themselves and might have made different if they had liked."[250] Admittedly, there are some things that are learned that could have been different, such as the side of the road on which one is to drive. The question, as Lewis asks, is to which class moral values belong. Are moral values more like the multiplication table (which could not have been different) or the side of the road on which a car drives (which could have been different)?

Response to Objection 1: The Social Objection

According to Lewis, there are two reasons for saying morality belongs to the same class as mathematics. The first is that though there are differences between the moral values of one society and another, the differences are not as great as most people claim and one can recognize

---

[250] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001), 12.

"the same law running through them all," whereas mere conventions, such as the rule of the road or the kinds of clothing people wear, may differ to great extents.[251] In short, there is probably more convergence among societies when it comes to moral values than skeptics often realize or admit. Lewis's second reason for saying that moral values belong to the same objective class as mathematics, and are therefore not the upshot of human convention, is that throughout history people have recognized the moralities of some people groups as morally better or worse than the moralities of others. Recognitions of this kind have made moral progress possible, and moral progress is not merely changing, but changing for the morally better. As Lewis says, "If no set of moral ideas were truer or better than any other, there would be no sense in [morally] preferring civilised morality to savage morality, or Christian morality to Nazi morality."[252] Because it is possible to say that some moral ideas are truer or better than others, Lewis posits a standard by which two or more moralities are measured—a standard that is different from either. This seemingly invokes at least the possibility of a transcendent realm or source (e.g., Platonism or God) in order to explain or ground such an objective standard of measurement for moral values.

Another problem the social objection faces is that the equality of all human persons makes it impossible for any single finite person to determine value for other persons. No human person possesses the requisite authority to make moral decisions about right and wrong. As David Beck suggests,

> This . . . leads to a dilemma. Only persons can be the source of values, yet no finite and socially conditioned person is in a position to determine authoritatively the values appropriate for other persons. So, if there really are objective values, there must be some "ultimate" person who has the moral authority to set the standards of right and wrong. [Therefore], [t]here must be a universal personal authority that is the source of morality. What is crucial about this argument is its implication that the source of this feature of the

---

[251] Ibid., 12-13.

[252] Ibid., 13.

universe is a personality, at least in the sense required by the capacity to understand value and make free moral judgments. There is, of course, more to the concept of "person," but this is enough to show that there is a transcendent agent capable of moral concerns, decisions and actions. . . .[253]

If Beck's analysis is correct, that values only derive from persons, and if no finite person is capable of determining authoritatively the values appropriate for other persons, this is potentially evidence that a universal personal authority exists as the source of objective moral values. Therefore, what began as an objection to objective moral values has turned into a potential indicator not only of the reality of objective moral values, but of the existence of a transcendent personal source.[254]

The Nature of Moral Values

In the discussion that follows, several moral values will be examined in an effort to determine whether they are largely personal or non-personal. If it is found that values are indeed personal, and if they cannot be accounted for on a purely human level, they are likely evidences of a personal God.

Goodness

At the beginning of this discussion on the nature of moral values, it is important to first address goodness, considering its foundational role for other values. Human persons ascribe goodness to a number of things or at least consider them good in their everyday thoughts and conversations. For example, one likely considers his favorite chair to be a *good* chair or his

---

[253] Note: Beck is casting this deductively; the approach to this dissertation is something closer to abduction. W. David Beck, "God's Existence," in R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas, eds. *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997), 161.

[254] Some might ask, "What about the possibility of a plurality of persons or gods?" This question is briefly taken up in chapter 7 in a footnote on Athanasius.

preferred drink to be a *good* drink.[255] This leads to an interesting question: Does the value of

goodness (or badness) belong to the mere thing, that is, to things which are not persons like

chairs and drinks? What about something more controversial, such as a firearm? At first, the

answer of common sense seems to suggest that the answer is "yes," that goodness (or badness)

belongs to the mere thing. However, a deeper look at this answer reveals that "the 'goods' of the

world are appraised in relation to persons—by ministering to their desires, furthering their ideals,

or offering scope for their activities."[256] A chair or drink or firearm is neither morally good nor

bad in and of itself; rather, they take on the property of goodness (or badness) depending on how

they help or hurt, aid or limit personal beings. As William R. Sorley explains,

> The fruits of the earth are called good if they nourish man or satisfy any human wants;
> the forces of nature, the arrangement and order of the world, are valued for their effects
> on the lives of persons for the personal and social qualities and conditions which they
> encourage and foster. Man makes the world his instrument, and seeks in it the means for
> promoting a human good. These values, therefore, are strictly instrumental values; and
> instrumental values—real and necessary as they are—are not in themselves values but
> only instruments of value or means for its attainment. They are the conditions by which
> intrinsic values are realized; and these latter, it would appear, are found only in personal
> life.[257]

Likewise, the evils of the world are also calculated in relation to persons. Again, material

things are not morally good or evil in and of themselves, but rather in their relation to persons;

---

[255] This is seemingly an Aristotelian notion of goodness in terms of fulfillment of function. Although this chapter presents more of a Platonic understanding of values, it is possible for Aristotelian and Platonic conceptions of goodness to dovetail in interesting ways.

[256] Sorley, *Moral Values and the Idea of God*, 117.

[257] Ibid., 118. Here, Sorley claims that instrumental values are not in themselves values, but rather instruments by which intrinsic values are realized. Later in his *Moral Values and the Idea of God*, Sorley further expounds on this idea: "In this way every kind of value is or may be related to character and conduct. Truth is an ideal to be realised in a man's intellectual striving; beauty is something that may be produced and enhanced by his mind and hand. All values—the intellectual and the aesthetic, among the rest—have also a share in moral value, because they heighten personal worth and are, to some extent at least, within the reach of personal endeavor. The scholar's life and the life of the artist are examples of the moral life just as much as the lives of the philanthropist or of the ordinary good citizen. Values, once unknown, have been revealed in this way: intrinsic value has been found in instruments, such as knowledge; and things of intrinsic value are seen to possess instrumental value also by enhancing personal worth through its whole range." Ibid., 166

therefore, goodness and badness "[do] not belong to material things, but to persons only."[258] This is an especially important point nowadays as all kinds of people attempt to reduce talk of goodness, including moral goodness, in terms of things non-morally good, like health and happiness, for example.[259]

What about immaterial things, such as love and justice? It seems natural to say that values like love and justice are good things, but what is meant by this? It seems odd to assign goodness to some other quality without considering that this quality belongs to some concrete whole. It appears to make more sense, for instance, to say that "love is good" or "justice is good," recognizing that "love as realised in a personal life is good, that justice as manifested in a man's character or in a social order is good."[260] Sorley actually claims that qualities or values such as love and justice are *not good* when conceived abstractly and without any connection to personal life.[261] It is important to note that by saying these qualities are "not good" when understood abstractly, Sorley is not claiming what some may assume—that these qualities are the opposite of good (i.e., bad). Rather, he is simply saying that these qualities lose the property of goodness when not connected with or understood in terms of a larger concrete whole, specifically, personal life.

What about ultimate goodness? Is it possible to understand ultimate goodness apart from reference to a personal source? If ultimate goodness exists, and if perfect moral goodness "does

---

[258] Ibid., 120, 122.

[259] Another relevant thought here is that the only truly good thing, Kant wanted to say, is the "good will," an attribute of persons. Kant was especially keen to characterize the instrumental construal of values as essentially nonmoral.

[260] Ibid., 139.

[261] Ibid.

not exist in the volitional, or even in the intellectual, consciousness of [human] persons [and if] they have not achieved agreement with it in their lives, and [if] their understanding of it is incomplete," then one can reasonably postulate the existence of a source of ultimate goodness.[262] Sorley attempts to explain this jump to the divine in the following way:

> And yet the system of moral values has been acknowledged to be an aspect of the real universe to which existing things belong. How are we to conceive its relation to them? A particular instance of goodness can exist only in the character of an individual person or group of persons; an idea of goodness such as we have is found only in minds such as ours. But the ideal of goodness does not exist in finite minds or in their material environment. What then is its status in the system of reality? The question is answered if we regard the moral order as the order of a Supreme Mind and the ideal of goodness as belonging to this Mind.[263]

Here, Sorley claims that moral values belong to the fabric of the universe, and that something like goodness is best explained in terms of a person (or group of persons) possessing a mind. The issue is that the ideal or standard of goodness does not perfectly exist or is not wholly found within the mind of any particular finite being. Therefore, Sorley introduces a Supreme Mind in which the ideal of goodness exists.

It certainly seems reasonable to conclude that goodness on a human level is personal. What about ultimate goodness, if there is such a thing?[264] Is it personal or non-personal? There are several reasons for arguing that ultimate goodness is personal. First, as H. P. Owen notes, if on the finite level moral values inhere in persons (and not merely things), then "it is natural to infer that they are personal in their absolute existence."[265] As previously mentioned, the march of

---

[262] Ibid., 355.

[263] Ibid.

[264] Some may wish to agree that goodness is personal at the finite level and that this is all there is to it—there is no need to talk of morality at an ultimate level. On this view, it is difficult to understand how one could adequately account for the objectivity of moral values.

[265] H. P. Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1965), 79.

all things is from higher to lower, so if something is understood as personal on a finite level, the

logical assumption is that it is also personal in its absolute existence. Second, it is challenging to

conceive how humans can participate in ultimate goodness if it is non-personal. The concept of

ultimate goodness is attractive to human persons, prompting them to pursue goodness in their

own lives, giving them moral reasons to act, demonstrating what is permissible, and perhaps

even exerting obligations on occasion. It is understandable how Platonic Forms could attract, but

how is it that abstract Forms give one reasons to pursue goodness or make morally good choices,

demonstrate what is permissible, and possibly even exert obligations or at least serve as the

foundation for moral duties?[266]

According to David Bentley Hart, "Among the mind's transcendental aspirations, it is the

longing for moral goodness that is probably the most difficult to contain within the confines of a

naturalist metaphysics."[267] Perhaps in longing for moral goodness, one is longing for something

greater than nature itself, such as God. Actually, this is one "proof" of God that is discussed in

the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "The human person: with his openness to truth and

---

[266] As Owen puts it, "The second question is whether absolute goodness is personal or impersonal. Are we to equate it with Plato's Idea of the Good or with the personal God of Christianity? The second alternative is preferable on at least two grounds. In the first place, if on the finite scale moral qualities inhere in persons (and not things) it is natural to infer that they are personal in their absolute existence. The inference is not only natural: it is also necessary. Plato said that the world of becoming 'participates' in the world of being. But how could we, as persons, participate in a goodness that is impersonal? An even stronger proof is afforded by the fact that values exert an obligation. Their obligatoriness is inexplicable unless they are personal. Platonic Forms could, perhaps, attract. But how could they impose an obligation? How could we be indebted to them? Why should the failure to enact them engender guilt? I can betray a person and I know that I deserve the guilt I feel. But I cannot see how I could betray values if they are impersonal. Personal theism gives the only explanation by affirming that value-claims inhere in the character and will of God." Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism*, 79-80. Note: Owen's statement is helpful here for a number of reasons, but his emphasis on values exerting obligations may be taken a bit too far. It is true that values may produce obligations in some circumstances, but certainly not in all circumstances. It may be more helpful, and perhaps more accurate, however, to say that values produce permissibility, maybe obligations on occasion, maybe on other occasions reasons that, if acted on, would go beyond our obligations but still be good (supererogatory).

[267] David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 251.

beauty, his sense of moral goodness, his freedom and the voice of his conscience, with his longings for the infinite and for happiness, man questions himself about God's existence. In all this he discerns signs of his spiritual soul. The soul, the 'seed of eternity we bear in ourselves, irreducible to the merely material,' can have its origin only in God."[268] Whether longing for moral goodness is actually longing for God is a debatable claim, no doubt, but it is an intriguing thought nonetheless. The aim here is not to present a deductive case, but rather to present thoughts to take into consideration when attempting to determine the likely best source of moral values. In sum, moral goodness is personal on a human level and also points toward the personal nature of goodness on an ultimate (or divine) level as well.

<div align="center">

Justice

</div>

Justice is a word that is commonly discussed on the contemporary scene, especially as talks of "social justice" occur. What is justice? Among other things, justice is a personal response to the wrongdoing of morally free human persons.[269] It is said that justice has been served when a guilty party has been punished for his or her wrongdoing. Justice, rather than merely existing as an abstraction of the universe, appears to be a property of persons. When a judgment is made upon a particular person or group of persons (or a situation in general), whether it be one of approval or disapproval, a mind and a will are assumed, and generally speaking, one who possesses a mind and a will and the possibility of grasping the role of justice

---

[268] This is found in Part 1, Section 1, Chapter 1 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. What is interesting, at least for the purposes of this chapter, is how personalism and moral evidentialis mare conjoined here. This section of the Catechism can be found here: Catechism of the Catholic Church, "II: Ways of Coming to Know God," accessed December 6, 2020, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_PA.HTM.

[269] According to Kant, "In his moral actions, however, man is a free agent and is, therefore, liable for consequences of actions done…In a word, the key to the imputation of responsibility for consequences is freedom." Immanuel Kant, *Lectures in Ethics*, trans. Louis Infield (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1963), 60.

is a person. Is it plausible for justice to simply exist apart from connection to a person or persons? William Lane Craig responds to this question in the following manner:

> It is difficult, however, even to comprehend this view. What does it mean to say, for example, that *Justice* just exists? It's hard to know what to make of this. It is clear what is meant when it is said that a person is just; but it is bewildering when it is said that in the absence of any people, *Justice* itself exists. Moral values seem to exist as properties of persons, not as mere abstractions—or at any rate it's hard to know what it is for a moral value to exist as a mere abstraction.[270]

On a human level, it is easy to understand that justice exists and that its instances are present in persons. In many cases, one might argue that justice is the result of governments (whether federal or local), which are personal entities that enact justice when wrongdoing occurs by a specific party. What about ultimate justice, if such a thing exists?

It is difficult to understand how one can separate the two—justice and persons—which presents an interesting dilemma when considering that justice (at least in an ultimate sense) is challenging to account for on a purely human level. If justice is personal, is it possible to ground the notion of ultimate justice apart from reference to a personal source that transcends humanity? When a human person chooses to carry out a criminal act, he is deserving of punishment, and only when he receives the punishment he deserves, has justice been served. This raises a difficult question: What about the times when justice does not seemingly prevail, at least in this life? There are countless examples of this throughout history, including Joseph Stalin and his participation in the killing of between twenty and sixty million people, Adolf Hitler and his role in the murder of six million Jews, and Pol Pot and his slaying of nearly one-third of the Cambodian population (between one and three million Cambodians). Other examples include the numerous persons who get away with atrocities such as rape, sex trafficking, child abuse, and

---

[270] William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 179.

103

murder. When human justice is not enacted in this life, should one hope that there is a personal God to enact justice in the next? According to Richard Creel,

> As long as it is logically possible that evil be defeated, that innocent suffering is not meaningless and final, it seems to me that we have a moral obligation to hope that that possibility is actual. Therefore we have a moral obligation to hope that there is a God because, if there is a God, then innocent suffering is not meaningless or final. . . . To be sure, the Holocaust was enormously tragic—but without God it is even more tragic. Indeed, a far greater evil than the evils of history would be that the evils of history will not be defeated because there is no God.[271]

If there is no God or the divine is altogether impersonal, legitimate hope for ultimate justice appears unattainable.[272] Conversely, if there is a holy and personal God who exists, then "innocent suffering is not meaningless or final" because ultimate justice will be handed down.[273] Therefore, by considering the concept of ultimate justice, one is able to postulate not only the existence of a personal deity who is capable of enacting justice, but also an afterlife in which ultimate justice is handed down. Even if justice just exists, as a Platonist might assume, it is difficult to understand how an abstract realm could account for ultimate justice and enact justice. Suppose that an abstract realm does exist for a moment. Admittedly, in theory it is easier to understand how ultimate justice could exist, but it is much more difficult to grasp how a non-personal realm (with no ultimate person in view) could *enact* justice because *enacting* seemingly requires the existence of a person who does the *enacting*.

---

[271] Richard E. Creel, *Divine Impassibility: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 149-150.

[272] There are those who accept the need for justice on a human level but dismiss the need for ultimate justice. However, on this view, it appears that there are many who get away with injustice unscathed. For this reason, among others, it at least seems logical to hope there is such a thing as ultimate justice and that it will be enacted.

[273] Marilyn McCord Adams puts it this way: "If Divine Goodness is infinite, if intimate relation to it is thus incommensurably good for created persons, then we have identified a good big enough to defeat horrors in every case." Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 82-83.

Love

In order for genuine love to exist there must be both a subject and an object, a giver and receiver of love. True love is more than self-love, which easily slips into narcissism. It is a self-giving love, where the fullness of love is shared in reciprocal fashion among two or more human persons. As Richard of St. Victor claims, "One never says that someone properly possesses love if he only loves himself; for it to be true love, it must go out towards another. Consequently, where a plurality of persons is lacking, it is impossible for there to be love."[274] No one considers a human person loving if he ignores the needs of others, instead looking out for his own interests.[275] Again, while it is important for a human person to love himself (in the sense of desiring to take care of himself, maximize his potential, etc.), the concept of self-love is a slippery slope that leads to pride and selfishness if pushed too far. Proper love is outward rather than inward focused.

Where does the moral value of love come from? Without religion the coherence of an ethic of love and compassion[276] are difficult to establish. The principles of love and respect for persons and the principle of the survival of the fittest are mutually exclusive.[277] Thus, an

---

[274] Richard of St. Victor, *De Trinitate*, III.2

[275] Interestingly, H. H. Farmer claims, "[F]or love, rightly understood, is the only relationship which fully grasps and affirms the other as personal." H. H Farmer, *The World and God: A Study of Prayer, Providence and Miracle in Christian Experience* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1933), 226. It is only love (rightly understood) that recognizes the intrinsic worth of human persons and rightly respects their infinite personal value. If human persons possess intrinsic value, they ought to be viewed through eyes of love and a heart of compassion. Anything less than this fails to recognize and respect the intrinsic dignity of human persons.

[276] Like love, compassion is a value that is shared among persons since compassion is something that one has for another person, which oftentimes prompts one to act on behalf of the other. According to H. P. Owen, "Today a humanist, a Hindu and a Christian could all agree that truthfulness, courage, and *compassion* are among the principal virtues that they are obliged to cultivate" (emphasis added).[276] Compassion is a value (or virtue) that people across various belief systems hold—from one who denies the existence of God to one who is a devoted believer, compassion is understood as important for human well-being. Compassion, like love, is shared among persons; it must be shared with a personal object (from one person to another). Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism*, 28.

evolutionary view faces a challenge in accounting for the existence of love on a metaphysical level. Additionally, to say that love just exists in a transcendent realm of values (i.e., Platonism) seemingly misses the point that love exists within the context of personal relationships.[278] What about God? Within various belief systems throughout the world, God is described as loving.[279] If God is loving, then he is personal—because genuine love does not exist in isolation, but rather in community with other persons. At this point, the question becomes: Which religions of the world claim that God is personal and which one(s) provide(s) the best explanation of his essentially loving nature? Although raised here for the purpose of causing one to begin thinking ahead, this important question is one that is addressed in chapter 7.

Gratitude

Gratitude is not a self-enclosed or self-sufficient emotion but a human person's inner response to another person or persons, whether human or divine, for benefits, gifts, or favors received from them—such as the gratitude one experiences as a result of caring parents, loving friends, and dedicated teachers or mentors. The call of gratitude is to honor a person for a benefit he has provided. On a human level, when gratitude is felt due to a country, school, or some other collective, it is owed to them not as impersonal institutions, but as communities of human persons. Once again, consider receiving a special gift from a friend or family member and, as a

---

[277] R.Z. Friedman, "Does the 'Death of God' Really Matter?" *International Philosophical Quarterly* 23 (1983): 322.

[278] Actually, Erik Wielenberg, a modern Platonist, claims that not all values are properties of persons; he also denies that all values have external foundations. See Erik J. Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics: The Metaphysics and Epistemology of Godless Normative Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 46.

[279] This seems to be required of God's character. If he is the greatest conceivable being, then it appears that he must be essentially loving. How could he be the greatest conceivable being if he was unloving? Of course, some might suggest that love is not a great-making property, arguing instead that the greatest conceivable being is not essentially loving, but still loving in some sense. If love is the supreme ethic, as many conclude, it is difficult to understand how God could be anything less than essentially loving. If a Being such as God was loving at some times and unloving at other times, would one be able to refer to him as essentially good? It seems that goodness and love bear an intimate connection when it comes to the nature of God.

result, experiencing an overflowing sense of gratitude that spills over in the form of thankfulness. Similarly, consider the "thank you" notes and cards that individuals send throughout their lifetimes—each of which assumes a personal object. In every expression of thanks, the verb "thank" is used in conjunction with an object: "you." Without an object of thanks, there can be no thankfulness. Every time one utters the words "thank you," it is directed toward *someone*.

On a deeper level, when one enjoys the richness of life which culminates in deep gratitude and a profound sense of reverential wonder, to whom is this gratitude, this reverence, to be felt? Assuredly, these are emotions that plausibly demand a transcendent personal object.[280] Furthermore, when one considers the overwhelming immensity of a galaxy or the dynamic intricacy of a single living cell and is overcome by an intense feeling of thankfulness, chalking this up to "abstract gratitude" seems inadequate. It is easy to understand how atheists and agnostics feel gratitude toward human persons who have made positive differences in their lives, but what about the blessings that cannot be ascribed to human agency? Perhaps understanding this appreciation of the good gifts of life as praise of a personal Creator and transcendent Giver of all good gifts, even when one knows little about whom they are praising, provides a more satisfying account.

Of course, there are other values that many people hold,[281] but the values of goodness, justice, love, and gratitude are thoroughly personal in nature and are indicators of a personal

---

[280] Clement C. J. Webb, *Religion and Theism: The Forwood Lectures Delivered at Liverpool University, 1933* (Oxford: Unwin Brothers Ltd., 1934), 72-74.

[281] For example, consider anger, which is closely related to blame. Although one may not characterize something like anger as a moral value *per se*, it is interesting to point out a few key features of anger here. Anger, while sometimes directed inwardly due to a personal failure, is typically aimed at another person or persons. Humanly speaking, when one feels as if another has wronged him, blame ensues—which implies intent or negligence on the part of the offender. Blame suggests that *someone* is blameworthy—which can only be a sentient being, or someone who has the freedom of choice. As Webb maintains, "It is true that what would be a criminal act, if brought about by a person, is not blamed when due to a natural force or the activity of an irrational animal." Webb, *God and Personality*, 14. It is persons, not trees or cats, who are blameworthy and therefore the objects

God. What about human value? Do humans possess intrinsic worth, and if so, what (or who) is it that makes them valuable?

Human Value

Although time and space do not allow for a full treatment of human value, as that would take an entire dissertation or more, it is helpful to mention a few things here in light of the aim of this chapter and the overall thrust of this dissertation. When considering how to determine or measure the value of human beings,[282] there are, at least broadly speaking, two main camps that exist. The *property view* measures the value of human beings by certain properties that they acquire, such as self-consciousness or rationality, claiming that humans begin to exist at some point but become valuable later when such properties are gained. The *substance view*[283] holds

---

toward which anger is appropriately directed. On a divine level, believers and atheists alike sometimes express anger toward God. Interestingly, when individuals express their anger toward him in statements such as, "If God was good, then he would not allow _____," they are issuing a personal challenge to the irrationality of suffering. This is problematic for the skeptic because it is difficult to hold a non-existent or impersonal being *personally* responsible for something. To this point, Os Guinness succinctly states, "If God is allowed to be personal nowhere else, he must be personal here. In this sense, blame is a useful index of belief, for everyone believes in God at least as much as he or she blames God for suffering that cannot be explained in any other way." Os Guinness, *God in the Dark: The Assurance of Faith Beyond a Shadow of Doubt* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 190.

[282] There are those who draw a distinction between human beings and human persons. For example, Mary Anne Warren maintains that "persons" are self-aware, able to interact with their environment, able to solve complex problems, possess a self-concept, and are able to see themselves existing over time. Mary Anne Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion," in *The Problem of Abortion*, ed. Joel Feinberg (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1984). To be clear, the claim in this chapter is that human beings *are* persons—because human worth is not determined by what qualities one possesses—therefore, one does not gain or lose their personhood.

[283] W. Norris Clarke offers a four-part definition of what constitutes a *human* substance: "(1) it has the aptitude to exist *in itself* and not as a part of any other being; (2) it is the unifying center of all the various attributes and properties that belong to it at any one moment; (3) if the being persists as the same individual throughout a process of change, it is the substance which is the abiding, unifying center of the being across time; (4) it has an intrinsic dynamic orientation toward self-expressive action, toward self-communication with others, as the crown of its perfection, as its very *raison d'etre*." W. Norris Clarke, *Explorations in Metaphysics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 105. On the substance view, human substance maintains identity through change as well as possessing a nature or essence that makes certain activities or functions possible. As J. P. Moreland notes, "A substance's *inner nature* is its ordered structural unity of ultimate capacities. A substance cannot change in its ultimate capacities; that is, it cannot lose its ultimate nature and continue to exist." J. P. Moreland, "Humanness, Personhood, and the Right to Die," *Faith and Philosophy* 12.1 (January 1995): 101.

that humans are valuable based upon the kind of thing they are (i.e., they are human persons), not by some capability they have or function they can perform.[284] Of course, it is true that humans differ significantly in terms of their talents, abilities, accomplishments, and degrees of development—a point that Nietzsche perpetually accentuated—but they are nonetheless equal because they share a common human nature, at least arguably and intuitively. Simply put, humans are intrinsically valuable because of their shared personhood. On this view, personhood is ontologically prior to any and all contingent properties that may be acquired by human beings over time. Again, they are not valuable because of what they do or possess the potentiality to do, but rather because of what they are—they are human persons and therefore possess intrinsic (or fundamental) worth.

The property view is problematic for several reasons, but perhaps the most significant problem facing this view is that it cannot account for basic human equality. If humans have value by virtue of the value-making properties they possess, such as self-consciousness or rationality, then it follows that since these acquired properties come in varied degrees among human beings, basic human rights also come in varying degrees. Does one really wish to say that those with more self-consciousness or rationality are more human (and therefore more valuable) than those with less?[285] If so, the claim that all human beings are equal loses its force. Philosophically

---

[284] Contemporary proponents of the substance or essentialist view include philosophers Robert P. George, J. P. Moreland, Patrick Lee, and Francis Beckwith. See Francis J. Beckwith, *Defending Life: A Moral and Legal Case Against Abortion Choice* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 49-50, 130-171; and Robert P. George, "Embryo Ethics," *Daedalus*, Winter 2008.

[285] Baruch Brody, a proponent of the property view, suggests that personhood arrives when brain waves are detected. See Baruch Brody, *Abortion and the Sanctity of Human Life: A Philosophical View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1975). Others, such as Mary Anne Warren, understand personhood to require that beings can do certain things, such as have consciousness, reason, possess a self-concept, and engage in sophisticated discussion. See Mary Anne Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion," in *The Problem of Abortion*, 2nd ed., ed. Joel Feinberg (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1984). Michael Tooley and Peter Singer hold similar views to Warren's. Actually, Tooley and Singer both possess an understanding of personhood that leads them to support infanticide. See Michael Tooley, "In Defense of Abortion and Infanticide," in *The Abortion Controversy 25 Years after Roe v. Wade*, 2nd ed., eds. Louis Pojman and Francis J. Beckwith (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1998); and Michael Tooley, *Abortion and*

speaking, it arguably makes more sense to claim that human beings are of equal worth not because of the sorts of properties they possess or acquire, but rather because of the sort of thing they are—rational moral agents. Again, it is true that humans differ with regard to their talents, abilities, and degrees of development, but they are nonetheless equal because they share in a common human nature.

But is this talking in a circle, basically saying that humans are valuable because they are human? Of course, one can avoid the potential for the circularity objection by grounding human value in one or more human properties (rationality, self-consciousness, etc.), but again, the property view fails to adequately account for human equality (since there are varying degrees of rationality and self-consciousness among persons). Additionally, Mark Linville notes that secular theories as a whole, and even many religious theories, likely fail to provide a robust account of the intrinsic value of persons. As Linville maintains, "If such an account [a robust account] of dignity is to be had at all, it must be rooted in the metaphysics of personhood."[286]

This poses a number of issues for various belief systems, including (but not limited to) naturalism.[287] For example, Linville notes that naturalism's difficulty in accounting for the intrinsic dignity of persons is at least threefold: "how to derive the personal from the impersonal,

---

Infanticide (New York, NY: Oxford, 1983). See Peter Singer, "Sanctity of Life or Quality of Life?" *Pediatrics* 73 (July 1973); Helga Kuhse and Peter Singer, *Should the Baby Live? The Problem of Handicapped Infants* (New York, NY: Oxford, 1985); and Peter Singer, *Rethinking Life and Death: The Collapse of Traditional Ethics* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994).

[286] Mark D. Linville, "The Moral Argument," in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, eds. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 441.

[287] Linville critiques a number of secular theories in his chapter on the moral argument, including (but not limited to) Hobbesian egoism, utilitarianism, and ideal observer theory. Linville also analyzes Hinduism and Buddhism as theories for grounding the intrinsic value of persons, and he finds that Hinduism fails because the Advaita Vedanta appears to deny the real existence of persons whereas Theravada Buddhism fails because it views persons as bundles of instantaneous constituents without anything substantial that may be identified as the self. On Theravada Buddhism, there are only non-personal constituents. See Linville, "The Moral Argument," 417-438.

how to derive values from a previously valueless universe, and how to unite the personal and the valuable with the result of a coherent and plausible notion of personal dignity."[288] Interestingly, if human value is ultimately rooted in the metaphysics of personhood, naturalism is in a difficult position when it comes to accounting for personhood—because naturalism is impersonal (or non-personal). Suppose, as Linville does, that the personal and the valuable are not emergent features of reality after all (as naturalists typically assume),[289] but are basic instead. Furthermore, suppose that personhood is one of (if not the) most basic feature(s) of reality, and that the impersonal (along with the personal) ultimately derives from the personal. Finally, "[s]uppose that the one thing that is both metaphysically and axiologically ultimate is a person [or personal God], so that personhood and value are necessarily united in that Being."[290] Of course, theists believe exactly this and claim that this Being is God.[291]

---

[288] Ibid., 443.

[289] A Platonist would contend that there are necessary objective features of the universe that exist as brute facts and do not need God as their ground or source. These features exist as eternal and unchanging ideas in a transcendent, abstract realm. For example, Erik Wielenberg states that ethical truths are "part of the furniture of the universe," constituting the "ethical background of every possible universe." Erik J. Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 52. William Lane Craig notes three issues with Platonism. First, it seems unintelligible. What does it mean to say that moral values such as justice or love simply exist? Values like justice and love appear to be properties of persons, and it is difficult to understand how they can exist as abstractions. Second, it is difficult to understand how Platonism provides a basis for moral duties. How is it that one has a moral obligation to align himself or herself with an abstract set of values such as justice, loyalty, love, compassion, and the like? In the absence of a moral lawgiver, is it possible for one to be morally obligated to an abstract object? Third, it is improbable that a blind evolutionary process is able to account for the sort of creatures who are able to correspond to an abstract realm of moral values. As Craig notes, "it's almost as if the moral realm *knew* that we [human persons] were coming." This invites the question: Is it possible for an abstract object to know anything, or does the possibility of knowledge require some sort of mind (as Sorley contends)? Craig, *On Guard*, 137-138. A fourth difficulty for Platonism is accounting for not only the valuable (as Craig highlights), but also the personal. Is it possible for the personal to derive from a non-personal, abstract realm? Or is it more likely for the personal to exist as a basic feature of reality, claiming that at the very heart of the universe there exists a personal God who is then able to account for personhood?

[290] Ibid.

[291] Linville ultimately posits the following conclusion: "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" (or three Persons, on the Christian view). Linville, "The Moral Argument," 443.

On the substance view, human beings enjoy an unconditional worth that is categorical in nature, independent of any extrinsic considerations. Therefore, the only appropriate response to each human being is categorical regard for their intrinsic worth. As Immanuel Kant's Principle of Humanity (i.e., one version of his Categorical Imperative) states: "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end."[292] Kant claimed that there are two ways in which something may be said to have value: either it has *dignity* or it has a *price*. If, as Kant claimed, the value of human persons "is above all price," unlike mere things (which have a "price"), then they ought to be treated as an "end" in themselves because they are intrinsically valuable.[293]

Persons are intrinsically valuable (i.e., substance view); they do not gain or lose value based on properties they gain or lose (i.e., property view). Furthermore, if the intrinsic value of human persons is ultimately rooted in personhood on an ontological level, then naturalism is likely not in a position to ground the concept of personhood and one has reason to look in the direction of a personal God for a robust account of personhood.[294] There is obviously more that

---

[292] Kant used this version of his categorical imperative primarily to show the immorality of suicide and sexual sin. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork in the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. H. J. Paton (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1964), 96. As morally significant and helpful as Kant's Principle of Humanity is, it lacks at least one thing. As Hastings Rashdall points out: "We must know what is the true end of human life before we can tell whether a certain course of conduct does or does not involve treating humanity only as a means." Hastings Rashdall, *The Theory of Good and Evil*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 131. Kant only recognizes two ends in human life: one primary (morality) and the other secondary (happiness). Interestingly, there is a version of the moral argument that utilizes Kant's two ends and attempts to show how theism provides a correlation between morality (holiness) and happiness. This version of the moral argument shows that by pursuing holiness one likely achieves ultimate happiness as well. See Baggett and Baggett, *The Morals of the Story*, 197-216.

[293] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork in the Metaphysics of Morals*, 97, 99.

[294] On this score, Rashdall argues, "In the eyes of the Absolute—supra-personal or impersonal—we can well believe that the unfinished but developing personality of a finite individual would have no intrinsic worth, but in the eyes of a Personal God of Love, not even the meanest of His creatures is devoid of some spark of good and some reflection of the Divine Image, however faint. And he judges of our abiding worth, not by what we are, but by what we shall be and what He believes He can yet make us." Hastings Rashdall, *King's College Lectures on Immortality*, ed. W. R. Matthews (London: London Press, 1920), 228.

needs discussing on this topic, but at first glance, it appears that non-personal naturalism struggles to provide an adequate basis for personal value.[295] Sure, naturalism is certainly in a position to measure the value of human beings by price, but it is likely not in a position to account for the value that humans intrinsically enjoy. Conversely, personal theism seems better positioned to account for the unconditional and essential worth of human persons by grounding the value of persons in the personhood of God.[296]

---

[295] If the substance view is one that is largely owing to the effects of the Judeo-Christian tradition, this potentially raises a concern about circularity. If the notion of the substance view comes from, say, Christianity, the arrow presumably points from Christianity to essential human dignity/equality, not vice versa, on pain of problematic circularity. In response to this potential objection, perhaps it is helpful to consider this particular thought from the outspoken atheist, Jürgen Habermas, who admits the profound debt that human rights discourse owes to the Christian faith: "Christianity has functioned for the normative self-understanding of modernity as more than just a precursor or a catalyst. Egalitarian universalism, from which sprang the ideas of freedom and a social solidarity, of an autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights, and democracy, is the direct heir to the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. This legacy, substantially unchanged, has been the object of continual critical appropriation and reinterpretation. To this day, there is no alternative to it. And in light of current challenges of a postnational constellation, we continue to draw on the substance of this heritage. Everything else is just idle postmodern talk." Jürgen Habermas, *Time of Transitions*, ed. and trans. Ciaran Cronin and Max Pensky (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), 150-151. According to Habermas, the foundational role of the Judeo-Christian ethics of justice and love are undeniable as the proper basis for contemporary discussions on human value and equality. What is more telling is that Habermas admits "there is no alternative" to the Judeo-Christian view on this matter. Could it be that the Judeo-Christian view finds itself as the basis for these discussions because it is actually true? Surely, there are numerous examples of how adherents of such a view have been motivated to fight for the intrinsic value of human persons in the face of mistreatment. John Hare makes an interesting observation on this score. According to Hare, "When we look at the great movements towards the recognition of *human* value over the last sixty years, we will often find a religious motivation. I am thinking of Martin Luther King and the civil-rights movement, and the Lutherans in East Germany and the fall of the totalitarian state. Why is this? It is because of the nature of the God they worship." John Hare, *God's Command* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 307-308. Others, such as Robert Putnam and David Campbell, have compared how religious and non-religious Americans have behaved in terms of giving money and time to charities and social organizations, finding that religious Americans typically give more money not just to religious organizations but to the American Cancer Society. Furthermore, religious Americans volunteer more of their time not only in their respective places of worship (churches, synagogues, mosques, etc.), but also in civic associations across the board. As Putnam and Campbell conclude: "By many different measures religiously observant Americans are better neighbors and better citizens than secular Americans—they are more generous with their time and money, especially in helping the needy, and they are more active in community life." The point here is not that religious adherents are better people morally speaking, but that their greater involvement in these ways is not a coincidental in nature. D. E. Campbell and R. D. Putnam, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 461.

[296] A question that surfaces here is: Are human persons valuable because God values them, or does God value them because they are valuable? According to Linville, "God values human persons because they are intrinsically valuable. Further, they have such value because God has created them after his own image as a Person with a rational and moral nature." Linville, "The Moral Argument," 445.

Values and Purpose

Another indicator that values are personal in nature concerns the role that values play in helping one satisfy his or her purpose—because purpose is, after all, a key feature of personality. According to Sorley, if moral values belong to the nature of reality, at least two things are implied: (1) they are objective and ought to be each person's guide; and (2) they help each person satisfy his or her purpose in life. Regarding the second point, Sorley explains,

> Reality, whatever other manifestations it may have, is manifested in persons; they are part of the real universe, and they come to form ideas of moral value and to some extent to frame their lives in accordance with them. Their lives are continuous efforts towards fulfilment of a purpose or purposes; and in their attainment of moral values the nature of persons receives an expression which grows in completeness as value is realised. That is to say, the objective moral value is valid independently of me and my will, and yet is something which satisfies my purpose and completes my nature. . . . Values characterise personal life as completed or perfected; they are factors in the fulfilment of purpose, and purpose is an essential trait of personality.[297]

As Sorley points out here, moral values are objective features of reality and independent of human will (or intellect, etc.), yet at the same time, values are manifested *in* persons.[298] Values serve as the framework for how humans should live their lives and are factors in the fulfillment of their purpose in life—and "purpose is an essential trait of personality." The link between values and purpose is another indicator that the source of moral values is likely personal in nature.

---

[297] Sorley, *Moral Values and the Idea of God*, 240-241.

[298] Unlike the laws of nature, mathematical relations, and general logical relations, moral values arguably hold true for persons only. Values are ultimately realized in persons, not in mere things. As Sorley says: "Of moral values it clearly holds that it is in persons that they are realised, not in mere things, and that they belong to persons in as truly objective a sense as any other characteristics belong to them. But something more than this is true. It is not merely the value actually realised in some one's conscious life that must be held to belong to objective reality. In bringing value into existence the individual person is conscious of a standard or ideal which has validity as a guide for his personal endeavour, or of an obligation which rests upon him. The attainment of value is recognised as a value only because of its conformity with this standard or law of value, or because of its approximation to this ideal of value. It follows therefore that the value or goodness actually achieved in personal life implies as its ground or condition a standard or ideal of goodness." Ibid., 508-509.

Summary

Chapter 4 looks at evidence from moral values in an effort to determine whether their source is personal. *Six* pieces of evidence for a personal God are suggested in this chapter. First, ultimate goodness, which is not fully contained within any finite mind, points in the direction of a personal God. If goodness on a human level is personal, as this chapter suggests, it appears logical to conclude that ultimate goodness is also personal (since the personal arguably cannot come from the non-personal—this would be an example of a stream rising higher than its source). Another reason to maintain that ultimate goodness is personal—if there is such a thing—has to do with the difficulty in understanding how human persons could participate in ultimate goodness if it were non-personal. Second, the value of justice, which is deeply personal, signals that a personal God likely exists. If there is such a thing as ultimate justice, one may postulate not only the existence of a personal God, but an afterlife in which ultimate justice is handed down (this is significant because it appears that some human persons get away with injustice in this life). Third, the ethic of love, which some suggest is the highest ethic, appears to signify the existence of a personal God. Love, which requires a subject and an object, a giver and a receiver of love, is difficult to establish on evolutionary naturalism since the principles of love and respect for persons and the principle of the survival of the fittest are mutually exclusive. Additionally, Platonism, which is a view that ultimate reality is non-personal, and that moral values just exist, faces a challenge in accounting for something as personal as love. Therefore, love likely points in the direction of a personal source. Fourth, gratitude suggests that a personal God exists because there are occasions when gratitude is not appropriately directed to any human person, such as when one feels grateful for the gift of life, or thankful for the beauty of a sunset or the warmth of the sun itself. Fifth, personal theism appears better positioned to account for the

concept of human value by holding that the unconditional and essential worth of human persons is grounded in the personhood of God. Sixth, values themselves are personal in nature because values play a role in helping one satisfy his or her purpose in life, and purpose is a key feature of personality. If this is the case, one might suggest the existence of a personal God as the source of moral values. In sum, *the six pieces of evidence suggested in chapter 4 make postulating the existence of a personal God appropriate.*

This chapter has attempted to show that moral values belong to persons and that moral values, plausibly thought to be objective and eternal, point to something (or someone) beyond the minds of finite persons. It seems, as J. F. Bethune-Baker indicates, that "belief that the ultimate reality is in some sense personal [is what] allows us to speak of values without talking nonsense, for values and idealistic views of life are the creatures of persons."[299]

---

[299] J. F. Bethune-Baker, "The Religious Value of the Idea of a Future Life," in *King's College Lectures on Immortality*, 25. Sorley concludes something similar here: "For we have found that values—intrinsic values, that is—belong to persons only. Persons are required for the realisation of the concept value; and it is only in connexion with the lives of selves or persons that values belong to the structure of the universe as the sum-total of existence." Sorley, *Moral Values and the Idea of God*, 362.

CHAPTER FIVE: MORAL OBLIGATIONS

Introduction

In chapter 4, which focused on moral values, several objections were considered, and then several specific moral values were examined—namely, goodness, justice, love, and gratitude—in an effort to demonstrate that the source of moral values is likely personal. Additionally, a discussion on human value (or dignity) was provided, leading to the conclusion that humans are intrinsically valuable because of their personhood, which was then understood as plausibly deriving from a personal God. Finally, a brief word on the link between moral values and purpose was offered, highlighting, yet again, the personal nature of moral values and pointing out the apparent need for a transcendent personal source.

This chapter focuses on moral obligations. The discussion assumes the existence of an objective standard of goodness and maintains that certain acts are either obligatory or forbidden in some sort of overriding sense. A particular act is morally obligatory when it *ought* to be carried out and forbidden when it *ought not* be done.[300] For example, attempting to save the life of a drowning child is something that someone *ought* to do. Likewise, it is perfectly intelligible to believe that humans are morally obligated to possess (or acquire) traits such as compassion, mercifulness, generosity, and courage.[301] On the other hand, one *ought not* drown children for

---

[300] Of course, some moral acts are permissible without being obligatory. This is an ambiguity in the word "right" that sometimes surfaces. Oftentimes, rightness is equated with obligatoriness, but "the right" more precisely encompasses a "deontic" cluster of concepts that include permissibility and forbiddenness. There are also occasions where certain choices are good (e.g., becoming a doctor), but they are not necessarily obligatory. Regarding the doctor example, it is important to remember the distinction drawn in chapter 4 regarding "the good" and "the right." Even something morally good need not be dutiful; recall, again, supererogation. In this treatment it is "the good" that serves as the proper foundation for "the right."

[301] This suggests there is a connection between the deontic and the virtues. C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press), 2-3.

fun or murder a human person out of boredom. C. Stephen Evans notes four key features of

moral obligations:

(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) They help humans understand why they should (and do) care about their obligations and why moral reasons should (and often do) move them to action; and

(4) An adequate account of moral obligation helps one understand the universality of morality.[302]

The overall flow of this chapter is as follows. First, following a brief explanation of

divine command theory, there are responses to a few common objections, particularly those

concerning divine command theory and the Euthyphro dilemma. Next, the nature of moral

obligations is examined in order to determine whether obligations make better sense originating

from a personal or non-personal source.

Divine Command Theory

Before moving to several objections that are commonly raised when moral obligations

are discussed, it is helpful to briefly introduce and discuss divine command theory (DCT).[303]

Admittedly, there are numerous ways in which to explain moral obligations, but DCT is the

preferred approach here for various reasons.[304] Obligations are more than feelings of obligation

---

[302] Evans, *God and Moral Obligation*, 1, 29-30.

[303] For a comparative approach to DCT that considers versions of DCT presented by Christian, Islamic, and Jewish thinkers, and even considers how evolutionary psychology stacks up to the theory, see John Hare, *God's Command* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[304] For detailed defenses of divine command theory, see Robert M. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Evans, *God and Moral Obligation*. Adams provides something like a Platonic theistic account whereas Evans presents more of a theistic natural law account, but both defend divine command theory at length, albeit in different (but not disjointed) ways. Baggett and

(e.g., I feel like I should do this).[305] They are not mere suggestions or opinions, and they are not even prescriptions for which there are excellent reasons to fulfill.[306] Duties are *inescapable*.[307] Furthermore, they are *imperatives* and therefore require something beyond inescapability; they require authoritativeness.[308] Actually, authority is arguably the single most important feature of moral obligations.[309]

How does one account for the *authoritativeness* of moral obligations? This question, among others, is one of the main reasons why DCT is appealing.[310] By positing God's existence,

---

Walls explain how the defenses of Adams and Evans are integrative in David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 287-289.

[305] Feelings are neither necessary nor sufficient for obligations. For instance, one might have a legitimate obligation to do something, but he or she does not *feel* as if should be done. On the other hand, one might have a feeling that something should be done but he or she is not actually obligated to do it. Admittedly, there are instances where feelings do not accurately correspond to obligations, but in many instances, feelings of obligations at least roughly correspond to actual obligations. On the whole, however, feelings alone are an inadequate basis for explaining and accounting for moral obligations.

[306] See Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, 148.

[307] Peter Railton, "Moral Realism," *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 95, no. 2 (April 1986): 203.

[308] A vital ingredient that morality requires is "authority," as Richard Joyce suggests. This, as Joyce maintains, provides a normative system that enjoys both features (inescapability and authority), and one that possesses "practical clout." Richard Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 57.

[309] Although the nature of moral obligations has not been addressed up to this point in the chapter, one brief comment needs to be made regarding the issue of authority. The authoritativeness of moral obligations needs explaining, which is why many insert God into the equation and explain obligations as his divine commands. If God exists, he certainly possesses the necessary authority for explaining obligations. W. R. Matthews adds a particularly insightful thought regarding *intrinsic* authority. If God is to account for moral obligations, he seemingly must possess intrinsic authority, and if he possesses intrinsic authority, his nature is most likely personal. As Matthews explains, "But it is obvious that a law externally imposed can possess no inherent authority but only that compulsory force which the Deity may exercise by an appeal to my hopes and fears. I may obey [God] because I hope for heaven or dread hell, but it will not be a moral obedience nor will His commands possess any moral authority. *It is thus clear that the only moral judgment which can have intrinsic authority is one that springs from the nature of personality*" (emphasis added). W. R. Matthews, *Studies in Christian Philosophy* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1921), 131.

[310] Baggett and Walls provide four helpful reasons for adopting DCT as a theory of moral obligations: (1) A desire to recognize God's status as the first and uncaused cause; (2) A desire to acknowledge God's supreme power; (3) The appeal of analogical modes of reasoning that take legislative activity as the very paradigm of divine activity, as well as biblical and exegetical depictions of God as Creator and Savior who possesses the authority to issue authoritatively binding commands; and (4) Many theists find it difficult to conceive of God's commands as being irrelevant to ethics. See David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 36-37.

and by understanding moral obligations as commands from God, morality is given the sort of clout that most intuitively think it possesses.[311] Divine command theory rests upon the foundation of a theory of "the good" (as suggested in chapter 4) and attempts to explain and offer an account of what is morally right. Of course, something can be morally good without being obligatory; moral duties, in contrast, are not optional, but required. As mentioned above, moral duties are authoritative and binding, signals of what one ought to do. This is why when one fails to carry out his duty, he or she is morally blameworthy or guilty. It is true that there is significantly more to DCT that deserves mentioning, but for now, it suffices to simply understand these two things: (1) DCT accounts for the authoritativeness of morality by (2) viewing moral obligations as commands from God.[312] Regarding the second point, it is of crucial importance to view moral obligations not only as commands from God but as commands that flow from his moral nature. In other words, God basically expresses his moral nature (who he is) to human beings through his commands. This key clarification will prove helpful as several objections to DCT are raised below. It is also helpful to note that DCT, at least as it is conceived

---

[311] At the end of their chapter entitled "Divine Command Theory," Baggett and Walls provide several reasons why *authority* is normally ascribed to someone, including: (1) power—someone who has the ability to enforce his will has a certain kind of authority; (2) knowledge—authorities are persons who have sufficient mastery of a field or discipline; and (3) moral integrity and character—the sort of authority that appeals to the conscience and demands respect in a deeper sense than the authority that comes from power or knowledge. These three reasons prove helpful in understanding why it is that *God* has the requisite authority to account for morality. As Baggett and Walls explain: "God has the supreme power, knowledge, and goodness, and all of these underwrite his moral authority. He created us and this world and stamped us with his image, and has the power to hold us fully accountable for our actions. Since he has perfect knowledge of us, he understands perfectly what is good for us and our flourishing. Moreover, since he is perfectly good he desires our well-being and does everything short of overriding our freedom to promote it. In view of his nature as a perfect being, there are no good grounds for doubting his authority. There can be no blindsideness, no bias, no imperfect understanding, no possibility of misuse of power, or having obtained it wrongly. If all rational withholdings are blocked, we ought to accept God as an authority. And part of what is involved in that is accepting his commands, unless we have good reason to do otherwise; but again, with a perfect being, there can't possibly be good reasons to do otherwise. In short, we think the issue of authority is a matter of power, knowledge, and character, all of which add up to *moral* authority." Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 122-123.

[312] For thorough treatments of divine command theory, see Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*; and Evans, *God and Moral Obligation*. Also see Hare, *God's Command*.

of in this chapter, is a theory of the nature of obligation only, and not of moral properties in general. These clarifications are helpful in better understanding the foundation of DCT. However, DCT is not without its critics. A few objections raised by critics are addressed below.

Objections to Moral Obligations

Objection 1: The Euthyphro Dilemma

The Euthyphro Dilemma is perhaps the most common objection to DCT.[313] Oftentimes skeptics raise the challenge directly, and there are many other occasions where the Dilemma inspires other objections. In the *Euthyphro*, Socrates interrogates Euthyphro, who claims that holiness (or "piety," as many translations have it) is understood as "that which is pleasing to the gods."[314] After a bit of philosophical sparring, Socrates raises this famous question: "Is what is holy holy because the gods approve it, or do they approve it because it is holy?"[315] This question raises an interesting dilemma. If Euthyphro responds by saying that what is holy has the quality on the basis of the gods' approval, then the gods' approval appears to be arbitrary. On the other hand, if he maintains that the gods approve of it because it is holy, holiness is a quality independent of the gods' approval.[316] Although *Euthyphro* is about holiness or piety, many philosophers have thought that a similar challenge can be raised about morality.[317] Adapted to a

---

[313] There are many introductory ethics texts that dismiss the idea that God plays any significant or meaningful role in ethics by raising this objection. For example, see James Rachel, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 46-50.

[314] *Euthyphro*, trans. Lane Cooper, in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 174.

[315] Ibid., 178.

[316] Evans, *God and Moral Obligation*, 89.

[317] Especially moral theories that ground moral qualities in what God commands (or wills or approves of). Of course, DCT is one of these theories, which is why proponents of DCT cannot ignore the Euthyphro Dilemma.

monotheistic context and replacing notions of "approval" or "loving" with "commands," it might

go like this: Does God command what is right because it is right, or is something right because

God commands it? If God commands something because it is right, then rightness is independent

of God's commands. Conversely, if something is right because God commands it, it appears that

abhorrent things such as hatred and mistreatment would be right if God commanded them.[318]

Either way, there is a challenge for a proponent of DCT to overcome.

Response to Objection 1: The Euthyphro Dilemma

Before addressing the Dilemma,[319] there are two clarifications that need mentioning.

First, DCT as presented here (and in the work of Adams, Evans, Baggett, and Walls) is a theory

only regarding the source of moral *obligations*, not a theory of morality as a whole. This is in

contrast to William of Ockham, who is widely regarded as having developed a universal

voluntaristic ethical theory that attempts to ground all moral properties in God's commands or

will.[320] Second, since moral obligations deal with what is *right*, a theory of the *good* is necessary

in order to account for what is morally right. Taken together, one can then argue that if God is

the good, then what is right flows from his nature. This approach allows one to ground goodness

in who God is rather than independent of him, while also potentially avoiding the abhorrent

command charge by maintaining that God's necessary goodness serves as the basis for his

commands (e.g., a necessarily good God could not possibly command evil things, though he may

well command certain things in some respects bad, but ultimately justified and reconcilable with

---

[318] Evans mentions another problem on this score, namely, if God's commands make something right, then whatever he commands is right by definition, which means that God would be right no matter what he did, as long as he approved of himself and his actions. Evans, *God and Moral Obligation*, 89-90.

[319] For more thorough treatments of the Euthyphro Dilemma, see the groundbreaking work of Philip Quinn and Robert Adams, as well as Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, specifically chapters 2, 6, and 7. Also see John Milliken, "*Euthyphro*, the Good, and the Right," *Philosophia Christia* 11:1 (2009), 145-155.

[320] Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 35-36.

our deepest moral intuitions). Of course, more needs to be said on the matter, which is why two common Euthyphro-inspired objections are further addressed below, followed by an objection that is more central to the overall thrust of this dissertation.

<center>*Objection 2: Abhorrent Commands*</center>

This objection to DCT, inspired by the Euthyphro Dilemma, states that if God's commands dictate moral goodness, then it is possible for God to command something that is abhorrent, like torturing children for fun or mistreating people instead of attempting to love and serve them. If God commanded something like this, then it would be good—at least according to the skeptics.

<center>*Response to Objection 2: Abhorrent Commands*</center>

The problem with the abhorrent command objection is that it fails to recognize that God wills something because *he is good*, and something *is right* because God wills it. (This is the main reason it is helpful to properly understand the distinction between "the good" and "the right.") God's very nature is the standard of goodness, and his commandments are an expression of his loving nature. This means that, on the view under consideration, moral obligations and duties are ultimately determined by and flow from a perfectly loving and just God instead of a dictator who issues arbitrary commands. If God's character is impeccable—if he is essentially and entirely holy, compassionate, kind, and so on—when he issues commands, they are a reflection of his perfect moral nature. Why are all of *God's commands right* (instead of arbitrary, immoral, etc.)? Because *God is good*. This means that to assume God could issue abhorrent commands is to assume something that is logically impossible. God cannot cease to *be* other than *who* he *is*; if he could, then he would fail to be the maximally great Being.[321] Similarly, God

---

[321] As stated in the introduction, an Anselmian conception of God as the perfect Being possessing all of the "omni" qualities is the theology utilized throughout this dissertation.

<center>123</center>

cannot fail to *do* something that runs contrary to who he *is*; again, if he could, then he would not be God. This is at least one theory, model, account, or overall picture, which seemingly possesses plausibility and power and coherence, which gives one reason to take it seriously.

This objection is not a decisive one against DCT because a story can be told according to which there are principled reasons for believing that a good God simply never would or could issue a command to do something irremediably reprehensible. Since DCT satisfies various desiderata for what a good account of moral obligations should explain, and this objection and the others are not decisive, this gives us reason to take theistic ethics seriously. (And ultimately, since theistic ethics makes morality personal, these considerations point toward a personal explanation.)

<center>*Objection 3: "No Reasons"*</center>

When skeptics raise this objection to DCT, they suggest that if God's say-so is the reason for the morality of an action, then there is no reason that something is wrong (e.g., slavery, rape, etc.) except God's command. In other words, God's commands are a reflection of his own capricious choice; there are no prior reasons for them. And, as skeptics maintain, if God has no reasons for his commands, then we cannot anticipate what his commands will be, since they can be whatever he decides and dictates.

<center>*Response to Objection 3: "No Reasons"*</center>

How should one respond to this objection? One must affirm that God does have reasons for the commands he issues, and one must reject the notion that this leads to a divorce between God and ethics. If "God is good" is true, a foundational reason for why God commands the sorts of things he does is because the actions he commands are good. One must remember that the goodness of an action—in this case, God's commands—comes from its resemblance to God's

nature. As such, a command to love one's neighbors, then, is good in virtue of the fact that it resembles God's own loving and relational character; it flows from who God is. Ultimately, this is the reason why all of God's commands are understood to be right: because *he is good* and all of his commands flow from his loving nature.

There are other Euthyphro-inspired objections to DCT, but for the sake of time and space, only the abhorrent command and "no reasons" objections are addressed in detail here. For other Euthyphro-inspired objections—such as the normativity, vacuity, epistemic, and autonomy objections—one will need to look elsewhere.[322] One additional objection follows: this objection is more central to the heart of this particular dissertation, as it deals with God, personhood, and morality, along with how the three are related.

Objection 4: Personhood

The overarching aim of this dissertation is to evaluate moral properties in an effort to determine whether their source is most likely personal or non-personal. Thus far, there are many indications that the source is personal in nature. An interesting challenge involving moral obligations and personhood is presented by Brian Davies, and due to its relevance to the current topic, a response is warranted. According to Davies,

> You might say that there are moral laws of which any decent God needs to take account—this making God a moral agent. After all, is it not commonly said that God is a person? And are persons not subject to moral laws (or duties, or obligations)? And are not such laws (or duties, or obligations) binding on all persons—even divine ones? And does this not mean that God is a moral agent?[323]

---

[322] For excellent responses to each of these objections, see Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, chapters 2, 6, 7, 9, and 10. For a general response to the Euthyphro Dilemma, and specific responses to several other objections to DCT, including the "horrible acts" objection, autonomy objection, prior obligations objection, supervenience objection, "mysterious relationship" objection, and the promulgation objection, see Evans, *God and Moral Obligation*, 88-117. For additional responses to DCT objections, see Hare, *God's Command*.

[323] Brian Davies, *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil* (London: Continuum, 2006), 93.

Interestingly, Davies himself,[324] among others,[325] does not think that God is a moral agent subject to moral obligations, and therefore God is not, or likely cannot be, a person. Davies claims that if God is a person, then he is subject to moral obligations because obligations are binding on all persons (or moral agents), both human and divine. However, since God does not have moral obligations, he is not a moral agent and is therefore not a person. There are several issues with Davies' claim. First, Davies projects the idea of "person" (in a human sense) onto God, failing to acknowledge that God is the premier person, the very standard of personhood. As mentioned previously, if God exists, he is the One who establishes personhood. In essence, Davies utilizes a bottom-up approach when it comes to defining personhood (which begins with humans), instead of utilizing a top-down approach (which begins with God). Second, there are theists who claim that God is a person (and a moral agent) while also maintaining that he has no moral obligations. For example, William Lane Craig writes, "I'm inclined to think that God has no moral obligations whatsoever to fulfill."[326] Moral obligations arise when a competent authority issues imperatives, and since God presumably does not issue imperatives (or commands) to himself, it follows that God is under no moral obligations.

Response to Objection 4: Personhood

If this is the case—that God has no moral obligations—does it mean that God is not a person, as Davies suggests? There are presumably two ways of responding here: (1) hold that

---

[324] Ibid.

[325] See Edward Feser, *Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 125-126; and Roger Pouivet, "Against Theistic Personalism: What Modern Epistemology Does to Classical Theism," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2018): 8.

[326] William Lane Craig, "On the Goodness of God," *Reasonable Faith*, published December 9, 2012, https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/question-answer/on-the-goodness-of-god. Other theists, such as Robert Adams, argues that God does not have moral obligations. See Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 156, 158.

God has no moral obligations, and that this has no bearing on his personhood since he is the One who ultimately establishes personhood; or (2) hold that God issues commands to himself and is therefore under moral obligations, which would satisfy Davies' criteria for being a person.[327] Regarding the second option, there are theists who claim that if God has moral obligations, they are only those which he gives himself. For instance, perhaps by making promises, God is allegedly placing himself under an obligation to keep those promises.[328] Not all theists would agree that the promises of God are congruent with obligations that are binding upon him, but if it is true, it is potentially problematic for Davies' view. If God is under an obligation to keep a promise, or under any obligation whatsoever, then he is a moral agent and therefore a person on Davies' view. Although both options deal with Davies' objection, one who holds to DCT, such as the version presented in this chapter, should probably go with the first option and hold that God has no obligations. Even if God has no moral obligations, it is a *non sequitur* to claim that he is not a moral agent, and therefore not a person. It appears perfectly reasonable to say that God has no obligations, is a moral agent, and is the ultimate exemplar of personhood.

The Nature of Moral Obligations

In what follows, a discussion on the nature of obligations (or duties) takes place, divine commands are addressed, and the concept of reverence is considered—all in an attempt to determine whether moral obligations are personal or non-personal, and then, as a result, whether their source is most likely personal or non-personal.

---

[327] This is not Davies' only quality necessary for personhood, but it is the one that is most relevant to the present discussion.

[328] Brian Leftow, "God's Deontic Perfection," *Res Philosophica*, vol. 90 (2013): 81-92. Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 220-221.

Obligations/Duties

Although some claim that there can be morality without God,[329] removing God from the

equation raises serious challenges for maintaining objective morality, including moral categories

like moral obligations.[330] Furthermore, attempting to claim that moral obligations derive from an

impersonal source is problematic since the idea of *obligations* involves the idea of a person or

persons to whom one is obligated; the word "obligation" itself "always impl[ies] a *personal*

constraint whenever [it] refer[s] to an object within the finite world."[331] One might say he is

under an obligation to his friend or wife, but not to a tree or computer because "[i]t takes two to

establish an obligation. . . . The person that *bears* the obligation cannot also be the person whose

presence *imposes* it; it is impossible to be at once the upper and the nether millstone."[332] As

Adams says, "If I have an obligation . . . I believe it can only be in a personal relationship or in a

social system of relationships. If an action is wrong, likewise, there must be a person or persons,

distinct from the agent, who may appropriately have an adverse reaction to it. For the meaning of

the obligation family of ethical terms is tied to such reactions to the wrong."[333] In short, the idea

of a "'claim' seems inevitably to suggest two persons, one of whom might make a claim on the

---

[329] See Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, *Morality Without God?* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), xi.

[330] Evans, *God and Moral Obligation*, 1.

[331] H. P. Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1965), 49.

[332] James Martineau, *Types of Ethical Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889), 107-108.

[333] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 234. Explaining Adams' view here, John Hare says, "[O]ur notion of obligation or duty makes most sense against the background of a belief that we are under obligation *to* some person or persons, and that God is the most appropriate person for such a role, in regards to moral obligation." John E. Hare, *God and Morality: A Philosophical History* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 262.

other."[334] All of this seemingly makes sense if morality is, after all, "the sphere of personal relations."[335]

One might agree with the previous analysis, which mainly deals with obligations on a human level, while insisting that obligations on a divine level either do not exist or do not require a personal source. Fair enough, but what if there are moments when no human person is in sight and one still feels morally obligated to perform an act or to avoid it altogether? To whom is one obligated if not to God who is the source of such obligations?[336] The only other possibilities are to oneself or to an abstract order of claims. Regarding the first option, it seems obvious that the idea of obligation involves the notion of an "other" to whom one is obligated, whereas the second seems unintelligible due to the oddness[337] of an abstract order of claims providing a bit of instruction regarding what ought or ought not be done in a given situation.[338] If moral obligations are essentially instructions, even commands or requirements on how to live, it appears that reference to a personal God is more appropriate.[339]

---

[334] W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), 20.

[335] Clement C. J. Webb, *God and Personality* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1920), 105.

[336] Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism*, 57.

[337] Mention of oddness may cause one to think of George Mavrodes' piece entitled "Religion and the Queerness of Morality." George Mavrodes, "Religion and the Queerness of Morality" in *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*, eds. Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986).

[338] As discussed in the previous chapter, Lewis claims that "you can hardly imagine a bit of matter giving instructions." Moreover, these "instructions," which suggest "the Being behind the universe is intensely interested in good conduct" and forthrightly detests bad behavior, indicate that anything less than an intelligent personal being as the source for moral obligations will not suffice. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001), 25, 30.

[339] The challenge of Platonism recurs quite a bit in the history of the moral argument. This is a large discussion that cannot realistically take place in a short treatment such as this chapter.

A duty is something that *is owed*—"[b]ut," as Taylor says, "something can be owed only *to* some person or persons. There can be no such thing as duty in isolation."[340] One might say that it is his or her moral duty to protect innocent children from harm, but one would not maintain that it is his moral responsibility to protect a tree in his yard from pesky insects (unless it provides shade, food, or some other benefit to *persons*).

The idea of political and legal obligations, which are the products of human lawmakers, are clear enough; the duty of individuals is to obey the statutes set forth by the society in which they live. What best explains moral obligations, which are higher and more binding upon humanity than political or legal obligations? Are they more adequately explained in terms of a higher-than-human personal Lawgiver, or can one explain these moral claims and duties as self-explanatory aspects of impersonal existence? It seems contradictory to say that humans are morally responsible to obey the latter (i.e., self-explanatory aspects of impersonal existence) since duties are owed to persons.[341] Conversely, it appears more logical to consider obeying a higher-than-human personal Lawgiver (i.e., personal God).

If moral duty is explained in terms of an impersonal, abstract principle, or even an impersonal God, the idea of an abstract principle or impersonal God holding someone *personally* responsible for failing to carry out his or her moral duty becomes difficult to uphold. Moreover, when one fails to carry out his or her duty in a given circumstance, guilt frequently arises, which follows if moral obligations are the result of a personal God but not if they derive from abstract

---

[340] Richard Taylor, *Ethics, Faith, and Reason* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1985), 83. Ross' statement bears repeating here: "[A] 'claim' [duty] seems inevitably to suggest two persons, one of whom might make a claim on the other." Ross, *The Right and the Good*, 20.

[341] As Owen remarks, "Adherence to abstract principles at *any* cost merits the reproach of hardness if not also inhumanity." Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism*, 53.

or impersonal principles. This provides further evidence that the concept of moral duty is best explained in terms of a personal Source.

Obligations/Duties, Inanimate Objects, and Animals

If duties are best understood within the context of persons, what about duties felt toward inanimate objects? For example, perhaps one feels obligated to care for a tree in his or her yard, or a small stream down the road. How is one to account for these sorts of duties apart from reference to a person? Or are these duties also best understood within the context of persons? According to Kant,

> These duties are also indirectly duties towards mankind. Destructiveness is immoral; we ought not to destroy things which can be put to some use. No man ought to mar the beauty of nature; for what he has no use for may still be of use to some one else. He need, of course, pay no heed to the thing itself, but he ought to consider his neighbor. Thus we see that all duties towards animals . . . and towards inanimate objects are aimed indirectly at our duties towards mankind.[342]

Interestingly, Kant explains duties felt toward inanimate objects as indirect duties toward human persons, specifically because these sorts of things may be of use to others—whether it be for enjoyment, shade, provision, or some other personal benefit.[343]

In the quote above, Kant also mentions the personal component present when carrying out duties toward animals. How is it that if one has a duty to an animal, that this is somehow a duty, albeit indirectly, to human persons and is therefore personal in nature? Kant's reason for holding that duties toward animals are indirectly duties to human persons (and personal in

---

[342] Kant, *Lectures in Ethics*, 241.

[343] What about the desire to care for inanimate objects when there is no other person in view? Is it correct to maintain that one has a duty to himself in situations like this, to an abstract order of claims, or does it make more sense to suggest that a personal God is the One ultimately in view here? These three options were discussed above, and the following conclusion was drawn: (1) Regarding the first option, it seems that the concept of obligation involves the concept of an "other" to whom one is obligated; (2) the second option seems unlikely due to the fact that an abstract order of claims does not provide instructions on what ought or ought not be done in a given situation; and (3) that the third option, therefore, is the likely best explanation.

nature) is as follows: "Animal nature has analogies to human nature, and by doing our duties to animals in respect of manifestations which correspond to manifestations of human nature, we indirectly do our duty towards humanity."[344] Kant unpacks this statement by saying that by carrying out duties toward animals, this prepares human persons to carry out their duties toward other persons, where there are binding duties. Additionally, Kant claims that if acts toward animals are analogous to human acts and conceivably spring from the same principles, duties toward animals are personal because it is through them that one cultivates his or her corresponding duties toward human persons. For instance, when a man has a dog and is cruel to it, by depriving it of food and water, and perhaps even by beating it frequently, this man is more likely to become hard also in his dealings with other men.[345] On the other hand, if a man treats his dog well, regularly feeding and watering it and taking it for walks, showing the dog affection and so on, this man is probably going to be kinder in his dealings with human persons. This is why Kant says, "We can judge the heart of a man by his treatment of animals."[346] Shortly after this statement, in a somewhat humorous manner, Kant quips, "Tender feelings towards dumb animals develop human feelings towards mankind."[347] In sum, duties toward animals, as with

---

[344] Kant, *Lectures in Ethics*, 239.

[345] There is an interesting painting by William Hogarth entitled, "The Stages of Cruelty." The painting dates to 1751, during the lifetime of Kant. This painting undoubtedly influenced Kant's view on animal mistreatment as it corresponds to human mistreatment. In fact, Kant speaks of this painting when discussing this very issue. The painting depicts the growth and development of cruelty in three stages: (1) a child is cruel to animals, pinching the tails of dogs and cats; (2) a grown man in his cart runs over a child; and (3) the culmination of cruelty in the form of murder. Ibid., 240.

[346] Ibid.

[347] Ibid. I am writing this the morning after cleaning up an entire backyard of trash, which our family's German shepherd decided to drag out of the garbage bin and shred to pieces—so, needless to say, I understand what Kant means when he says "dumb animals." At the same time, I try to remind myself that my feelings toward my dog at times like this shapes my feelings toward human persons, so I must be careful to respond tenderly rather than cruelly when things like this happen.

duties toward inanimate objects, are indirect duties toward human persons and are also personal in nature.

Another approach to animals involves saying that human persons have an obligation to God to treat his creation properly, which includes animals, and it is even more pressing that human persons treat animals well because they are capable of feeling pain. Intentionally and needlessly inflicting pain on animals is cruel disregard for God's creation—and a sin against God. One should also care about the experience of animals and want them not to suffer needlessly, and not just for instrumental reasons. Either way, whether one is obligated to care for animals because mistreatment of them leads to mistreatment of human persons or because God commands that animals be cared for—or perhaps some combination of both—there is still evidence that caring for animals is personal in nature, and if a personal God exists, caring for animals is likely a duty one has to God.

Divine Commands

Moral obligations viewed as divine commands arguably make more sense of these obligations than any alternative account. Owen notes that "[i]t is impossible to think of a command without also thinking of a commander" and that "[e]ither we take moral claims to be self-explanatory modes of *impersonal* existence or we explain them in terms of a personal God."[348] It seems that the latter is the better explanation because divine commands are more than ethical imperatives to follow or decrees to obey. They reveal that their divine source (i.e., God) is intensely interested in how people live and that he cares deeply about the moral decisions they make. Perhaps this is because "we are not merely obligated to a law or a moral principle, but to a perfectly loving *person*."[349]

---

[348] Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism*, 49-50.

On a Judeo-Christian view, throughout Israel's history, rather than forcefully demanding obedience from his people, God developed covenants (which are *radically personal*) with his people, whereby he gave them laws to follow in an effort to lead them along the right path and ultimately back to himself and his moral standard of holiness. Therefore, as T. W. Manson states,

> The last ground of moral obligation is the command of God; and the supreme ideal is the imitation of a God who is at once king and father, who exhibits in the field of nature and history, and above all in his dealings with Israel, the qualities of holiness and righteousness, mercy and faithfulness, love and covenant-loyalty, which are to be the pattern for the behavior of his subjects and children.[350]

God revealed his law to the people of Israel and charged them to obey it,[351] not just for duty's sake, as Kant later claimed, but rather so they could cultivate and demonstrate personal loyalty to a personal God.[352] Following the revelation of God's law to his people, the picture remained incomplete until the eternal Person of Christ was clothed with human flesh and was sent to earth to reveal the embodiment of the moral standard in human form.

The profound implication in this is that although God issues commands for individuals to obey, individuals are not obligated to the commands themselves or to some sort of impersonal moral code as a whole, but rather to a perfectly loving *Person* who desires to be in relationship with his creatures (i.e., human persons). Having realized that a personal God, whose very nature is love, is the One addressing humans via morality grounds the idea that this Being listens and

---

[349] David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *The Moral Argument: A History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 179.

[350] T. W. Manson, *Ethics and the Gospel* (London: SCM Press, 1960), 18.

[351] Clement Webb makes an interesting point regarding the personal mode in which God revealed his law to Moses: "But it would be absurd to deny that a religion has a personal God which has ever taken as its ideal the great Lawgiver to whom his God 'spake face to face as a man speaketh unto his friend.'" Webb, *God and Personality*, 86. See also Exodus 33:11.

[352] R. Scott Smith, *In Search of Moral Knowledge: Overcoming the Fact-Value Dichotomy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 26.

cares, which then provides motivation[353] for trusting him and living in confidence, knowing that the well-being of every person is never at odds with doing God's will and following his commands.[354]

Reverence

It has been the impression of many, including Kant and others, that anything less than complete reverence for the moral law is unfitting. What is interesting about this attitude is that reverence inspired by the moral law likely cannot be equated with reverence for an abstract principle, even of moral obligation, because "[r]everence is naturally reverence for a person," and in this case, as de Burgh insists, "reverence for the law leads to reverence for its author."[355] Reverence, if understood as one's most proper attitude toward the moral law, can only be felt toward persons, which seems to suggest that the representation of moral laws as divine commands, suggested in this chapter, may very well be something more than an imaginative personification.[356] From a practical point of view, it hardly needs to be pointed out "how much easier it is to feel towards the moral law the reverence that we ought to feel when we believe that that law is embodied in a personal Will."[357]

---

[353] See chapter 6 for a word on motivation to obey the moral law against the realization that the One issuing the commands of the law is a personal Being whose essential nature is love.

[354] Baggett and Walls, *The Moral Argument: A History*, 179. A relevant quote from Glen Tinder is rather enlightening here: "Once personality has come to light it is seen, under the authority of irresistible intuition, as morally prior to everything impersonal. Having become cognizant of the personal, the only realities we can think of as valuable beyond measure and therefore as intrinsically ends in themselves, are those we can love and trust, listen to and address." Glen Tinder, *The Fabric of Hope* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 34-35.

[355] W. G. de Burgh, *From Morality to Religion* (London: MacDonald & Evans, 1938), 147.

[356] Webb, *God and Personality*, 119.

[357] Hastings Rashdall, *Philosophy and Religion* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), 76.

If reverence includes the attitude of devotion, then "[o]ne cannot (morally) devote oneself to an object that is less than personal."[358] One may marvel at the sheer beauty of a snowy landscape or possess a sense of awe when considering the magnificent colors bursting forth behind a picturesque mountainside at sunset, but one cannot morally devote himself to such impersonal objects in nature. If one recognizes a sense of reverence arising in his or her soul at moments like this, then the best explanation is that this reverence is due to the personal Author of nature, God himself. Webb adds, "Reverence refers always to persons only 'as its object,' never to things. Things can arouse in us inclination, and if things are animals (e.g., horses, dogs, etc.) also love, or again fear, as with the sea, a volcano, a beast of prey—but never reverence."[359] The same is true with the moral law. When one considers the overwhelming weight of what "ought" or "ought not" be done in specific circumstances, the reverence for the moral law that sometimes arises is naturally reverence for its personal Author. This sort of reverence for the moral law and dedication to fulfilling moral obligations, which seems to be the appropriate response in light of the overriding nature obligations possess, seemingly requires a personal divine source.

Summary

Chapter 5 considers moral obligations in the quest to determine whether obligations make better sense in terms of a personal or non-personal source. This chapter lists at least *five* pieces of evidence for the existence of a personal God. First, the idea of obligations or duties involves the idea of a person or persons to whom one is obligated. There are times in life when no human person is in view and one is still, ostensibly at any rate, morally obligated to do something—to

---

[358] Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism*, 57.

[359] Clement C. J. Webb, *Divine Personality and Human Life* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1920), 125.

whom is one obligated if not to a personal God who is the source of such obligations? Second, moral duties explained in terms of non-personal, abstract principles, or even in terms of a non-personal God, appears strange because a non-personal entity likely cannot hold one *personally* responsible for one failing to carry out his or her duty in a given situation. Third, duties toward inanimate objects and animals are also personal in nature, albeit indirectly. Fourth, in an effort to account for the authoritativeness of obligations, one possibility involves viewing obligations as divine commands, and divine commands imply a personal divine Commander. Fifth, it has been the impression of many, including Kant and others, that anything less than reverence for the moral law is simply unfitting—and reverence is naturally reverence for a person. If reverence includes the attitude of devotion, then one arguably cannot devote himself or herself to an object that is less than personal. Therefore, a personal God at the foundation of ethics makes excellent sense of the reverence due to the moral law. In sum, *the five pieces of evidence presented in chapter 5 on moral obligations make the existence of a personal God seem likely.*

If moral obligations are personal, as suggested in this chapter, and rooted in God, then God presumably must exemplify this quality by being personal himself, and personal to the highest degree possible. Views such as naturalism and Platonism, which are non-personal in nature, face a difficult challenge when it comes to accounting for the personal nature of moral duties.[360] Supposing that naturalism or Platonism were true, this "would mean that the ontological status of moral duties in themselves would be entirely different from their

---

[360] According to Christoph Ernst Luthardt, "In the sphere of nature there is no morality, and consequently no immorality. For here, not freedom but necessity prevails, here it is not *will* or *ought*, but *must*." This seems to indicate that the very idea of moral obligation only applies to persons (obligation implies freedom to choose; just because one is under obligation to do something does not mean that he or she is forced/coerced to do something). Nature itself cannot account for *will* or *ought*, as Luthardt suggests, but only *must*. Christoph Ernst Luthardt, *Apologetic Lectures on the Moral Truths of Christianity*, trans. Sophia Taylor (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1873), 34.

ontological status when empirically embodied."[361] God's existence, however, provides a strong explanation of obligations, particularly their authoritative and utterly personal nature. In sum, as with moral knowledge and moral values, moral obligations provide further evidence for the existence of a personal God.

---

[361] Baggett and Walls, *The Moral Argument: A History*, 188. Similarly, Owen says, "[God] must perfectly exemplify all the qualities which we know to be binding on us in our human life. Otherwise he cannot be the source of moral obligation." Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism*, 38.

CHAPTER SIX: MORAL TRANSFORMATION

Introduction

Chapter 5 offered an examination of the nature of moral obligations, ultimately

concluding that a personal God accounts for both the authoritativeness of obligations and their

personal nature. This chapter[362] considers one of the most obvious facts about human persons:

they fail miserably when it comes to following the moral law. As C. S. Lewis explains, there are

two foundational facts that ground all clear thinking about human persons and the universe in

which they dwell: (1) Humans have the idea that they ought to behave a certain way; and (2) *they*

do not behave that way.[363] Elsewhere, he admits that although moralities may differ among men

at times, although not as widely as is oftentimes claimed, "*they all agree* in prescribing a

behaviour which their adherents *fail to practice*" (emphasis added).[364]

Not only does this chapter consider moral failure; it also focuses on the hope of moral

transformation. Is it really possible for human persons to become *new* persons or do their moral

failures define them, keeping them from ever experiencing radical transformation (or as Kant

would say, a revolution of the will)?[365] There are several key concepts related to moral failure

---

[362] Compared to previous chapters, this chapter admittedly points more in the direction of Christianity, although several opposing views are referenced throughout. One of the main reasons for the emphasis on Christianity in this chapter is due to the concept of moral transformation being at the heart of the Christian message (i.e., the gospel).

[363] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001), 21.

[364] C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001), 11.

[365] Immanuel Kant calls this "Spener's Problem": How do human persons become not only *better men*, but altogether *new men*? Kant's coining of this "problem" is based on his response to the German pietist, Philipp Jakob Spener, who originated the notion. See Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (New York: Abaris Books, 1979), 97. Lewis says something similar when he insists, "God became man to turn creatures into sons: not simply to produce *better* men of the old kind but to produce a *new* kind of man. It is not like teaching a horse to jump better and better but like turning a horse into a winged creature" (emphasis added). Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 216.

and moral transformation that essentially bridge the gap between failure and transformation; these concepts are guilt, punishment, grace, and forgiveness. Each of these concepts are discussed in this chapter, among others. Yet again, the overarching aim of this chapter, as with chapters 3-5, is to examine the nature of the moral features themselves in an effort to determine whether they point in the direction of a personal or non-personal source.[366]

John Hare and The Moral Gap

John Hare, in his work *The Moral Gap*, presents a version of the moral argument that focuses on moral transformation. Recognizing that there is a *gap* between humankind's failure to live up to the demands of the law, and also assuming that *ought* implies *can*, Hare deals with four possible ways to close what he calls "the moral gap": (1) Puffing up human capacities to close the gap[367]; (2) lowering the moral demand[368]; (3) providing secular substitutes for God's assistance[369]; or (4) God's assistance.[370] After evaluating the first three options, Hare ultimately concludes that these options fail to close the gap as well as God's assistance (the fourth option) can. In the final comment in his book, he declares, "My own belief is that there is a God who loves us enough both to demand a high standard from us and to help us meet it."[371] Therefore,

---

[366] Chapters 3-5 begin by addressing several objections before looking at the nature of moral features. This chapter, however, considers a few objections throughout instead of beginning with potential objections to moral transformation.

[367] See John E. Hare, *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 99-115.

[368] Ibid., 142-169.

[369] Ibid., 170-190.

[370] Ibid., 191-275.

[371] Ibid., 275.

according to Hare's view, one *ought* to keep the moral law, and one *can* keep the moral law, but *only* with God's assistance.

Hare's version of the moral argument serves as a helpful starting point when thinking about moral failure, and especially moral transformation. It also serves as a backdrop to the flow of this particular chapter, which emphasizes the personal nature of concepts such as moral failure, guilt, grace, forgiveness, and moral transformation.

Moral Failure

Humans everywhere—regardless of their age, gender, culture, socio-economic status, level of education, and training—fail morally. There is no human person who perfectly lives out the moral law; each person falls miserably short in his or her attempt to satisfy morality's pressing demands.[372] Maybe this is because all humans are, as Clay Jones puts it, born "Auschwitz-enabled." [373] None are good; every human person is deeply broken. Even one who denies there is such a thing as morality (i.e., a moral standard or law) is likely to admit his or her own shortcomings in life. There are even those, mired by their perpetual failings and plagued with discouragement, who cease trying to live a good life and choose instead an "easier" route by accepting their own depravity and spiraling downward into the muck even further. It seems there is more to life than simply trying and failing and trying again and failing more. Perhaps Lewis was right when he claimed, "We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and

---

[372] On the Christian view, Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, became a human being and lived a perfect life. He is the only human to ever fully satisfy the demands of the moral law (of course, Jesus is not only human, he is divine—100% man, 100% God). See Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986).

[373] See Clay Jones, *Why Does God Allow Evil? Compelling Answers for Life's Toughest Questions* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2017).

ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."[374] Is there hope of something more, possibly even anticipation of something like radical moral transformation—"a holiday at sea," as Lewis puts it—or are humans forever destined to make mud pies in the slums? If the former, then more needs to be said; if the latter, then humans ought to ignore the issue altogether and go on with making more mud pies. Since the prospect of making mud pies for several decades does not sound overly appealing, more is said about the possibility of undergoing radical change in what follows, but not without first dealing with the reality of moral failure a bit more.[375]

Regarding the nature of moral failure, it is interesting to note that when one fails or is irresponsible in some manner, he or she usually fails or is irresponsible to another person. On this score, H. P. Owen suggests,

> The concept of responsibility has clearer theistic implications. When we call someone "irresponsible" we can often supply a reference to another human person....Yet we also speak of responsibility when no human persons are in view. Thus a person who wasted his talents could be called "irresponsible." Admittedly we may mean that he is irresponsible towards his wife who depends on his income or to his parents who are eager for his success. Yet even if he has no wife or parents, and even if he discharges the duties of his station to the satisfaction of society, we should still regard him as irresponsible if he squandered his gifts. To whom then is he responsible if not to God who bestows all gifts of trust? The only other possibilities are that I am responsible either to myself or to an abstract order of claims. With regard to the first it seems to me plain that the idea of responsibility involves the idea of an "other" to whom responsibility is due. Can then, this "other" be a set of impersonal claims? Hardly. Each person must speak for himself.

---

[374] C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001), 26.

[375] A relevant Christian insight from Christoph Ernst Luthardt is fitting here: "The eternal purpose of God, that we should find in himself and in communion with Him the object of our life, is implanted in each of us, and is the law of our being. But our actual state contradicts, not only contradicts, but resists the law. The sad paradox of our existence is that while there is within us an attraction towards God, we yet resist it; while we long for freedom, we yet love the chains of sin; while the higher ideal of the good and the true is present to our soul, we yet struggle against it; while we feel within us aspirations towards loftier regions, we yet love the dust and mire." Christoph Ernst Luthardt, *Apologetic Lectures on the Moral Truths of Christianity*, trans. Sophia Taylor (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1873), 52.

But I, for one, cannot make any sense of the view that such claims, however august and magisterial they may be, can be the objects of responsibility.[376]

Owen points out the personal nature of responsibility here, while also demonstrating the theistic implications in play.

What about moments when one is all alone—is moral failure an individual thing then? Even in moments when no one else is around, when one is all alone, individual failings have a way of spilling over into the lives of others. For example, consider a man who looks at pornography, thinking it to be a private, individual act that affects no one else but himself. What the man fails to realize is that this moral failure has profound implications on the man's marriage (or his future marriage, if presently unmarried), his children, and how he interacts with others, particularly in how he views and treats them. Again, when one sins (as Christians say), he sins against another person or group of persons. On the Christian view, even if there is no other possible human person in view, when one sins, he or she still sins against a Person.[377] Perhaps this is one reason why guilt is so strong at times, even in the absence of human persons. Many describe what they take to be their intense realization that they are not merely obligated to a moral law or principle, but to a perfectly loving Person.[378] If such a picture is accurate, moral

---

[376] H. P. Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1965), 57.

[377] This is a simplification of the Christian doctrine of God (which involves three Persons). It is also interesting that David once prayed "against you, you only, have I sinned" (Ps. 51:4). This does not mean that one does not sin against fellow human beings, but that one's sin against God is primary. In a similar way, one might interpret OT passages about God bringing about the good and the bad; it is not that God is the author of sin, but the writers were inspired to emphasize God's ultimate sovereignty; if something evil happens, it is only because he allows it; it might not be his perfect will, but it is at least within his permissive will.

[378] Baggett and Baggett summarize a view of Clement Dore that is rather pertinent here. Dore insisted that a person's wrongdoing inexorably harms himself. Dore argued that this harm is more than simply being a bad person, because many people are rather content with being bad people. In fact, there are many hedonists, for instance, who relish the prospect, while still seeming to avoid harm in this life. However, if morality is binding and overriding, it follows that there is an afterlife where such people will be punished for their wrongdoings in this life. Dore maintained that a being with "God-like power" and "God-like knowledge," One who is thereby a Person, provides the best explanation of this. David Baggett and Marybeth Baggett, *The Morals of the Story: Good News About a*

failure is not merely a blunder when it comes to carrying out one's duty, it is essentially failing

to love the Person who deserves the deepest loyalty and devotion. This is arguably a piece of

general revelation amplified in special Christian revelation.[379]

Regarding the cause of moral failure, it is also true that what is a criminal act, if brought

about by a person, is not blamed when due to a natural force or the activity of an animal. For

instance, it is nonsensical to assert that a tree is guilty of murder because it falls on someone and

claims that person's life. Trees do not fail morally; trees simply fall. Similarly, one would not

charge a bear with murder because it mauls a person to death. The bear is simply acting like a

bear, and is therefore not guilty of any sort of moral lapse. It still might be killed, but not out of

any sense of retributive justice, on pain of quite a bit of confusion. Thus, the implication here is

that the cause of evil in the world (moral failure) should be regarded as personal in nature. Only

persons are blameworthy when it comes to moral failure, which makes sense of why only human

persons experience guilt.[380]

Guilt

Guilt[381] is a human experience involving the fact or state of having violated a sense of

right and wrong. It serves as something like a trigger that alerts one to his or her personal failure

Good God (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 80. Also see Clement Dore, "A Moral Argument" in *Theism* (Boston, MA: D. Reidel, 1984).

[379] David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *The Moral Argument: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 179.

[380] Clement C. J. Webb, *God and Personality* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1919), 14.

[381] An interesting phenomenon to which some point is that some cultures are more inclined to speak of shame than guilt. Some try to raise this as a potential objection. However, shame itself tends to be a deeply personal (and usually communally rooted) sort of visceral reaction. For instance, one typically feels shame when a moral shortcoming has been exposed to an "other" or, in some cases, several others. Another potential objection is that guilt is sometimes cast in repressive and negative terms, especially by psychologists (this is not an attempt to "throw shade" at psychologists as a whole, but rather to point out the conclusions that some have arrived upon when guilt is

to do what ought or ought not have been done in a particular situation.[382] For example, when one

fails to keep an important promise to a family member or friend, he likely experiences guilt on

some level. Someone who accidentally runs a red light while texting and driving, leading his car

to strike a pedestrian crossing the road experiences painful feelings of remorse and a sense of

responsibility over his carelessness. Human beings all over the earth have the idea that they

ought to behave in a certain way and fail to do so,[383] which gives rise to guilt.[384] In fact, one of

the most natural things in the world is to recognize imperfection in humans and their inability to

adhere to moral ideals.[385] Even the atheist experiences guilt as she reflects upon her violation of

---

psychoanalyzed). This sort of approach to guilt casts it as a bad thing rather than a good thing, and as having no referent beyond the subjective feelings involved. One way of responding to this objection involves highlighting the differences between objective and subjective guilt. (The distinction between guilt feelings and an objective state of guilt is further addressed below.)

[382] What if one does not feel guilty when he really is? Or, what if one feels guilty when he is actually innocent? According to Baggett and Walls, "Guilt it is thought, properly attaches to morality in a way it doesn't to breaking the laws of logic. We don't feel guilty, and shouldn't, for making a logical mistake. Maybe we feel silly or even embarrassed, but not guilty. The feeling of guilt, though it can be absent on occasions when we're still actually guilty and present on occasions when we're not (which is enough to show these things aren't identical), more typically points to a real state of guilt." David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 176.

[383] One may bring up the psychopath or sociopath objection here. Again, as noted in chapter 2, one should consider the story of David Wood, a diagnosed psychopath who once tried to murder his own father with a hammer. Wood did not experience guilt feelings in this moment, but he later came to *recognize through reasoning* that his act was a grievous wrong. This example illustrates several things. First, there is a distinction between guilt and guilt feelings. Guilt feelings oftentimes track with reality when one is objectively guilty. Admittedly, there are occasions where guilt feelings do not occur (e.g., psychopathy) and where guilt feelings do not line up with reality (e.g., sometimes one feels guilty when he is not, and other times he feels innocent when he is, in fact, guilty). More times than not, however, guilt feelings do point toward one's guilty state. Second, there is a difference between subjective guilt and objective guilt. The former deals with one's feelings whereas the latter pertains to one's real status. Again, the two typically work together, with subjective guilt feelings alerting one of his or her objective guilt. Third, guilt is sometimes *grasped more cognitively than emotionally*, as is the case with Wood. Even if one's emotions are unreliable or non-existent, one can come to realize through reasoning that he or she is really guilty in an objective sense. See David Baggett, "On *Psychopathy* and Moral Apologetics," *Moral Apologetics*, published December 11, 2014, accessed December 19, 2020, https://www.moralapologetics.com/wordpress/on-psychopathy-and-moral-apologetics?rq=psychopath.

[384] Again, Lewis says "[t]hese two facts are the foundation of all clear thinking about ourselves and the universe we live in." Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 8.

[385] David Baggett, "Pro: The Moral Argument is Convincing," in *C. S. Lewis's Christian Apologetics: Pro and Con*, ed. Gregory Bassham (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2015), 127.

the moral law; even she too can feel the law's inexorable demands.[386] Therefore, as Lewis says,

all human persons stand condemned, and all are conscious of guilt, not only of the existence of a

moral law, but of a law at once recognized and disobeyed.[387] If the feelings of guilt are taken to

be more than *mere* feelings, that is, something like a real objective condition of guilt,[388] one is

left wondering if there is a solution.[389]

A very helpful description of guilt is provided by A. E. Taylor in his *The Faith of a*

Moralist, where he identifies five phenomenological features of the guilt experience. These

features of guilt were previously mentioned in chapter 2, but they are again listed here, with

particular emphasis on the fifth feature. Taylor's five features of guilt are as follows:

(1) Guilt involves dissatisfaction with our self and self-condemnation, and it differs in kind from any discontent with our surroundings;

(2) Guilt has a peculiar indelibility—it cannot be "worked off and paid for" by subsequent "making good" or by the infliction of a penalty;

(3) The sense of guilt is regularly accompanied by a demand for our own punishment;

(4) Guilt is associated with "pollution"[390]—there is a sense of "dirtiness" that results from one's wrongdoing; and

---

[386] Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism*, 118.

[387] Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 11.

[388] This is an important point since plenty of people may recognize feelings of guilt but deny there is anything like an objective condition of guilt. If there is no such thing as objective guilt, it seems that one could simply recognize his or her guilt feelings and then move beyond them. However, this is not the case—the guilt remains more times than not. Perhaps this indicates that guilt involves more than just feelings (i.e., an actual state of being), although these feelings are oftentimes indicators of a person's objectively guilty condition. Interestingly, on the Christian view, objective guilt (a person being guilty without even recognizing it) is addressed in passages such as Leviticus 4-5 (specifically 4:13, 27; 5:17). In these passages, it is said that one is guilty and deserves punishment, even if he does not recognize or admit his guilt.

[389] One can try all sorts of things in order to alleviate guilt, but left unaddressed, guilt can and will "eat one up." Charles Darwin thought mankind's capacity for experiencing the moral sense and a painful conscience to be by far the most important distinction between mankind and the animals. Sigmund Freud took the problem of guilt to be the single most important development in the history of civilization. It seems that these two men, among others, embraced reductionist analyses of guilt and took guilt to be the essential problem, rather than the deeper malady of which guilt is but the symptom. Rightly construed, guilt is semiotic, pointing beyond itself and warranting an adequate solution.

(5) What is felt to be outraged by sin or dishonor is not an impersonal law—the outrage is felt as personal treason against a person, yet not against our own personality as it actually is, but against a real personal embodiment of our ideal of good, treason against a "living God."[391]

Each of Taylor's five features are valuable insights regarding the nature of guilt, but the fifth is the most relevant to the present discussion. Regarding the fifth feature of guilt, Taylor says that when one feels as he ought to feel about the evil in himself, he cannot help but recognize that his position is not that of someone who has broken "a wise and salutary regulation, as of one who has insulted or proved false to a person of supreme excellence, entitled to whole-hearted devotion."[392]

What about those who deny God's existence? Taylor anticipates this objection and responds by noting that even in the lives of those who do not think of wrongdoing as a personal offense against the living divine majesty, it is well-known that "an adequate sense of the dishonour attaching to treason to a principle or a cause can only be awakened when one succeeds in 'personifying' the cause or the principle."[393] Stated differently, when one feels as he ought about his wrongdoing, it is when he realizes that he has wronged living persons, not simply failed to carry out a particular principle or cause. Taylor admits that this is an imperfect analogical example, but it is an intriguing point nonetheless. What is different about the

---

[390] The imagery of "pollution" helps evoke some biblical imagery pertaining to shame, which arguably helps one better understand shame (e.g., after partaking of the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve felt "ashamed").

[391] A. E. Taylor, *The Faith of a Moralist* (London, England: MacMillan and Co., 1951), xiii-xiv, 163-210. Interestingly, Taylor introduces his five features of guilt by saying that each of the features distinguish humankind's experience of guilt and wrongdoing from everything else in the natural world. In other words, there are no other creatures or things in the natural world that experience the five features of guilt that Taylor provides, which are unique to the human experience. Guilt, on Taylor's view, seems to point beyond itself and to something unlike anything else in the natural world.

[392] Ibid., 207.

[393] Ibid.

adequately conceived moral life, at least according to Taylor, is that it goes beyond anything that is demanded of one's loyalty to fellow human persons. It requires unremitting endurances and sacrifices, that may, at any moment, require the sacrifice of the most intimate of attachments to other human persons to a higher loyalty. By way of example, Taylor explains that a good man's duty involves not allowing "love of friend, or mistress, or wife, or mother, be the paramount and final influence in all his choices."[394] In moments like this, one sacrifices his loyalty to these human persons to a higher loyalty. Taylor then asks whether this supreme loyalty can be felt toward any object except for one whom it is possible to stand in personal relation to and with, that is, to love. Can one love the moral law itself, or what about Kant's Categorical Imperative? Is it possible for one to love an abstract Platonic Form? According to Taylor, this "motive must be found in another and a supreme love, and that such a love, like all loves, must have its real personal object," which is, in this case, the living God. Whether this *must* be the case one can set to the side; for present purposes plausibility is enough.

Again, guilt is a nearly universal experience that involves painful feelings of remorse following a moral failure of some sort. What about the nature of guilt: is it personal or non-personal? Generally speaking, non-personal rules and principles, such as mathematical formulas, do not elicit feelings of guilt within individuals; only when one human person has wronged or harmed another person (or group of persons) in some way does guilt arise. As John Henry Newman avows, "Inanimate things [such as rules and principles] cannot stir our affections; these are correlative with persons."[395] Similarly, Owen posits, "Why should the failure to enact

---

[394] Ibid., 209.

[395] John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (London: Burns, Oates, & Co., 1874), 109.

[values] engender guilt? I can betray a person and I know that I deserve the guilt I feel. But I cannot see how I could betray values if they are *im*personal."[396] Likewise, R. Scott Smith notes,

> [W]hen we experience moral failing, we often feel guilt or shame. However, it does not make sense to feel that way in light of some nonspatial, timeless abstract entity with which we cannot even interact. Instead, we have those feelings in the presence of a person. This view does not make sense if morals are just abstract principles that do not have some connection to us.[397]

Presumably, as Newman, Owen, Smith, and others, such as Paul Copan explain, it would be odd to feel guilt before an abstract, impersonal moral code.[398] Therefore, there is reason to think that the moral code is personal.

Naturally, there are many occasions where guilt can be explained solely in relation to human persons. There are other occasions where there is no human person in view and one still feels guilty. For instance, there are times when individuals feel guilty for failing to use their talents and abilities properly, and other times when persons experience guilt upon feeling as if they have wasted their life (this usually occurs later in life or when one is on his or her deathbed). Additionally, there are times when the person who has been wronged is no longer around to confer forgiveness, and still other occasions when the wrong seems to be so

---

[396] Interestingly, immediately after this quote, Owen boldly claims, "Personal theism gives the only explanation by affirming that value-claims inhere in the character and will of God. In rejecting them we do not merely reject an abstract good; we do not merely reject our own 'good' (in the sense of our 'well-being'); we reject the love which God is in his tri-une being." Admittedly, this may be moving a bit too fast here, but it is interesting to consider how Owen invokes the Trinity in order to explain the personal nature of value-claims and the guilt one experiences when failing to keep them. Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism*, 80.

[397] R. Scott Smith, *In Search of Moral Knowledge: Overcoming the Fact-Value Dichotomy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 317. More directly, H. H. Farmer claims, "[Sin] is something through which a man is set against *God*, the word God standing not for an impersonal Moral Order or Creative Life Force, nor for a man's own Better Self, nor for the Totality of Social Ideals, but for the Eternal as personal will which enters into relation with the will of man in a polarity or tension of personal relationship." H. H Farmer, *The World and God: A Study of Prayer, Providence and Miracle in Christian Experience* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1933), 173.

[398] Paul Copan, *True for You, But Not For Me* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1998), 62.

grievous[399] that no human person seemingly has the authority to offer forgiveness.[400] In situations like these, before whom is one guilty? It becomes increasingly understandable that many would suggest nothing less than a personal God who bestows such talents and abilities to human persons. As J. P. Moreland says, "[I]f the depth and presence of guilt feelings is to be rational, there must be a Person toward whom one feels moral shame."[401] Moreover, who is in a position of authority (besides God) to offer forgiveness in moments like these? For these reasons, if the cause of conscience and the One before whom humans are ultimately guilty cannot be completely accounted for in the visible world, then perhaps when individuals fall short they have not merely broken a rule, but rather, as Taylor claims, "insulted or proved false to a person of supreme excellence, entitled to whole-hearted devotion."[402]

Punishment

As indicated above, moral failure leads to feelings of guilt, with each (failure and guilt) arguably pointing in the direction of a personal God who has been wronged and toward whom feelings of guilt and shame are accurately felt. Moreland suggests another interesting feature of morality, stemming from moral failure and guilt, which is that of *retributive* punishment.[403]

---

[399] Similar to the way Taylor describes the indelibility and dirtiness of guilt, Lewis explains one's response to grievous actions in this way: "Much, we may feel, can be excused to human infirmities: but not *this*—this incredibly mean and ugly action which none of our friends would have done, which even such a thorough-going little rotter as X would have been ashamed of, which we would not for the world allow to be published. At such a moment we really do know that our character, as revealed in this action, is, and ought to be, hateful to all good men, and, if there are powers above man, to them." C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 51.

[400] Baggett and Baggett, *The Morals of the Story*, 180.

[401] J. P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987), 88.

[402] Taylor, *The Faith of a Moralist*, 207.

[403] The aim here is not to offer a defense of the retributive theory of punishment. For a more in-depth discussion of this theory, including both some objections it faces and advantages it possesses, see A. C. Ewing, *The*

Retributive punishment, at least in part, is "punishment of a crime which is not merely for the purpose of rehabilitation, protection of society, or deterrence."[404] As Taylor and others point out,[405] one's sense of guilt is oftentimes accompanied by a demand for one's own punishment. Furthermore, there are occasions when one feels guilty, as described above, when there is no human person in view. There are also times when no human victim is present and one senses the need for his or her own punishment. How is one to make sense of this seeming demand for punishment, especially when no human person is in view? Can one set the moral record straight and thus balance the good and evil in the universe by paying the moral universe back for wrongdoing, as some Eastern religions suggest? Or does such talk have in mind some sort of being that has been a victim of crime, and therefore deserves retribution?[406] On this score, Moreland responds, "Such talk makes sense if God exists, for he is always a victim of crime, and thus his justice deserves to be paid back in the presence of evil. But without God, there is often no victim to pay back, and in such causes it is hard to make sense of retribution."[407] Punishment is, therefore, likely best understood as a category of personal relations.[408]

Morality of Punishment: With Some Suggestions for a General Theory of Ethics (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1929), 13-45. For discussions on other theories of punishment, see the remainder of Ewing's *Morality of Punishment*.

[404] Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City*, 88.

[405] See Taylor's third feature of guilt as stated previously in this chapter.

[406] It is difficult to understand how a person can "pay back" a non-person for something. It presumably makes more sense to say that a person is paying back another person (or persons).

[407] Ibid. For related thoughts on punishment, see again Baggett and Baggett's summary of Clement Dore's moral argument, which emphasizes that if morality is overriding, it is possible to postulate an afterlife where those who seemingly got away with injustice in this life will be punished in the next. Dore explained that a being with "God-like power" and "God-like knowledge," one who is ultimately a Person, adequately accounts for this. Baggett and Baggett, *The Morals of the Story*, 80. Also see Clement Dore, "A Moral Argument" in *Theism* (Boston, MA: D. Reidel, 1984).

[408] Farmer, *The World and God*, 229.

If there is a God and his character is essentially good, he must not merely let human persons off the hook when they perform evil acts. A God who "let us off," to use Taylor's terminology, would be One who did not care for human persons in the least. There could be no inspiration drawn towards good from whatever relations one may have with a God who cares so little for human persons that he has no concern for what they do. Actually, a God such as this would be One who is presumably on a lower moral level than human persons themselves because his careless condonation would be proof of his moral indifference to justice—and justice is something that a good being ought to *deeply* care about.[409] Instead of letting humans off, a good God, One who really cares about justice, punishes persons for wrongdoing.[410] If this is the case, human persons find themselves on the wrong side of God,[411] having transgressed his law and now in an ominous situation, certainly deserving of punishment and seemingly awaiting such from God himself.[412] Is there hope of something more, or is this humanity's final destiny?

On the Christian view, God is just, which is basically another way of saying that he is good, and being good, he cares deeply for his creatures and wants them to participate in the absolute good which he himself possesses.[413] As a result, he does not leave human persons in

---

[409] Taylor, *The Faith of a Moralist*, 190-191.

[410] Some complain about the indecency of the idea of God's wrath, maintaining that a loving God would not unleash his wrath upon human persons. After witnessing unspeakably horrific injustices in his homeland of Croatia, Miroslav Volf experienced this telling realization: "Though I used to complain about the indecency of the idea of God's wrath, I came to think that I would have to rebel against a God who wasn't wrathful at the sight of the world's evil. God isn't wrathful in spite of being love. God is wrathful because God is love." Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 138-139.

[411] As Lewis says, "God is the only comfort, He is also the supreme terror: the thing we most need and the thing we most want to hide from. *He is our only possible ally, and we have made ourselves His enemies*" (emphasis added). Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 31.

[412] Even Socrates believed in a coming reckoning, claiming that justice demands punishment for wrongdoing. See Baggett and Baggett, *The Morals of the Story*, 23-25.

[413] Taylor, *The Faith of a Moralist*, 190.

their grave position. Rather, he offers them a lifeline, a rescue plan, hope for something more. God the Father decides to send his Son, Jesus, the second Person of the Trinity, to earth as a human (the God-man) in order to live a perfect life (free of every moral stain), and to suffer the punishment of God the Father in place of human persons (who rightly deserve punishment) by dying for them. Following his substitutionary death on the cross, he is placed in a tomb, where three days later he rises from the dead, making possible humankind's forgiveness and redemption, among a host of other things. Taylor explains in this manner:

> Because He is just, His forgiveness is no mere indifference, but a genuine moral forgiveness which means so much to Himself that it can remake the very self of the recipient, as, in a lesser degree, a man's self may be cleansed and remade by receiving a fellow-man's forgiveness for a grievous wrong, though never by being "let off" as a creature from whom nothing can be expected except that he should behave after his worthless kind. . . . Thus the Christian paradox that God is at once the supremely just and also the great forgiver of iniquities, so far from creating an ethical difficulty, is exactly what we should expect to find in a religion which has one of its roots in the ethical conviction of the absoluteness of moral "values."[414]

Grace and Forgiveness

A deep need that human beings possess is the need to be forgiven of their wrongdoings instead of being defined by them forever. There are countless people who live their lives in a state of perpetual guilt because they think forgiveness is impossible and that they are unable to do anything about it.[415] This is more than merely academic concern, but one of deep existential import. Using Hare's wording here, at this point, one could "puff up his capacity" to reach the moral law, "reduce the demands of the law,"[416] or offer some sort of secular substitute for God in

---

[414] Ibid., 191.

[415] Baggett and Baggett, *The Morals of the Story*, 178.

[416] In a vivid way of capturing mankind's inability to live up to the demands of the moral law on his own, Taylor states, "A man cannot receive the power to rise above his present moral level from his own inherent strength,

order to close the moral gap between moral failure and moral transformation. As Hare notes, there is a fourth option, and in his estimation, this is the best option: God's help, that is, his grace and forgiveness.[417] Ultimately, if failure to follow the moral law is transgression not of an impersonal set of abstract principles, but transgression against the One behind the law, it appears that the only hope for mankind is if the Person who has been offended extends forgiveness.[418] Christian theism maintains that God's forgiveness is possible because God does not leave the guilty unpunished or simply overlook their moral failures; rather, he chooses to send his *innocent* Son in order to be punished in place of the *guilty*. As Eleonore Stump puts it, to forgive means "to fail to exact all that is in justice due," so that if Christ paid the sinner's debt (one function of the atonement), this shows that God "has arranged that the debt be paid in full, not that he has agreed to overlook any part of the debt."[419] In a very profound sense, if this theology is true, forgiveness is the language of heaven.

Interestingly, grace[420] and forgiveness, are deeply personal in nature.[421] Matter, nature, a divine mind or Power, an impersonal force, or some other conception of the divine, likely cannot

---

because the process of rising above himself, and, in the moral as in the physical world, *you cannot lift yourself by the hair of your own head*" (emphasis added). Taylor, *The Faith of a Moralist*, 229.

[417] For an extremely helpful look at the nature of forgiveness that emphasizes the role of forgiveness in reconciling broken relationships, see Hare, "Forgiveness," in *The Moral Gap*, 222-243.

[418] According to A. C. Ewing, "[I]n personal offences forgiveness may often be a far more effective means of morally benefiting the offender than any punishment could be." Ewing, *The Morality of Punishment*, 114.

[419] Eleonore Stump, "Atonement According to Aquinas," in T. V. Morris, ed., *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1988), 62.

[420] For a fascinating look at the nature of grace, particularly as it relates to the notion of a personal God, see John Oman, *Grace and Personality*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1919). In the history of the moral argument, there is a moral argument from grace set forth by Immanuel Kant that serves as the inspiration for Hare's performative argument. For a helpful overview of Kant's argument from grace, see Baggett and Walls, *The Moral Argument: A History*, 22-27.

[421] Is it possible to explain forgiveness in light of an impersonal God? According to Farmer, "The experience of the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God, which is so central in the New Testament, obviously lies within the same sphere of personal relations with God. Doubtless it is possible, starting from an

154

forgive—seemingly, only a personal God can forgive. When one person has wronged another, there is a sort of estrangement and enmity that occurs between the one who has been wronged and the wrongdoer himself. On a human level, forgiveness makes possible the overcoming of estrangement and enmity between two or more persons. It is an operation between persons. The same appears to be true with God and man. If God is the One who has been wronged and human persons are the wrongdoers, then forgiveness on God's part likely makes possible the overcoming of estrangement and enmity between God and man, and thus, in turn, a personal relationship between these two parties. Actually, the New Testament teaches that God's forgiveness of man serves as the basis for and ought to be the inspiration of a human person's forgiveness of his fellow man.[422]

Moral Transformation

Centrality of Moral Transformation to Christianity

Although there are presumably other personal deities who offer forgiveness, there is an unparalleled beauty of the Christian conception of God: the incarnate Son of God comes to earth to not only offer *forgiveness*, but also provide the grace and power necessary to enable one to repent and undergo complete *moral transformation*. Whereas the majority of the religions in the world focus on moral improvement through humankind's own moral efforts, the concept of moral transformation is at the heart of the Christian message, and it is carried out not by man,

---

impersonal conception of God, to excogitate possible meanings for such words as sin, forgiveness, reconciliation, but these would not be the New Testament meanings, nor would they be the meanings with which anybody, out of the midst of a living experience of divine forgiveness, would spontaneously invest the terms. Sin, for the New Testament writers, is something which involves an estrangement from, even an enmity to, God of a personal kind." Of course, Farmer is here explaining the meaning of concepts like forgiveness and sin against a Christian backdrop, but he does make an interesting point about the terms probably losing their meaning if understood in light of an impersonal conception of God. Farmer, *The World and God*, 9.

[422] Farmer, *The World and God*, 10.

who is unable to become a *new* creature on his own,[423] but by God himself. According to

Luthardt,

> Christianity acknowledges the world; it confirms all its natural laws, possessions, and arrangements, and acquiesces in man's position therein. But it gives him a new heart; and this new heart, this changed disposition, we are to take into the various relations of our life in the world. . . . It was in the soul of man that Christ deposited the sacred sparks of love to God and man, and thus kindled the fire of love in the heart. From the heart, its warmth and light have penetrated the whole man, and renovated his life in the world. *This is Christian morality* (emphasis added).[424]

As Luthardt recognizes, at the core of Christian morality is the striking reality that man can

undergo radical moral transformation by receiving a new heart where the fire of love is kindled

for God and others, thus allowing the whole man to experience a transformed life in the world.

Before further discussing the possibility of moral transformation, and even examining how it

possibly points to life after death, it is important to consider two potential objections.

Two Objections to Moral Transformation

First, consider the "I want to be myself" objection. Admittedly, there are those in this life

who simply want to be themselves—to go on with living their own lives, refusing to allow

anyone or anything to change them or to prevent them from being themselves in the fullest sense

of the term. However, if Christianity is true and these individuals, indeed, if *all* individuals, are

made by God, is it not God who not only made each person, but the One who also determines

what each person was intended to be? Again, if Christianity is true, then Sartre was wrong, and

essence precedes existence after all. Therefore, on the Christian view, one of the paradoxes about

the concept of becoming a *new* person is that when an individual allows God to take over,

---

[423] On this matter, Luthardt says, "We are in bondage; what shall make us free, truly free? Conscience cannot do it, the law cannot do it; only the Gospel and the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Spirit of inward renovation, can effect this." Luthardt, *Apologetic Lectures on the Moral Truths of Christianity*, 53.

[424] Ibid., 26-27.

submitting his will to God's will, it is then that this person becomes more truly himself, because God made him. Furthermore, when one turns to Christ, giving up his own personality to Christ's personality, it is in that moment that one begins to have a real personality of his own.[425] Again, assuming Christianity is true, another problem that a man faces when trying to "be himself" on his own, without reference to God as his Maker, is that he oftentimes aims too low, failing to realize that God has much larger intentions for the man than the man has for himself. Borrowing an example from George MacDonald, Lewis explains in vivid terms:

> Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of— throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.[426]

God is making each human person who submits to him into something *new*, something more beautiful than one could hope for or imagine on his own. This process is not without difficulty and pain, however, as God has to chisel away the rough edges, and in some cases, completely tear down certain areas in order to make an individual into what he (God) intends them to be. None of the difficulty and pain in life is without purpose though, as God does not waste anything that one goes through; rather, he uses every little trial and temptation in order to refine the person, to make him into something tremendous, far beyond and much greater than one could ever conjure up himself.[427]

---

[425] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 225-227.

[426] This imagery of a "house" reminds one of similar imagery used in Hebrews 3:1-6. Ibid., 205.

[427] According to Christian theology, in order to make transformation possible in the lives of human persons, God sent his Son, the second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, to earth in order to experience pain and suffering himself, ultimately dying an excruciating death on a cross. In striking terms, Lewis points out the price that God had

Second, consider the "Christians are hypocrites" objection. If Christians have undergone moral transformation and are therefore *new in Christ*, why do so many "Christians" look like the rest of the world? Posed differently, why do professing Christians look more like *old* selves than *new* selves? There are several important points worth making here, but one must first admit that it is true that Christians do oftentimes behave badly, failing to live up to the notion that they have been reborn or made new in some sense. Careless living on behalf of Christians gives the outer world grounds for doubting the veridical status of the Christian faith. This is probably a fair judgment raised against Christians, especially since Jesus himself claimed in his Sermon on the Mount that Christians will be known "by their fruits" (Mt. 7:16, 20).

Now, there are at least two ways of responding to this objection after admitting that Christians do, in fact, behave hypocritically at times. First, and perhaps most importantly, one must consider not the behaviors of Christians themselves as the primary reason for rejecting Christianity, but the founder of the Christian faith himself: Jesus Christ. It is a *non sequitur* to claim that Christianity is false because Christians behave badly at times. Indeed, their bad behavior is a function of their departing from Christian dictates. However, one cannot put Christianity off simply because his or her "Christian" neighbors, co-workers, or other acquaintances are behaving badly; this is nothing more than evading the issue, predicated on a sad but common fallacy. Again, when considering whether to accept or reject the Christian faith, one should primarily consider the central figure of Christianity, the founder of the entire movement, Jesus Christ. Are there any complaints about Jesus? Is there anything hypocritical in

---

to pay in order for humanity's redemption: "It costs God nothing, so far as we know, to create nice things: but to convert rebellious wills cost His crucifixion." The Incarnation, unique to Christianity, among other things reveals that God not only allows human beings to experience pain and suffering in order to make them into something new, but that he himself experienced pain and suffering, and to the highest degree, in order to make human beings into new creatures. Ibid., 212.

his life? Where did he fall short morally? Did he do what he promised to do? These sorts of questions should be dealt with before one dismisses Christianity as a false belief system. Second, to illustrate why it is a *non sequitur* to dismiss Christianity—and thus the possibility of real moral transformation—on the basis of Christians living hypocritically, think about the following example:

> Imagine there is a man who hops into his truck each morning and drives around each day, noticing as he goes about his daily business that there are frequently bad drivers who cut him off in traffic and fail to keep other basic traffic laws. We will call this man Scott. Finding this to be a common occurrence each day, Scott begins noticing that virtually every "bad driver" that he encounters is driving a Toyota vehicle of some sort: Sequoia, 4Runner, Highlander, Sienna, RAV4, Tundra, Tacoma, Camry, Corolla, and perhaps worst of all, the Prius. Consequently, in his anger, Scott vows to never purchase a Toyota vehicle of any kind in the future. He completely rejects the Toyota brand because the drivers of Toyota vehicles drive badly.

One does not have to think hard to see the problem with Scott's total rejection of the Toyota brand. It simply does not follow that because the drivers of Toyota vehicles drive badly that the entire Toyota brand should be rejected. If Scott is going to reject the Toyota brand, he should do so on some other more central basis (e.g., the reliability of Toyota vehicles, their cost, etc.). Similarly, it does not follow that because Christians behave badly (i.e., act like hypocrites) that Christianity as a whole, or any belief system as a whole for that matter, should be rejected.

Moral Transformation and Eternity

As a side note, it is actually possible to present an argument from moral transformation to eternity. On this matter, it is at least conceivable to envision that if Christians do not fully live as they ought in this world, that while God is making them into something new in this world, the process will not be fully actualized until they reside in another world. If "ought" implies "can" with God's help, and one does not fully realize his moral potential in this life, on this basis one can arguably postulate the existence of another life where God will ultimately bring about one's

complete and final transformation.[428] In other words, death is not the end; it appears there is an

afterlife where one undergoes complete transformation and the quest for moral perfection is

finally completed. Eternity is then lived as it was meant to be lived, free of the never-ending

quest to attain what is beyond every human person's reach. Within Christianity, these are the

doctrines of sanctification (i.e., God is bringing about change in this life) and glorification (i.e.,

God will bring about complete and final change in the life to come).[429]

In the history of the moral argument, Immanuel Kant is one thinker who presented an

argument for the afterlife, claiming that a "holy will" belonged to God alone, and that a

"revolution of the will" would forever reside beyond humanity's reach. As a result, one needs

eternity in order to approach it asymptotically (ever closer but never quite there). It seems that

Kant was both right and wrong on this score. According to Christian theology, each person who

trusts in Christ will be entirely conformed to the image of Christ by God's grace, so the process

of moral transformation, of being made new, will one day reach completion. It seems that Kant

was right in the sense that humanity's eternal state involves more of a dynamic picture than a

static picture. Presumably, once a person's moral transformation is complete (i.e., glorification),

that person's growth will not cease. Indeed, completion of "the good work within us" will allow

each person to live as they were fully intended to live, with all of the obstructions and challenges

at once removed. Debates over whether morality will go away in heaven sometimes arise. It

seems that morality in Kant's sense certainly will, with talk of rights and duties passing away.

---

[428] A. C. Ewing once called the "ought implies can" argument into question by suggesting that one cannot claim he or she ought to follow the moral law until it is first shown that it can be done. One way of replying to Ewing involves explaining that the driving insight, the motivating factor of the moral law, is that it sets forth a projection of each person's highest good. Another way of responding to Ewing is to suggest that "it can be done" with God's assistance, as Hare indicates. See A. C. Ewing, *Value and Reality: The Philosophical Case for Theism* (London: Routledge, 2016).

[429] Forgiveness for wrongdoing, mentioned in a previous section of this chapter, pertains to the Christian doctrine of justification (i.e., right standing with God).

However, they (rights and duties) will likely be supplanted by something far grander—gift and sacrifice, as George Mavrodes would say. As a result, heaven will be a place where self-giving love is the norm.[430] It is true that more can be said on the matter of moral transformation and the possibility of eternity,[431] but the present aim of the chapter involves considering the nature of moral transformation, to which the discussion now turns.

The Nature of Moral Transformation

As claimed above, moral failure, guilt, grace, and forgiveness are personal concepts, and thus, indicators of a personal God of sorts. What is the nature of moral transformation: non-personal or personal? According to David Baggett and Jerry Walls, with moral transformation "we come to understand that we can be made right not merely with some impersonal Power behind the law. Rather, we can be restored to a loving relationship with a 'superpersonal God,' the God who is 'begetting love' as well as 'love begotten.'"[432] The Judeo-Christian God is a personal God of perfect love who invites sinners into communion with himself and such a relationship is *altogether transformative*.[433] As a whole, the entire process of salvation arguably makes better sense in terms of a personal God. According to Hastings Rashdall,

> [I]f there be there be any truth in the moral argument, we may be content with feeling sure that the solution must be one which will give a real meaning to the idea of salvation—a meaning which cannot be given to it by any philosophy which reduces

---

[430] This paragraph relies heavily on a portion of an article written by David Baggett. See David Baggett, "Moral Apologetics & Christian Theology," *Moral Apologetics*, published February 10, 2021, accessed February 19, 2021, https://www.moralapologetics.com/wordpress/2021/2/10/moral-apologetics-amp-christian-theology.

[431] The goal of this section on moral transformation and eternity is twofold: (1) Provide a possible explanation for why Christians do not seemingly live "completely transformed lives" in this world; and (2) Bring up an interesting connection between moral transformation and the possibility of eternity, which is a fascinating link that emerges in the history of the moral argument.

[432] Baggett and Walls, *The Moral Argument: A History*, 173.

[433] Baggett and Baggett, *The Morals of the Story: Good News About a Good God*, 229.

change, human effort, personal existence to unreal seemings within the being of a changeless, unpurposeful, super-moral, and impersonal Absolute.[434]

As Rashdall notes, the concept of salvation likely loses it meaning in terms of an impersonal Absolute. Conversely, the recognition of personality in God plausibly adds to the intelligibility and moral efficacy of ideas such as moral failure (i.e., sin), grace, forgiveness, justice, sacrifice, moral transformation, union, and so on.[435]

God for the Christian, rather than being an impersonal Absolute or some sort of impassible deity, One who is untouched and unmoved by the world's pain brought about primarily through humankind's moral failures, is "One whose Love necessitates His willingness to share our infirmities, to work in us for our redemption, to achieve through us man's conquest of the many ills that flesh is heir to."[436] On the Christian view, God's purpose with men is thought of in terms of a personal relationship, the kind of intention toward persons that is called "love."[437] Speaking of the power of God's love, Farmer eloquently writes,

> Love, in fact, is an ultimate of the personal order, and cannot be expressed fully in terms of other things and relationships. It has to be experienced in order to be known. Tell me that God respects my personality, that He intends my highest welfare, that He will never use me as a mere means, and you have no doubt told me something which it is very important for me to *know*; but tell me that God loves me, and my whole being does not merely know these things, but—how can one put it?—comes to rest in a final and all-inclusive peace and joy, which the abstract phrases can neither evoke nor convey. On the human level it is the difference between the proverbial coldness of charity and the warmth of genuine love. It is the difference between being in a boarding-house, even of the most comfortable and well-run sort, and being at home.[438]

---

[434] Hastings Rashdall, *God and Man* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1930), 142-143.

[435] Webb, *God and Personality*, 16.

[436] H. Maurice Relton, "The Christian Contribution to the Conception of Eternal Life," in *King's College Lectures on Immortality*, ed. W. R. Matthews (London: London Press, 1920), 179.

[437] H. H. Farmer, *Towards Belief in God* (London: SCM, 1942), 77.

[438] Ibid., 105.

162

Through experiencing the love of God, one experiences what is truly best for his life, what truly transforms his heart, and what ultimately brings about one's peace and joy—things which, as Farmer points out, abstract phrases are neither able to evoke nor convey.[439] This new heart, this changed disposition that one receives as a result of encountering God in loving relationship, is what one is to take into his various relations in the world.[440] In short, if a personal God of perfect love exists, and he is inviting human persons into communion with himself, such a relationship makes complete moral transformation possible.

Catalyst for Moral Transformation

It is challenging to understand how an abstract moral law or a cold, indifferent deity provides motivation or is able to serve as the catalyst for one's total transformation. However, perhaps a better explanation is, as Rashdall claims, "Belief in the moral ideal attains its maximum momentum when it is identified with the love of a Person."[441] Elsewhere, he states that "Love for a Person is a stronger force than devotion to an idea."[442] On a similar note, Relton says, "The Divine Love of a Personal God is the motive of the 'initial impulsion.'"[443] In other words, abstract truths likely cannot touch the will and motivate the feelings in the life of an individual to the extent that the divine love of a personal God can. It is true that ideas motivate and sometimes people are changed as a result of the ideas they encounter and adopt, but love for a person is a stronger catalyst for moral improvement and finally a revolution of the heart, mind,

---

[439] On a related note, Farmer says, "[F]or love, rightly understood, is the only relationship which fully grasps and affirms the other as personal." Farmer, *The World and God*, 226.

[440] Luthardt, *Apologetic Lectures on the Moral Truths of Christianity*, 26.

[441] Hastings Rashdall, *The Theory of Good and Evil*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 268.

[442] Hastings Rashdall, *Philosophy and Religion* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), 78.

[443] Relton, in *King's College Lectures*, 242.

and will. Ultimately, as Duns Scotus claims, the journey that human persons are on is a journey

towards their final good, which Scotus takes to be that human persons become "co-lovers" of

God (*condiligentes*), entering into the love that the three persons of the Trinity have for each

other.[444] If a personal God of perfect love exists, Relton insists that death cannot frustrate such a

divine purpose as this because "[l]ove triumphant is God's last word" and eternal life God's final

end for man.[445] Utterly convinced of the centrality of an essentially good, loving, personal God

to the moral enterprise, Taylor proclaims,

> Thus once more I find myself forced back on the conclusion that, to be truly itself, the
> moral life must have as its last motive love to God, and so become transfigured into the
> life of religious faith and devotion. . . . Belief in the absolute reality of God, and love for
> the God in whom we believe, are at the heart of living morality. The good of our fellow-
> men is unworthily thought of when we do not conceive that good as a life of knowledge
> of God and transformation by the knowledge into the likeness of God. And the love
> which arises from our belief is the one motive adequate to secure the full and whole-
> hearted discharge of the duties laid on us by our ideal.[446]

Of course, all of this talk about love indicates that the source of the moral law, if such there be, is

likely a personal God, because it would be odd to think of giving love to or receiving love from

an abstract principle, and on this basis, one is motivated to change morally. On the other hand, it

presumably makes more sense to say that one's love for a person, and in this case, the very fount

of personhood, God himself, is an adequate and eminently plausible catalyst for moral

transformation.

---

[444] John E. Hare, *God and Morality: A Philosophical History* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 254.

[445] Relton, in *King's College Lectures*, 246.

[446] Taylor, *The Faith of a Moralist*, 209-210.

164

Before wrapping up discussion of moral transformation, it is helpful to consider one more piece of evidence that points in the direction of a personal God: the human conscience. It is true that many things potentially serve as "channels" for moral improvement and transformation (e.g., self-help books, religious texts, etc.), but one interesting "channel" relevant to the present discussion is the human conscience, which briefly came up in chapter 3 when moral knowledge was discussed. The conscience sensitizes one to the need to be less inwardly curved on oneself and calls one to be willing to change, to listen to "its" voice, and so on. This provides evidence that there is "intentionality" here—a sign of personhood, owing to its purposiveness and such. Furthermore, the conscience is deeply personal in that it is not merely "out there" but also "in here," deep within the recesses of who each human person is. It is a bit of "inside information" that may very well come to human persons from some other source.[447] However, one must be careful at this juncture to avoid falling into the trap of over-individualism. What helps with this potential pitfall is understanding that the conscience itself points outward. Of course, one apprehends his or her conscience best inwardly, but it points one outward. For example, when one realizes her own selfishness (inwardly) and is moved to unselfishness (outwardly), something significant has happened. This dual feature of morality is important to bear in mind, especially when some thinkers overemphasize one aspect to the exclusion of the other. Kant's emphasis on autonomy, rightly understood, intimates at this duality.

The moral conscience is potentially evidence for God's existence, as the conscience is not entirely socially determined in all circumstances.[448] In fact, there are times when one's

---

[447] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 29.

[448] John Henry Newman is an important voice on this issue. See Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*.

conscience works when there is no social influence, such as when one is motivated to love an enemy without being taught by someone to do so. How is the moral conscience evidence for God's existence? Perhaps more importantly, how does the moral conscience shed light on God's character? In an effort to answer these questions, consider what the human conscience does: it challenges human persons, wakes them up, gets them out of their complacency, encourages them to get serious about what really matters in life, alerts them to wrongdoing (or potential wrongdoing), and motivates them to do what is good or right, among other things. The human conscience is concerned with morality, as evidenced by its instruction-giving nature on how to live decently. This emphasis on morality points to a standard or law beyond an individual person or society of persons. Admittedly, this invites the question: Why is the conscience not just another thing in reality, and how is the moral conscience indicative of ultimate reality? If there is a standard of moral goodness, it excludes certain things (e.g., torturing children for fun), and if certain things are excluded, there is evidence of intentionality. Furthermore, if the conscience functions similarly to the way described above—it challenges, encourages, alerts, motivates, and so on—there is additional evidence of intentionality, and intentionality (or purposiveness) points to personal agency.

Matter (i.e., the material world) by itself does not have intentions; only persons have intentions. At this juncture, one has evidence for a source of moral goodness[449] and a source that has intentions. If only persons have intentions, and if morality is indicative of personal agency,

---

[449] Perhaps moral goodness construed in reductionist terms is at least conceptually possible without reference to God (e.g., Platonism), but it is much more difficult to get *lasting* moral goodness apart from God. Plato considered whether the morally good life can be offered as something sustainable and commendable as having lasting value. This is the sort of meaning in life that monotheists talk about—*lasting* meaning. Put that way, a naturalist view is at a serious disadvantage, as it does not have the resources necessary for *lasting* moral goodness or *lasting* meaning. It seems that a Being who can sustain lasting moral goodness is preferable to all other options, and a Being of this sort is only possible to account for on a theistic view.

then this may serve as evidence for a personal God. If there is a God who embodies moral

goodness and provides instructions on how to live morally via the human conscience by speaking

to them through their conscience,[450] this God is more valuable than an impersonal being or force

who does not (and probably cannot) care about these matters. Not only is this God more

valuable; this God is seemingly worthy of worship.[451] A God who is worthy of worship is a

morally perfect God who is personal in nature, One who cares about how human persons live

their lives, desires the best for them, loves them, and so on.[452] This sort of thinking brings to

mind a quote from Arthur Balfour, who once described God in this manner: "I mean a God

whom men can love, a God to whom men can pray, who takes sides, who has purposes and

preferences, whose attributes, howsoever conceived, leave unimpaired the possibility of a

personal relation between Himself and those whom He has created."[453] If this is the case, that the

moral conscience is evidence for such a God as this, one must then consider whether he is going

to submit to the challenges of his conscience, to undergo a change of priorities, to be led away

from his selfishness and instead genuinely care for others, and much more.[454] Each human

---

[450] If there is "someone" or "something" speaking to human persons via the conscience, it is helpful to point out that there is likely no language apart from consciousness, and no utterance without a speaker. Language and consciousness are evidences not only of a speaker, but plausibly of a personal Speaker (i.e., personal God).

[451] When considering ultimate reality, one has to deal with the question: Is there a Being (i.e., God) who excels to the highest moral degree and therefore demands our worship? To ignore this conceptual option is to cheat, and to cheat is not good philosophy. In all monotheistic traditions, God is presented as a Being who is worthy of worship. A god who is not worthy of worship is lowering the bar, and one should not lower the bar when it comes to the divine.

[452] Worship is a personal act most appropriately directed toward a personal being. Worship does not seem as robust if directed toward an impersonal object or being.

[453] Arthur James Balfour, *Theism and Humanism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915), 21.

[454] Credit for some of these ideas goes to Paul K. Moser, who discusses how the moral conscience is evidence for God in this YouTube video: https://youtu.be/qiClbtO_qLI.

167

person has a personal response before him: ignore his conscience and live his own way, or pay attention to the challenges of his conscience and begin the process of moral transformation.[455]

Summary

Chapter 6 began with a quote from C. S. Lewis, emphasizing two foundational facts that virtually all human persons are aware of: (1) humans know they ought to behave a certain way; and (2) they fail to behave that way. Humans fail morally, which gives rise to guilt and makes them culpable, deserving of punishment for their immoral actions. If this were the end of the story, it would be a sad story indeed. But all across the world, humans hope for something more—something like forgiveness, even transformation, even to the point of completion. The gap between the best one can do on his or her own and what morality demands, called "the moral gap" by John Hare, is arguably best bridged by nothing less than the assistance of a personal God.

This chapter focuses on moral transformation and seeks to determine whether moral transformation and other related concepts, such as moral failure, guilt, punishment, grace, and forgiveness make more sense on a non-personal or personal account. This chapter provides *seven* pieces of evidence in favor of the latter, that is, a personal God. First, when one fails morally, such as when he wastes his talents (or his life as a whole), to whom is he responsible to if not a personal God who bestows such talents (and the gift of life itself)? The only other options are that one is responsible to himself or to an abstract order of claims, and since the concept of

---

[455] It is important to note that the conscience is not infallible in all situations. This is why, on the Christian view, that one ought to make sure what his conscience is "telling him" is what Scripture actually says. If the Christian God exists, and he (God) is speaking to one through the human conscience, it should align with what he (God) has revealed in Scripture. Why? Because God cannot contradict himself by "telling" one person something via the conscience, and then "tell" everyone else something completely different in his written Word.

responsibility implies the idea of an "other" to whom responsibility is due, it is appropriate to postulate the existence of a personal God to whom responsibility is due. Second, the nature of guilt points in the direction of a personal God since it seems inappropriate to feel guilt before an abstract, non-personal moral code of sorts. The experience of guilt typically implies that an "other" has been betrayed in some sense, and it is before this "other" that one is guilty. Third, punishment is best understood as a category of personal relations, and if there is an essentially good God who cares about justice, it seems fitting to also understand this God to be personal in nature. Fourth, grace and forgiveness for each human person's moral failures, are deeply personal, and if humans find themselves in desperate need of grace and forgiveness, it is important to note that a divine mind or power, an impersonal force, or some other conception of the divine likely cannot dispense grace and offer forgiveness—presumably, only a personal God can truly offer these things. Fifth, the nature of moral transformation suggests that a personal God of love exists, One who invites human persons into a transformative loving relationship with himself. As one encounters the love of God, he experiences what is best for his life, what truly transforms his heart, and what ultimately brings about lasting peace and joy—these are things which abstract ideas and non-personal deities are arguably neither able to evoke nor convey. Sixth, it is difficult to understand how devotion to an abstract moral law or a cold, indifferent deity could provide adequate motivation for one's moral transformation, at least not in the same way that a personal God of love can. Simply put, love for a Person is probably a stronger motivator than devotion to an abstract moral ideal or non-personal deity. Seventh, God arguably "speaks" to each person via the conscience, urging them to wake up and take right living seriously, motivating them to do what is right and alerting them to potential wrongdoing. If this is the case, it is evidence of intentionality on God's part, and intentionality is indicative of

169

personhood, owing to its purposiveness. This makes it possible to suggest that a personal God is the One who is speaking through the human conscience to each person. In sum, *the seven pieces of evidence presented in chapter 6 point toward the existence of a personal God of love.*

Now that moral knowledge, moral values, moral obligations, and moral transformation have each been discussed in the previous four chapters (chapters 3-6), and because each point in the direction of a personal source, several possibilities will be briefly examined in the concluding chapter in an effort to shed light on the plausibility of Christianity in explaining and accounting for the personal nature of morality.

CHAPTER SEVEN: TOWARD A TRINITARIAN UNDERSTANDING OF THE PERSONAL NATURE OF MORALITY

Introduction

As stated in the introduction (chapter 1), the universe and everything within it are the result of either a personal or non-personal source. Therefore, ultimate reality is either personal or non-personal, and everything in the universe flows from one or the other. The present project has examined some of the available moral phenomena in an attempt to gather evidence and draw a conclusion regarding whether ultimate reality is likely personal or non-personal.[456] Stated differently, this project has aimed to better understand the *nature* of ultimate reality by examining the *nature* of various moral categories, such as moral knowledge, moral values, moral obligations, and moral transformation. Of course, classical arguments for God's existence do not take one all the way to the God of any particular religion, but it appears that the moral argument may be able to move one a bit closer to a particular conception of God than the other arguments—due to its ability to reveal more of God's *character* (or *nature*).

Following the introductory chapter, chapter 2 provided reasons for believing in objective moral facts, and then chapters 3-6 looked at the nature of moral knowledge, values, obligations, and transformation. If there are objective moral facts, and chapter 2 suggested that there are, one must consider what the facts are like, specifically, whether they are personal or non-personal. Chapters 3-6 provided evidence that morality is personal, which at the least roots morality

---

[456] There is significantly more moral data for one to observe—data that arguably provides further evidence for the existence of God (and perhaps even a specific God). For example, this dissertation could have looked at the property of moral rationality, which focuses on the coherence between happiness and holiness. Interestingly, a discussion on moral rationality (or moral providence) would have likely rendered additional evidence for the existence of a personal God. Another piece of moral data is the evidence of evil, which is usually taken as evidence against God's existence, or at least a good God's existence. However, construed properly, evil actually serves as evidence for God, and perhaps even a personal God. David Baggett and Marybeth Baggett, *The Morals of the Story: Good News About a Good God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 197-216.

somehow in persons and might well point in the direction of a more ultimate or transcendent personal source. When considering evidence of any kind, and in this case, evidence for God, it is important to remember that an effect cannot have a quality not possessed by the cause. Therefore, if morality is *personal* in nature, as suggested in the preceding chapters, one has reason to look for a *personal* source as the most plausible explanation, perhaps even a personal God. It is important to remember that the concept of "personal God" was defined this way in chapter 1: *A personal God is a self-conscious Being who thinks, feels, wills, and One who is capable of loving and being loved by other beings*. Consequently, this chapter, which serves as the conclusion to this project, will consider several conceptual options and attempt to demonstrate that the existence of a personal God in general, and Christian theism more specifically, possesses the most explanatory power and provides the widest explanatory scope for the personal nature of morality.[457] Admittedly, this chapter is unable to provide a full treatment of the issue, but hopefully it will tie up some loose ends and provide an adequate foundation for further work in this area.

Summary of Evidence (From Chapters 3-6)

Evidence Chart

At the end of chapters 3-6, a short summary is provided of the evidences presented in each respective chapter. A chart of these evidences is also provided below. In terms of the cumulative evidence for the existence of a personal God, chapter 3 (moral knowledge) suggests

---

[457] I am approaching this final chapter largely from a Christian perspective, aiming to make a move toward philosophical theology. (This is something I briefly mention in a chapter 1 footnote.) Philosophical theology has apologetic significance if the fine-grained accounts of Christianity move the discussion forward and make ever better sense of what we are able to glean from general revelation and ethical reflection, providing at least some evidence of its truth.

seven evidences, chapter 4 (moral values) *six* evidences, chapter 5 (moral obligations) *five*

evidences, and chapter 6 (moral transformation) *seven* evidences, for a total of *twenty-five*

evidences.[458] See the chart below for an overview of these evidences (or indicators).[459] (Note:

Chapters 3 and 6 both present the "human conscience" as an evidence. See "Evidence 6" below.

Also, chapters 3 and 4 both present "purpose" as an evidence. The "human conscience" is

counted as one evidence in the chart below, and "purpose" is counted as one evidence. As a

result, there are actually *twenty-three* evidences listed in the chart.)

Evidence 1 (ch. 3)	The moral law is information, and information is typically the product of a conscious, intelligent mind (i.e., a person).
Evidence 2 (ch. 3)	The moral law indicates that the source cares deeply about how humans live their lives.
Evidence 3 (chs. 3 & 4)	The moral law implies purpose, and purpose involves intent, and intent reveals a personal will. Values themselves are personal because values play a role in helping one satisfy his or her purpose in life, and purpose is a key feature of personality.
Evidence 4 (ch. 3))	If moral knowledge is contained within the mind of God, and if God has revealed such knowledge to human persons, the act of revelation suggests God is personal.
Evidence 5 (ch. 3)	If morality is a reflection of God's character and if God has chosen to reveal this information to human persons, it follows that morality is very important to God and that God expects human beings to pattern themselves after God's character.
Evidence 6 (chs. 3 & 6)	The human conscience, if it serves as a channel through which God has communicated the moral law, is evidence that God is personal (ch. 3). God speaking to each person in the human conscience (to urge them to do what is right, avoid what is wrong, etc.) is evidence of intentionality, and intentionality is indicative of personhood, owing to its purposiveness and such (ch. 6).
Evidence 7 (ch. 3)	Perhaps one reason why God chose to dispense moral knowledge to human persons stems from his desire to be in relationship with them.

---

[458] There are likely other evidences from morality for the existence of a personal God than the two dozen (or so) presented in this dissertation. This is an exciting thought to consider, and one that will hopefully motivate further research into this fascinating area.

[459] It may be helpful to understand these twenty-three "evidences" instead as "indicators" of a personal God, due to the fact that some thinkers may not count several of these items as "evidences." Regardless of one's thoughts on this matter, if one denies the existence of God or adopts some other non-personal view of ultimate reality, many of these "evidences" or "indicators" are still in need of explanation and should not be dismissed without careful consideration.

Evidence 8 (ch. 4)	Ultimate goodness, which is not fully contained within any finite mind, points in the direction of a personal God. (If goodness on a human level is personal, it is logical to conclude that ultimate goodness is also personal.)
Evidence 9 (ch. 4)	The value of justice, which is deeply personal, signals that a personal God likely exists. If such a thing as ultimate justice exists, there is further evidence for the existence of a personal God.
Evidence 10 (ch. 4)	The ethic of love, which requires a subject and object, points in the direction of a personal God.
Evidence 11 (ch. 4)	Gratitude suggests that a personal God exists because there are occasions when gratitude is not appropriately directed to any human person.
Evidence 12 (ch. 4)	The intrinsic value of human persons is likely best grounded in the personhood of God.
Evidence 13 (ch. 5)	The idea of moral obligations involves the idea of a person or persons to whom one is obligated.
Evidence 14 (ch. 5)	It would be odd to think of a non-personal entity holding one personally responsible for failing to carry out his or her duty in a given situation.
Evidence 15 (ch. 5)	Duties toward inanimate objects and animals are also personal in nature, albeit indirectly.
Evidence 16 (ch. 5)	If moral obligations are understood to be divine commands, divine commands imply a personal divine Commander.
Evidence 17 (ch. 5)	Reverence before the moral law is likely best understood as reverence not before the law itself, but rather the personal God behind the law.
Evidence 18 (ch. 6)	Moral failure indicates that there is One before whom human persons have been irresponsible, and One who holds human persons accountable for their failures.
Evidence 19 (ch. 6)	The nature of guilt points in the direction of a personal God.
Evidence 20 (ch. 6)	Punishment is best understood as a category of personal relations, and if there is an essentially good God who cares about justice, it seems fitting to understand this God to be personal in nature.
Evidence 21 (ch. 6)	Grace and forgiveness, which are important concepts in light of each human person's moral failures, are presumably best understood in terms of a personal God.
Evidence 22 (ch. 6)	The nature of moral transformation suggests that a personal God of love exists, One who invites human persons into a transformative loving relationship with himself.
Evidence 23 (ch. 6)	It is difficult to understand how devotion to anyone or anything less than a personal God of love could provide adequate motivation for one's moral transformation.

Cumulative Force of the Evidence

These roughly *two dozen* pieces of evidence, taken cumulatively, point powerfully to the existence of a personal God. Arguably, these evidences cannot be accounted for on views that:

(1) deny the existence of God completely; or (2) present a God who is non-personal or less than fully personal (or instrinsically personal). For a look at the difficulty some of these views face, see below.[460]

A Brief Word on Weighing Competing Hypotheses

By taking a look at the world and seeing what one can do in terms of explaining morality and its distinctive features, it should not be surprising that one can make some progress. There are many belief systems that have much to say when it comes to the moral enterprise. However, one must then remind himself or herself of the full range of moral facts in need of explanation—namely, the objectivity of moral facts, moral knowledge, moral values, moral obligations, moral transformation, and others still—and then ask this question: What is the most plausible explanation of such moral phenomena? In the case of this dissertation, one must ask, what is the most plausible explanation of the *personal* nature of moral phenomena? Which view provides the widest explanatory scope, possesses the most explanatory power, and is the most plausible?[461]

There are three criteria commonly used when weighing competing hypotheses: (1) explanatory scope; (2) explanatory power; and (3) plausibility. The criterion of explanatory scope looks at the *quantity* of facts accounted for by a particular hypothesis, with the hypothesis accounting for the most facts being deemed as the hypothesis with the widest explanatory scope.

---

[460] This is not an exhaustive look at the views that deny the existence of God or present a God who is non-personal or less than fully personal (or intrinsically personal). The purpose of considering these options is to briefly suggest the shortcomings of these views in accounting for the deeply personal nature of morality, and to lay the groundwork for future work.

[461] David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016)*, 77.

On the other hand, the criterion of explanatory power looks at the *quality* of the explanation of

the facts.[462] The hypothesis that explains the data most clearly and with the least amount of effort

is said to possess the greatest explanatory power. In order for a hypothesis to be deemed

"plausible," it must be implied to a greater degree and by a larger body of accepted truths (or

background knowledge) than other hypotheses.[463] Moreover, a hypothesis may be granted

plausibility status if it is not in tension with solid conclusions in other areas. Oftentimes,

simplicity serves as an additional criterion when judging competing hypotheses, with the

hypothesis that most simply and clearly explains the data being preferred. With these criteria in

mind, the discussion now considers several hypotheses in an effort to determine which

hypothesis possesses the widest explanatory scope, the greatest explanatory power, and is most

plausible.

---

[462] N. T. Wright basically combines these two criteria (explanatory scope and power) and lists two additional requirements of a good hypothesis. He writes, "First, it must include the data. The bits and pieces of evidence must be incorporated, without being squeezed out of shape any more than is inevitable.... Second, it must construct a basically simple and coherent overall picture.... In any given field, it is quite likely that there will be several possible hypotheses which will include more or less all the data, and do so with reasonable simplicity. There is therefore a third thing that a good hypothesis must do if it is to stand out from the others. The proposed explanatory story must prove itself fruitful in other related areas, must explain or help to explain other problems." N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 99-100.

[463] These criteria largely come from Michael Licona's *The Resurrection of Jesus*. Admittedly, Licona is a historian, but a process of this type is not unique to historiography, as Licona himself maintains. Similar approaches are oftentimes applied by philosophers, for instance. Licona also lists "less *ad* hoc" and "illumination" as criteria for claiming a particular hypothesis is the best or most plausible explanation. By "less *ad* hoc," Licona explains, "A hypothesis possesses an ad hoc component when it enlists nonevidenced assumptions, that is, when it goes beyond what is already known. When two or more hypotheses seem equal, usually due to a paucity of data, historians often employ a greater amount of imagination in order to account for the available data." In terms of illumination, sometimes a hypothesis not only plausibly explains the data at hand, it also provides possible solutions to other problems without confusing other areas held with confidence. Michael R. Licona, "Arguments to the Best Explanation" in *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 108-114.

Naturalism

Naturalism is in a difficult spot when it comes to accounting for the personal nature of moral knowledge, values, obligations, and transformation. This view is also in a difficult position when attempting to account for the moral order of the universe, because nature is not moral itself. There are other challenges that naturalism faces, some of which have been addressed previously in this dissertation. However, the fundamental problem with naturalism in terms of explaining the evidence in this work is that naturalism views ultimate reality as non-personal, and things such as personality, personhood, and as this dissertation suggests, the personal nature of morality, are likely best explained in reference to a transcendent personal cause. For example, one may wonder how anything less than a fully conscious, intelligent, personal being could do things like dispense moral knowledge, account for personal moral values like goodness, justice, and love, give instructions (perhaps even commands), and make moral transformation possible. Claiming that naturalism is able to account for the personal is likely similar to saying that a stream *can* rise above its source or that an effect *can* have a quality that the cause itself does not have to give. As Nancy Pearcey explains, "As water cannot rise above its source, so a nonpersonal object of force could not have produced personal beings like ourselves."[465] Based

---

[464] This section briefly looks at several opposing views, treating each in a page or two. Admittedly, before something like a full abductive case can be made, each of these views would need to be more thoroughly analyzed. The point of this section is not to thoroughly dismantle these views as a whole, but rather to highlight a few weaknesses of the opposing views in light of the evidence for a personal God presented in this dissertation. Hopefully, these short analyses of opposing views will serve as a springboard for more work on these views in the future, especially in terms of how they are able to account for the personal nature of morality.

[465] Viewing Pearcey's quote in its context is helpful: "Since He made us, He must have at least the qualities we have as personal, moral, rational, creative beings. As water cannot rise above its source, so a nonpersonal object of force could not have produced personal beings like ourselves. It is logical to conclude that God too is a personal Being." Her point is that an effect cannot possess a quality that the cause itself did not have to give. Therefore, if there are personal beings and if morality is personal, they are best understood as deriving from a personal Cause (i.e., personal God). Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 89.

upon observation, this is not the way things work in real life—a stream does not rise above its source, not without a personal cause anyway (e.g., a pump installed in a stream by a human person). Therefore, it seems that ultimate reality is plausibly personal in nature, that is, if it is to adequately account for the deeply personal nature of morality.[466] This likely renders naturalism a bad fit, an insufficient explanation and incapable ground of personal morality. As H. P. Owen puts it, "The failure of naturalism in all its forms shows that ethical terms cannot be reduced to, or explained by, non-ethical ones."[467] Using Owen's quote, one may also conclude that the failure of naturalism shows that *personal* terms presumably cannot be reduced to, or explained by, *non-personal* ones. On this score, even Kai Nielsen, a contemporary advocate of atheism, admits, "There can be no complete non-personal, objective justification for acting morally rather than nonmorally."[468]

Platonism

At the end of his book *Robust Ethics*, Erik Wielenberg, a Platonist, states, "If there is a moral to the story I have told, it is that the old-fangled ideas that reality includes objective, *sui generis* moral features that exist independently of God and that ordinary human beings can possess knowledge of such features of reality still have something to be said for them." In the next sentence, Wielenberg writes, "As our understanding of human moral cognition grows, we

---

[466] H. P. Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1965), 38, 70-71. Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 89.

[467] Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism*, 70. The comments of Pearcey and Owen found in this section serve as somewhat of a summary of the issues facing naturalism. One might suggest that individuals like Pearcey and Owen are friendly witnesses, and that one needs to engage more with the naturalists themselves (or the Platonists, Buddhists, Muslims, etc.) before attempting to claim that something approaching a full abductive case has been made. I could not agree more. Again, the aim of this dissertation is not to take on each of the opposing views at length, as that would take a dissertation in itself, but rather to present potential evidence for the personal nature of morality, which warrants explanation and seemingly makes most sense in terms of a personal God.

[468] Kai Nielsen in William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations For a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 393.

should not be too quick to abandon these old-fangled notions."[469] In short, Wielenberg urges his readers to not forsake the "old-fangled idea" of objective morality, while also suggesting that such a commitment does not make it impossible to remain or become an atheist. It is at least possible for objective moral facts to exist without God (although many theists would disagree),[470] but on Platonism, it is difficult to account for the deeply personal nature of morality.[471] Is it possible to get the personal from a non-personal, abstract realm such as the one suggested by Platonists? Or does it make more sense to claim that the personal exists as a basic feature of reality, and that at the very heart of the universe there exists a personal God who is able to account for personal, personality, personhood, and so on? Moral values seem to exist as properties of persons, not as mere abstractions; moral obligations also seem more intelligible when a person is in view. How do personal values such as goodness, justice, and love, for instance, simply float about in some transcendent, abstract realm? Moreover, how is it that anything could do things like give instructions or urge good behavior if it were anything less than a personal being? For these reasons, among others suggested in this dissertation,[472] grounding personal morality in a personal God appears to be a more viable option.[473]

---

[469] Erik J. Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics: The Metaphysics and Epistemology of Godless Normative Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 176.

[470] For example, see William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 179.

[471] Other objections to Platonism are mentioned in chapter 3 on moral values.

[472] See the chapters on moral knowledge (chapter 3) and moral transformation (chapter 6). There are other reasons suggested in chapters 4 (moral values) and 5 (moral obligations) as well.

[473] In 2018, William Lane Craig and Erik J. Wielenberg participated in a debate at North Carolina State University, addressing the question: "God and Morality: What is the best account of objective moral values and duties?" Craig argued that theism provides the most plausible foundation for objective morality, whereas Wielenberg contended that morality can be objective even if there is no God. This debate was later published as a book. See William Lane Craig and Erik J. Wielenberg, *A Debate on God and Morality: What is the Best Account of Objective Moral Values and Duties?*, ed. Adam Lloyd Johnson (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021).

Admittedly, there are too many Eastern religions to consider here, but most can be categorized as pantheistic, polytheistic, or some blend of the two.[474] Pantheism, at least broadly speaking, typically views the divine as some sort of non-personal force. Considering the two-dozen evidences presented in this work, each pointing in the direction of a personal source, it seems inappropriate to speak of a force or substance existing as a conscious being who is capable of entering into a mutual relationship of love and trust with others.[475] Furthermore, if one is looking for a transcendent source that is personal to the highest degree possible, one must look for a source that is *intrinsically* personal, and a force is unlikely to possess such a quality as this.[476] Regarding polytheism, if morality is truly objective, it seems unlikely to be the result of a plurality of gods since the moral law seemingly implies the existence of one Moral Lawgiver. If many gods existed, disagreements would abound over the nature of goodness, over what is truly right and wrong, and so on.[477] On polytheism, if the gods are personal in any sense, they are

---

[474] For a comparative approach to the problem of evil, one that touches on naturalism, pantheism, panentheism, and theism, see Ronnie P. Campbell, Jr., *Worldviews and the Problem of Evil* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019).

[475] H. H. Farmer, *The World and God: A Study of Prayer, Providence and Miracle in Christian Experience* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1933), 26.

[476] There are those who suggest the Holy Spirit is something like a force; however, this is not consistent with Christian teaching throughout the annals of church history. The Holy Spirit, properly understood, is a Person—in fact, the third Person of the Trinity. As a divine Person, the Holy Spirit possesses all of the qualities of personhood, and to the highest degree possible.

[477] Athanasius, in his *Against Heathen*, provides numerous reasons why a plurality of gods presumably do not exist. In one section, Athanasius states, "For if there were more than one Ruler of Creation, such a universal order would not be maintained, but all things would fall into confusion because of their plurality, each one biasing the whole to his own will, and striving with the other….The rule of more than one is the rule of none. For each would cancel the rule of the other, and none would appear ruler, but there would be anarchy everywhere. But where no ruler is, there disorder follows of course." According to Athanasius, if more than one god existed, there would be no moral order, only moral disorder. Each deity would create rules according to his own will, and these rules would likely be at odds with the rules of other deities. In another section, Athanasius writes, "And this you must know, that if the universe had been made by a plurality of gods, its movements would be diverse and inconsistent. For having regard to each one of its makers, its movements would be correspondingly different." It seems that this same thought can be applied to morality. For example, if a plurality of gods existed, there would likely be different, and even

likely not *intrinsically* personal because their personal nature is likely dependent on other beings. It is also helpful to point out here that personality is not the only feature God must possess in order to account for morality as a whole.[478] For instance, he must also be holy and loving. For the reasons suggested in this brief section, among other reasons, pantheism and polytheism seem unable to account for the personal nature of morality in a robust sense.[479]

Islam

Regarding Islam, the extent to which Allah is a personal deity is debatable. Islam denies the Trinity, maintaining that Allah is "One and Indivisible," as Surah 112:1 states. As the Islamic scholar, Seyyed Hossein Nasr writes, "The Quran continuously emphasizes the Unity and the Oneness of God, and it can be said that the very raison d'être of Islam is to assert in a final and categorical manner the Oneness of God and the nothingness of all before the Majesty of that One."[480] Arguably, without the concept of the Trinity, one cannot hold a fully personal conception of God, because many attributes of personality are expressed within the context of a relationship—things like love, communication, empathy, and self-giving, for example. On the

---

contradictory moral standards or laws existing, each owing its content to its particular deity. Interestingly, within polytheistic religions, there is oftentimes disagreement among the gods over moral issues (e.g., Greek and Roman mythology, Hinduism, etc.). In Athanasius' estimation, in order for there to be moral harmony, there must only be one God, who is the Creator and Governor of it all. Athanasius, *Against Heathen* in L. Russ Bush, *Classical Readings in Christian Apologetics: A.D. 100-1800* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 146-147.

[478] Regarding Eastern religions, Webb notes: "If we may say that the God of much Indian worship is not what we should usually call a 'personal God,' we must take care not to imply by this that the Indian's religion is not his *personal* concern, for nothing could be less true. Moreover the important and widely prevalent type of Indian piety known as *bhakti* is admitted to be devotional faith in a personal God: while Buddhism, which originally perhaps acknowledged neither God nor soul, has produced in the worship of Amitabha, the 'Buddha of the Boundless Light,' the 'Lord of the Western Paradise,' a form of piety which has seemed to some scholars too similar to the Christian to have originated except under Christian influence." Clement C. J. Webb, *God and Personality* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1919), 88.

[479] Although more needs to be said, it is important to briefly note a presumed weakness of Buddhism, an Eastern religion that is largely atheistic in nature, so ultimately not personal. Buddhism says humanity's goal is dissolution of self, which seemingly helps the case attempting to be made in this chapter.

[480] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam: Religion, History, and Civilization* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2002), 3, 6.

Islamic view, which denies the Trinity, it is challenging to see how Allah intrinsically possesses these personal attributes. If Allah does possess these attributes, it is presumably not until Allah created the world. However, in that case, Allah would be dependent on creation,[481] which appears to be at odds with what Surah 112:2 says: "Allah—the Sustainer needed by all."[482]

Another reason to question whether Allah is personal has to do with how Muslims express their faith in near-mechanistic rituals. For example, Muslim believers oftentimes recite the Quran many times over,[483] in unison with other Muslims, word for word, in the original Arabic. Muslims seemingly do not pour out their hearts to Allah as a personal being as David does in Psalm 51.[484] According to the sociologist Rodney Stark, religions with non-personal gods typically stress precision in the performance of rituals and sacred formulas, whereas religions with a highly personal God are less concerned about such things, because a personal God will respond to the personal approaches of impromptu supplication and spontaneous prayer.[485]

It is certainly true that anthropomorphic language is used of Allah in the Quran. For instance, it is said that Allah possesses a face and two hands (Surah 38:75), has the ability to see and sits on a throne (Surah 57:4), is compassionate and merciful (Surah 1:3), and is responsive to prayers (Surah 11:61). However, as Clement Webb suggests,

> [I]t would seem that the tendency of that teaching is to reduce the personal relations which can exist between man and God to the lowest terms, to those, namely, which may exist between a slave and a master of absolutely unlimited power. Still this is a personal

---

[481] Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 387-388.

[482] Another translation of Surah 112:2 reads: "Allah, Who is in need of none and of Whom all are in need." Surah 112, entitled *Al-Ikhlas*, is one of the most revered sections of the entire Quran by Muslims.

[483] The word "Quran" is actually Arabic for "recitation."

[484] Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 387-388.

[485] Rodney Stark, "Why Gods Should Matter in Social Science," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 49, no. 39 (June 6, 2003): B7; also available online at http://chronicle.com/free/v49/i39/39b00701.htm. The article was adapted from Stark's book *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

relation, and on the whole it would seem best to describe the God of Mohammedanism as a personal God.[486]

According to Webb, one should not speak of a personal God unless it is supposed that human persons can be in personal relationship with him.[487] Therefore, technically speaking, Webb understands Allah to be a personal God, but he points out that the personal relationship that exists is likely not a warm, affectionate relationship that is characterized by mutual love, but rather one that is reduced to the sort of relationship that exists between a slave and his master. Regardless of one's take on the personal nature of Allah, this much appears fairly clear: Allah is not an *intrinsically* personal being.[488]

Christianity[489]

If a personal God—a self-conscious Being who thinks, feels, wills, and is capable of loving and being loved by others—is the likely best explanation of the deeply personal nature of morality, Christianity cannot be dismissed as a viable option. More specifically, if one is looking for an *intrinsically* personal God, Christianity provides a powerful account that must be considered. In what follows, an attempt is made to demonstrate that the Judeo-Christian God is personal to the highest degree possible, that is, *intrinsically* personal. The discussion begins by

---

[486] Webb, *God and Personality*, 86-87.

[487] Ibid., 73.

[488] For a related discussion, see the work of Brian T. Scalise, who considers whether the Tawhidic nature of Allah or the Trinitarian nature of God best accounts for the existence of human relationships. Brian T. Scalise, "Tawḥīdic Allah or the Trinity in View of Inherent Human Relatedness" (PhD diss., Liberty University Rawlings School of Divinity, 2014), *Doctoral Dissertations and Projects*, 922, https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/922. For an abbreviated version of Scalise's dissertation, see Brian T. Scalise, *Trinity and Allah in Anthropological Perspective* (Self-published, CreateSpace, 2014).

[489] Judaism is left aside here due to its complex relationship with Christianity. This is not to say there are no important distinctions between a strict version of Judaism and Christianity, because, of course, there are. The view presented in this section utilizes both the Old and New Testaments in an effort to demonstrate the intrinsically personal nature of the Judeo-Christian God of the Bible. Admittedly, there are other views that are absent from this analysis as well, such as deism, for example. Deism is not included here because it views God as Creator, but not as One with whom human persons can be in personal relationship.

considering some of the person-like acts of the Judeo-Christian God, but then moves to the heart

of the matter—the Trinitarian conception of *this* God—and explains how the Trinity provides the

proper basis for claiming that the Judeo-Christian God is intrinsically personal. Following the

discussion on the Trinity and the perichoretic relations of the three Persons within the Trinity, the

Incarnation is considered as further evidence of the deeply personal nature of the God of the

Bible.

Person-Like Acts

In the introduction to this dissertation, the person-like acts of the Judeo-Christian God

were referenced. Here, these items are revisited with a few additions. In the Hebrew Bible (or

Old Testament), God is One who decides to create (Gen. 1:1), walks in the Garden of Eden (Gen.

3:8), issues divine commands (Ex. 20:1-21), speaks "face to face" to people on occasion (Ex.

33:11), expresses emotions (Ex. 33:19; Is. 61:8), disciplines (Deut. 8:5), converses with human

beings (Job 38-41), receives expressed gratitude (Ps. 92:1), possesses a will to choose (Ps. 115:3;

Is. 46:10-11), reasons (Is. 1:18), has an intellect (Is. 48:17; Prov. 15:3), One who is both

transcendent and immanent (Jer. 23:23), shows mercy (Jon. 3:10). The New Testament depicts

God as One who responds to prayers (Mt. 7:7-8; Mk. 11:24), displays compassion (Mt. 9:36),

desires to be in relationship with human persons (Jn. 15:13-15; Jas. 4:8; 1 Pet. 3:18; 1 Jn. 3:1),

transforms those who trust in him (2 Cor. 5:17), offers grace (Eph. 1:7), reveals knowledge and

wisdom to those who ask (Jas. 1:5), provides good gifts (Jas. 1:17), judges (Jas. 4:12), forgives

(1 Jn. 1:9), and loves (1 Jn. 4:10).[490] In several places, God is contrasted with idols, which can

---

[490] As Farmer puts it, "The conviction that God is personal, and deals personally with men and women, lies at the heart of Christian experience and thought. Sufficient proof of this, if proof be needed, is afforded by the New Testament. Every category, phrase, doctrine, movement of thought, presupposes and implies the possibility for all, and the actuality for the writers, of a personal relationship to a personal God. 'God is love; and he that abideth in love abideth in God and God abideth in him.' 'If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.' These statements can have no straightforward meaning if God be not thought of as in some sense personal, constituting

neither hear nor speak (Acts 14:15). There is also a distinction drawn between the living God and non-living idols (1 Thess. 1:9).[491] In sum, there are numerous person-like acts carried out by the Judeo-Christian God, which should be expected given his intrinsically personal nature.[492]

The Trinity and Perichoresis

With the Trinity, one encounters a truly distinctive doctrine of Christianity; no other religions in the world make the claim that God is one Being who exists in three Persons.[493] Of all the doctrines that are distinctively Christian, none are more fundamental than the doctrine of the

---

with men an ultimate order of personal relations. 'The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.' 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.' Thus to use the term 'father' in respect of God, thus to derive its meaning and content from Jesus, involves that whatever else may be true of God, this at least is true, that He is personal and personally related to men. To see Jesus is to see a personal life entering into personal relations with, and seeking personal ends for, men and women." Farmer, *The World and God*, 9.

[491] Gerald Bray provides a helpful comment here on the difference between the Greek Gods and the God of the Bible, as well as the difference between Platonism and Christianity. According to Bray, "That the God of the Bible is a personal being is so obvious that it hardly needs to be demonstrated. But exactly what that personhood involves is another matter. The ancient Greek gods were personal too, but they were very different from Yahweh. No Greek god, not even Zeus, was the Supreme Being, and when pagan philosophers began to talk of such a Being they did not think of it as personal. That is one of the major differences between any form of Platonism and Christianity, and it raises major questions about the nature and extent of the supposed influence of the former on the latter. However similar the two beliefs may have been in some respects, they differed radically at this point, and that essential difference had immense implications for the way in which their relationship developed." Gerald Bray, *The Personal God: Is the classical understanding of God tenable?* (Carlisle, CA: Paternoster Press, 1998), 56.

[492] In addition to person-like acts, the God of the Bible reveals his personal nature in several other ways. For example, consider these words of Millard Erickson: "A personal God presents himself to persons. This is seen in a number of ways. God reveals himself by telling his name. Nothing is more personal than one's name. When Moses asked who he should say had sent him to the people of Israel, Jehovah responded by giving his name, 'I am who I am' (Ex. 3:14). Moreover, God entered into personal covenants with individuals (Noah, Abraham, etc.) and with the nation of Israel. And note the benediction Aaron and his sons were to pronounce upon the people: 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace' (Num. 6:24-26). The Psalms contain numerous testimonies of personal experience with God. And the goal of Paul's life was a personal acquaintance with God: 'I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death' (Phil. 3:10)." Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, second edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 203.

[493] Lewis even says, "A good many people nowadays say, 'I believe in a God, but not in a personal God.' They feel that the mysterious something which is behind all other things must be more than a person. Now the Christians quite agree. But the Christians are the only people who offer any idea of what a being that is beyond personality could be like. All the other people, though they say God is beyond personality, really think of Him as something impersonal: that is, as something less than personal. If you are looking for something super-personal, something more than a person, then it is not a question of choosing between the Christian idea and the other ideas. The Christian idea is the only one on the market." C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001), 160.

Trinity. A proper understanding of this doctrine helps one understand "who God is, what he is like, how he works, and how he is to be approached."[494] Of all of the intricacies that this doctrine teaches about God's nature and how humans relate to him, the most important for the current discussion is that God is, and has always been, personal. Christianity not only recognizes the personality *of* God, but maintains that personality is *in* God—it is a fundamental part of his divine nature rather than some sort of "add-on" that comes about later on in his existence (such as when human persons were created).[495]

Again, on the Christian view, there is one God who exists in three Persons. Therefore, it is more appropriate to refer to the Trinitarian God as *personal* instead of suggesting that God is a *Person*, because on Christianity, God is actually three *Persons*: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The three Persons within the Trinity, existing in relationship with one another, are distinct, yet not separate, Persons within the Godhead.[496] Thus, it is a *personal relationship*, that is, a loving relationship among Persons, which exists at the center of the universe. At its deepest level, this striking reality points to the loving, interpenetrating personal relationships among the Trinitarian Persons. Furthermore, all of God's actions in history are expressions of this intimate, personal

---

[494] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 347.

[495] On this score, Webb posits, "Where, then, shall we look for an example of what is really meant by a 'personal God?' We shall plainly be most likely to do so with good hope of success in the one historical religion of which, as we have seen, Personality *in* God (though not, until quite modern times, 'the Personality *of* God') has been a recognized tenet—that is to say, in Christianity." Webb, *God and Personality*, 81.

[496] God is "Three in One" on Christian theism. If one pushes the distinctness of each of the three Persons too far, where they are understood as being completely separate from one another, this leads to tritheism—which is not consistent with Christian teaching on the Trinity. If one pushes the "oneness" of God too far, it likely leads to modalism, which is also inconsistent with a proper Christian view. Therefore, what is needed is a way of maintaining both the "threeness" and the "oneness" of God (i.e., μια ουσία, τρεις ὑπόστασεις). One of the most effective ways of doing this involves understanding that while the Father, Son, and Spirit are three distinct Persons, they exist in mutual, unified *relation* to one another (i.e., perichoresis).

relationship that exists at the very heart of ultimate reality.[497] This is the doctrine of perichoresis (περιχώρησις) or *circumincessio*, the Latin equivalent,[498] which goes back to at least Gregory of Nyssa, one of the Cappadocian Fathers of the fourth century, who states,

> For all the attributes of the Father are beheld in the Son, and all the attributes of the Son belong to the Father, in so much as the Son abides wholly in the Father and in turn has the Father wholly in Himself. Thus the person or "hypostasis" of the Son becomes as it were the form and countenance by which the Father is made known, and the person or "hypostasis" of the Father is made known in the form of the Son.[499]

Here, Gregory points out that the Son beholds the attributes of the Father and the Son's attributes belong to the Father, "in so much as *the Son abides wholly in the Father and in turn has the Father wholly in Himself*" (emphasis added). According to Gregory, the Father and Son abide wholly in one another in intimate relationship, where each fully knows and beholds the other.

Although there were others who spoke on perichoresis before him, John of Damascus, writing in the seventh and eighth centuries, was largely responsible for adopting the concept and developing it in a fuller sense with respect to the Trinity.[500] According to John,

> For the subsistences dwell in one another, in no wise confused by cleaving together, according to the word of the Lord, *I am in the Father, and the Father in Me*...they are made one not so as to commingle, but so as to cleave to each other, and they have their being in each other without any coalescence or commingling. . . . For the Deity is undivided amongst things divided, to put it concisely: and it is just like three suns cleaving to each other without separation and giving out light mingled and conjoined in

---

[497] W. David Beck, "God's Existence," in R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas, *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 176-177.

[498] Millard Erickson explains, "In Latin, the term came to be translated by two words, which represent two different understandings of the nature of persons, and which together capture the full meaning of the Greek. The word, *circumincessio*, means literally 'to be seated in.' It conveys the more static conception of being located within one another. The word, *circumincessio*, is a more dynamic concept. It comes from a word meaning to permeate or interpenetrate. Together, these ideas as found in *perichoresis*, mean both permanence of location with respect to another and ongoing interchange or sharing." Millard Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 230.

[499] *Epistle* 38, 8; translation by R. Deferrari, *Saint Basil. The Letters* (New York, NY: Putnam's, 1926), 227.

[500] Ibid., 229.

one. . . . The subsistences dwell and are established firmly in one another. For they are inseparable and cannot part from one another, but keep to their separate courses within one another, without coalescing or mingling, but cleaving to one another. For the Son is in the Father and the Spirit: and the Spirit is in the Father and the Son: and the Father in the Son and the Spirit, but there is no coalescing or commingling or confusion.[501]

As John indicates, the doctrine of perichoresis grasps the circulatory character of the triune God, where the "subsistences dwell in one another" and are "established firmly in one another." Perichoresis is seen in the mutual cleaving of the Trinitarian Persons, where "[t]he Father exists in the Son, the Son in the Father, and both of them in the Spirit, just as the Spirit exists in both the Father and the Son."[502]

There are several instances where perichoresis is described in Scripture. First, as mentioned by John in the statement above, perichoresis is seen in John 14:11, when Jesus says, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me." Second, the loving communion among the three Persons of the Godhead is also evidenced in John 17:1 and John 16:14. In John 17:1, Jesus prays to the Father: "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you." In John 16:14, Jesus says that the Holy Spirit "will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you." Therefore, the Father glorifies the Son and the Son glorifies the Father, while the Holy Spirit also glorifies the Son. The mutual giving and receiving of glory within the Trinity is evidence of the close, loving relations that exist within God. Third, the Father sends the Son (Jn. 3:16), and the Spirit proceeds from the Father and was sent by the Son (Jn. 15:26), which is another example of perichoresis. Fourth, 1 John 4:8 says, "God is love." This verse has profound Trinitarian implications. As Erickson articulates,

The statement "God is love" in 1 John is a very basic characterization of God, which cannot be understood simply as a definition or an equation, but is more than merely, "God is loving." The Trinity is three persons so closely bound together that they are

---

[501] John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 1.8; 1.14.

[502] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1981), 174.

actually one. In a sense, God being love virtually requires that he be more than one person. Love, to be love, must have both a subject and an object. Thus, if there were not multiplicity in the person of the Godhead, God could not really be love prior to this creation of other subjects. For love to be genuine, there must be someone whom God could love, and this would necessarily be more than mere narcissism. The Father loves the Son; the Son loves the Father; the Father loves the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit loves the Father; the Son loves the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit loves the Son. The fact that God is three persons rather than merely two also is a demonstration of the character of love. There is an old statement, "Two's company; three's a crowd." It is possible for two human persons to have a relationship of love for one another that is much more difficult for three persons to have among themselves. Two persons may simply reciprocate love, not having to share the other person's love with anyone else. With three persons, there must be a greater quality of selflessness, of genuine *agape*. Thus the Trinity founded upon love is a demonstration of the full nature of *agape*.[503]

In order for genuine love to exist there must be both a subject and an object, a giver and receiver of love. Therefore, if there were not multiple Persons within the Godhead, God could not really be love prior to the creation of other subjects outside himself.[504] This is more than self-love, which leads to narcissism. It is a *self-giving* love, where the fullness of love is shared in reciprocal fashion among the three Persons of the Trinity.[505]

---

[503] Erickson, *God in Three Persons*, 221-222.

[504] Similarly, Lewis proclaims, "All sorts of people are fond of repeating the Christian statement that 'God is love.' But they seem not to notice that the words 'God is love' have no real meaning unless God contains at least two Persons. Love is something that one person has for another person. If God was a single person, then before the world was made, He was not love." Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 174. In *The Screwtape Letters*, he suggests (via a demon), "This impossibility He calls *love*, and this same monotonous panacea can be detected under all He does and even all He is—or claims to be. Thus He is not content, even Himself, to be a sheer arithmetical unity; He claims to be three as well as one, in order that this nonsense about Love may find a foothold in His own nature." C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2001), 94.

[505] Although it is impossible to fully conceive of how God can be one and three at the same time but not in the same sense, the doctrine of perichoresis serves as a safeguard against several Trinitarian errors. First, the intimate relationships among the three divine Persons, and by virtue of the fact that they live and dwell within one another in eternal love to the extent that they are actually one, guards against the notion that the three Persons are separate individuals and the concept of the Trinity is tritheistic. Erickson, *God in Three Persons*, 228. Second, the doctrine of perichoresis links together the threeness and the oneness of God, without reducing the threeness to the oneness, or dissolving the oneness in the threeness. The unity of the tri-unity, the eternal perichoresis that exists within the Godhead, guards against modalistic thinking. Third, through the concept of perichoresis, subordinationism is avoided. In perichoresis and because of it, the three Persons are co-equal; they live and manifest themselves in and through one another. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 174-176.

189

The doctrine of perichoresis provides a proper ground for claiming that God is not only personal in and because of his dealings with humans, but that God is *personal within himself*. Because God is fundamentally a community of divine Persons who displays love and functions in harmony within himself (i.e., tri-personal), a unified Being where each Person of the Trinity dwells within the others in mutual communion, God's very nature is *personal*. On a practical note, perichoresis reveals that God is no distant deity who foregoes intimate interaction with persons; rather, God is *intrinsically personal* and therefore reaches out in love and offers humans what they most desperately need—a *personal relationship* with himself. The tri-personal God of Christianity loves and can be loved, hears the prayers of individuals and forgives those who turn to him in repentance, cares about the well-being of those whom he has created and offers them guidelines, along with the ability (by his Spirit), to flourish as humans made in his image.

Incarnation

The Incarnation, another doctrine unique to the Christian faith, holds that the second divine Person of the Trinity, became a human person at a specific point in time, being born as a baby and living life on earth as the God-man.[506] Jesus, as "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature," further reveals the deeply personal nature of the Triune God (Heb. 1:3). The personality of Jesus who appeared on earth did not begin with his human birth; rather, it was the personality of an eternal Person—the eternal Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity.[507] Interestingly, it is the perichoretic relations of the three Persons of the Trinity that

---

[506] A quote from Owen is helpful here: "The arguments of natural theology point to God as First Cause, Designer, and Moral Ground. They also suggest that God is personal. The moral goes farther than the others in requiring a God of love who will remedy our weakness and grant us the beatitude of life with him forever. Yet however much the moral argument may require an omnipotent God of love it cannot reveal him with the fulness and finality that we need for our salvation. The only full and final revelation is given in Christ who is God manifest in human form." Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism*, 109-110.

[507] Hastings Rashdall, *God and Man* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1930), 79.

allows Jesus, God's Son, to refer to God as his Father, and God the Father to refer to Jesus as his Son; this personal relationship is one that exists *within* the life of God.[508] Further, it is the Incarnation—the union of the human personality and the divine personality in the Person of Christ—which makes it possible for the Holy Spirit to enter fully into human personality for the first time, a more intimate and personal relationship between God and man,[509] whereby God dwells not only *with*, but *within* human persons.[510]

Not only does Christ further reveal the intensely personal nature of the Triune God; he is also the embodiment of the moral law in human form (of course, Jesus was also divine). Jesus is the objective standard of moral perfection in a Person, he dispenses moral knowledge throughout his earthly ministry (e.g., The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7),[511] faultlessly exemplifies the moral values that he teaches about (e.g., goodness, justice, love, gratitude, etc.), issues moral obligations, and is ultimately the One who makes humankind's moral transformation possible through his death and resurrection. Moreover, Jesus not only pronounces the highest ideal of the

---

[508] Webb, *God and Personality*, 81-83.

[509] H. Maurice Relton, "The Christian Contribution to the Conception of Eternal Life," in *King's College Lectures on Immortality*, ed. W. R. Matthews (London: London Press, 1920), 176.

[510] The Triune God moves closer to humankind throughout history, further illustrating the personal nature of the Godhead. First, God creates human persons and places them in the Garden (Gen. 1-2), pursues them in the Garden of Eden when the Fall occurs (Gen. 3), offers guidelines on how to live a holy life (Exodus 20, among other places), and so on throughout the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the second Person of the Trinity, Jesus, God's Son, takes on human flesh in order to dwell among human persons, ultimately making possible their personal relationship with God (Phil. 2:6-11). The third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, following Jesus' ascension to heaven at the beginning of Acts, is sent to indwell (live within) believers from the moment of their conversion. Creation (God *before* us) > Incarnation (God *with* us) > Indwelling (God *within* us). One might also add that for those who trust in God's plan of salvation, these human persons will one day dwell with God (in his presence) in personal relationship for all of eternity.

[511] Luthardt says this about the Sermon on the Mount: "When we consider the Sermon on the Mount, we find this thought in all those sayings in which moral perfection and love are traced back to God, who is holy and perfect, that we also may be holy, and who maketh His sun to rise upon the evil and the good." Christoph Ernst Luthardt, *Apologetics Lectures on the Moral Truths of Christianity*, trans. Sophia Taylor (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1873), 23.

moral and religious life; he also demonstrates a proper relation between God and man (e.g.,

consider Jesus' relationship with the Father while Jesus was on Earth), and makes possible for

others to experience a similar personal relationship with God. This is an exciting reality, no

doubt—the very thought that God has personally and visibly entered into human history, making

possible humankind's reconciliation to God, the very source of the moral law, should give rise to

excitement within one's soul. The Christian affirmation is that God has made a saving revelation

of himself in and through the personality of Jesus Christ, and that virtually everything Christ

does for human persons while on Earth is for the purpose of taking them deeper into personal

fellowship with the eternal God.[512] Therefore, as Owen puts it, "Christian ethics….are radically

personal. They are grounded in the person of Christ, the only Son of God."[513]

On Christian theism, God is understood to be personal, One who is "definitive of

goodness, love, justice, power and order, and that 'his intention is to create a certain personal

relation between Himself and us.'"[514] Humans are made by the Trinitarian God, and made for

God; therefore, they are to find in God the very center of their lives and the end for which they

were destined.[515] Man's highest happiness is to enter into a loving personal relationship with

God, made possible by Christ's death and resurrection, for this is the end for which he was

created.[516] Therefore, on the Christian view,

> Our end is not Nirvana, not annihilation, absorption, not a supra-personal or impersonal
> existence within the divine, but *Communion*, with its sense of dependence, likeness, need,

---

[512] Farmer, *The World and God*, 170, 181.

[513] Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism*, 115.

[514] C. S. Lewis, *The World's Last Night and Other Essays* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2017), 25.

[515] Luthardt, *Apologetic Lectures on the Moral Truths of Christianity*, 72.

[516] Ibid., 77.

desire, knowledge of exhaustless possibility of a higher becoming as a result of its vital union with the Eternal Divine Fullness of God.[517]

Analysis of Hypotheses

Throughout this dissertation, twenty-three pieces of evidence were gathered, each pointing toward the existence of a personal God. In this chapter, several metaphysical systems were briefly examined against these evidences, with many seeming to fall flat in their ability to account for the profoundly personal nature of morality and the apparent need for a transcendent personal source. For example, it is hard to comprehend how naturalism and Platonism, which are altogether non-personal, can account for the personal nature of moral phenomena. Of course, this is not to say that naturalism and Platonism have nothing to say about morality; rather, they are in lacking explanatory power when it comes to explaining and grounding its personal nature. Additionally, Eastern religions (including both pantheism and polytheism) and Islam were quickly discussed, and it was suggested that these belief systems arguably fail to provide a God (or gods) who are personal to the highest degree possible, that is, *intrinsically* personal. Based on the nature of these belief systems, they likely possess more plausibility than naturalism and Platonism, at least when it comes to providing a transcendent personal source as the ground for morality. Similar to naturalism and Platonism, these belief systems likely have much to say when it comes to the moral enterprise as a whole, but they are found wanting when it comes to providing a conception of God that is thoroughly personal in nature.

The final metaphysical system considered, Christianity, provides a plausible and robust explanation of a God who is personal to the highest degree possible, namely, One who is

---

[517] Relton, "The Christian Contribution to the Conception of Eternal Life," in *King's College Lectures on Immortality*, 202.

intrinsically personal. If this is the case, the Christian view, in comparison to the other examined views, likely possesses the most explanatory power. As with other conceptions of God (e.g., the Islamic God, Allah), the Judeo-Christian God is described as One who performs person-like acts and possesses person-like attributes, but the fundamental difference with Christianity—the two doctrines that set Christianity apart from the rest when it comes to providing a God who is intrinsically personal—are the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation.

The Trinity, particularly the perichoretic personal relationships of the three Persons within the Trinity, demonstrate that the Judeo-Christian God is One who is, and has always been, personal. In fact, on Christian theism, one can argue that it is precisely a *personal relationship* that exists at the very center of ultimate reality. If one is looking for a God who is a self-conscious Being, One who thinks, feels, wills, and acts, and One who is capable of loving and being loved by others, Christianity provides a convincing explanation.

The Incarnation further demonstrates the personal nature of the Triune God, whereby the second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, steps down from his heavenly abode, taking on the form of a human person, embodying the moral law in human form and further revealing God's desire to be in loving relationship with those whom he has created. In terms of explanatory scope, Christianity is able to account for the two-dozen evidences provided in this dissertation, in addition to accounting for a number of other important facts in additional areas. For these reasons, Christianity arguably possesses the most explanatory scope and power, and is the most plausible view to hold, especially when it comes to accounting for the immensely personal nature of morality by providing a God who is intrinsically personal.

Other Evidence That God is Personal

On top of the evidences for a personal God gathered in the present work on morality, there are additional indicators of the existence of a personal God. First, one may argue that design points in the direction of a personal God in several ways: (1) marks of contrivance—evidences of inventing, devising, or planning—within the universe point to a divine Contriver; (2) design implies purpose and purpose points to a personal will; (3) the earth is optimally suited for human life, which indicates not just intentional design but that the Designer cares—and caring is a personal attribute; (4) information, such as what is found in DNA, points to a personal intelligence; and (5) the design of the universe evokes a sense of awe, wonder, and reverence in human persons—which seemingly makes more sense when directed toward a personal God.[518]

Second, another indicator of a personal God has to do with the miraculous. If there is evidence that miracles occur,[519] it is reasonable to infer that they are the result of a personal God. A miracle is presumably an act of a personal God; therefore, any religion that denies the existence of a personal God or lacks the idea of such a being in its belief structure arguably has no conceptual place for a miracle.[520] Farmer puts it this way:

> It is of the highest importance to approach the concept of miracle from within the sphere of personal relations with God; only thus can it be rescued from the gross misunderstanding and ill-repute into which it has fallen, and be restored in thought to that position which, despite all the admitted difficulties and confusions, it has never entirely lost in living and spontaneous Christian experience. It is significant that, whilst attempts have often been made to retain a place for prayer and for a species of trust in Providence

---

[518] Some of these thoughts originally appeared in the introductory chapter to this dissertation (chapter 1).

[519] For evidence of miracles, see Craig S. Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*, vols. 1 and 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011). Also see Eric Metaxas, *Miracles* (New York, NY: Plume, 2015).

[520] David K. Clark, "Miracles in the World Religions," in R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas, *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997), 202-203.

along with a fundamentally impersonal conception of God, the attempt is never made to retain a place for miracle under the same conditions, saving in a form that evacuates it of all its distinctive meaning. This would suggest that the issue between personal and impersonal conceptions of God reaches sharpest definition in relation to the concept of miracle.[521]

Third, oddly enough, the hiddenness of God may be evidence of God's desire to be in a loving personal relationship with those whom he has created. This claim seems counterintuitive, no doubt. However, if God were to boldly and powerfully reveal his existence in some manner, perhaps through a miraculous appearance or event of some kind, in the face of such overwhelming evidence, each person's mind would likely be overpowered with light and belief would be practically coerced.[522] True love is a respecter of freedom; in the absence of free choice, the possibility of genuine love seemingly dissipates.[523] If what God wants more than

---

[521] Farmer, *The World and God*, 17.

[522] This is one line of response to the argument. For more on this, see Chad Meister, *Evil: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing, 2012), 56. Also see Travis Dumsday, "Divine Hiddenness, Free-Will, and the Victims of Wrongdoing," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers* 27, no. 4 (2010), 424; Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 205-208; and Michael J. Murray, "Deus Absconditus," in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, eds. Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul Moser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 65-66.

[523] This point regarding God's divine hiddenness is not without its skeptics. There are many who would balk at the idea that God's hiddenness is indirect evidence of his personal nature. For example, one might ask: Does this idea suggest that in those places where God did perform miraculous signs (e.g., those who saw the resurrected Jesus, the parting of the Red Sea, etc.), that those who saw them had less capacity to love God? One might also ask something like this: Since one has indisputable evidence of his wife's existence, does that infringe upon his free will and therefore reduce his ability to love her? To the first question, it really is not a matter of capacity so much as it is provided revelation. The question in that case would be, "Did God provide more revelation to some than others?" The answer is, in the case of miracles, yes. This is a particularly tricky problem for Christians. One way to respond is by considering this question: "Did he provide enough revelation to all human beings such that they are culpable for their response to his existence?" In response to the question, yes, it seems that all humans who have ever lived are morally culpable for recognizing God's existence and this subsequently requires a moral response to God. This, however, is not the consensus view among philosophers. Many Christian philosophers think that there are at least some instances of "nonresistant unbelief" where the atheist is genuinely open to belief but has not been given sufficient evidence through revelation. At best, God gave inconclusive evidence in the experience of at least some people, but a loving omnipotent God would have given at least enough evidence to warrant knowledge of his existence. Unfortunately, a full response to this would take an entire dissertation or more. Among other things, one could point to his full theodicy as the preponderance of evidence which overall points to the Christian worldview. The Christian response to the second question is a bit simpler. Revelation of a wife's existence is not equivalent to the revelation of God's existence. God's complete presence is infinitely more overwhelming and coercive than that of any human (e.g., Moses had to hide behind the rock when God passed by).

anything else of human persons is for them to love him (Mt. 22:37), and if love respects human freedom, there is reason to believe that God's hiddenness is what makes possible, at least in part, each person's free choice to enter into loving relationship with him. If God were to absolutely prove it all, putting into place every final piece necessary for proving his existence both empirically and philosophically, it is at least possible, according to John Henry Newman, that human persons would take God for granted, much like a tree outside one's window. As Chuck Colson once said to Antony Flew during the question and answer time of Flew's conversation with Gary Habermas at Oxbridge in 2005, "If we knew for certain that he were God, or if he took away our free will, then we would not have the capacity to love him. That is exactly why he created us. Do not think you will ever get past that point. If you ever do get past that point, you will have talked yourself out of the ability to love God."[524]

Practical Implications

It is important to note that the loss of a personal foundation in morality is not merely an academic concern; it is a concern that also stretches to the practical realm due to its effect on humanity's understanding of who God is and how one relates to him. As Farmer once noted, "[T]o expound the thought of God as personal, and to help to restore it to a more living and central place in the experience and witness of Christian men and women, is one of the major tasks of the theologian today."[525] For many people in religious traditions across the world, the concept that God is personal is a necessary and fundamental part of religious belief. If God were

---

[524] Chuck Colson as quoted in David Baggett, Gary R. Habermas, and Jerry L. Walls, eds., *C. S. Lewis as Philosopher: Knowledge, Truth, and Beauty* (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University Press, 2017), 44. There are other areas where evidence for the existence of a personal God is available. However, due to time and space constraints, these three (design, miracles, and divine hiddenness) are mentioned here. Other areas of evidence may include Near Death Experiences (NDEs), fulfilled prophecy, the resurrection of Jesus, etc.

[525] Farmer, *The World and God*, 15.

not personal,[526] it would be improper to think of him as intelligent, creative, moral, or loving; it would also seem counterintuitive to speak of him as One with whom humans can have a personal relationship, One who can be trusted, cares for his people and listens to their prayers, and so on. In short, to talk of these matters in a sensible manner and experience them in daily living requires that God is personal.[527]

Not only is a non-personal conception of God deeply unsatisfying, it stands in stark contrast to the nature of the Judeo-Christian God, as revealed in the Bible, and how he desires for individuals to live in the world he has created. Morality in general and the Bible in particular reveals that God is no distant deity who foregoes intimate interaction with human persons; rather, he is *intrinsically personal* and therefore reaches out in love and offers humans what they most desperately need—*a personal relationship with himself*—which ultimately makes possible the restoration of their souls. To experience love in intimate, personal relationship with God is to experience a final and all-inclusive peace and joy. In the presence of *this* God, one is no longer faced with an argument demanding one's assent, but rather with a loving Person who demands one's full confidence and trust.

A Foundation for Future Work

The attempt of this dissertation has been to present evidence for the existence of a personal God of love. This has been no exhaustive treatment of the matter and has certainly been unable to consider all possible objections. The goal has been to lay something of a foundation,

---

[526] Farmer explains the damaging result of denying God's personal nature in the following terms: "[I]n proportion as God is explicitly denied personal quality, the distinctive religious attitudes of worship, adoration, trust, obedience become for most men only attainable, if attainable at all, by a certain strain or effort, a certain artificiality or 'non-spontaneity.'" H. H. Farmer, *Towards Belief in God* (London: SCM, 1942), 18.

[527] Rudi A. Te Velde, "The Divine Person(s): Trinity, Person, and Analogous Naming," in Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 359.

hopefully prompting work in the future on this important topic. Lastly, if anything beneficial has been said in this dissertation, and more importantly, if anything that builds the kingdom of God in any way has been presented, *soli Deo gloria*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adams, Marilyn McCord. *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

Adams, Robert. *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Aquinas, Thomas. *De Potentia Dei*, q.9, a.3, co.

Athanasius. *Against Heathen* in L. Russ Bush, *Classical Readings in Christian Apologetics: A.D. 100-1800* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983).

Audi, Robert. "Moderate Intuitionism and the Epistemology of Moral Judgment," *Ethical Theory and Practice*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1998): 15-44.

Ayer, A. J. *Language, Truth, and Logic* (London: Gollancz, 1936).

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

_____. *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011).

_____. *The Moral Argument: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

Baggett, David and Marybeth Baggett. *The Morals of the Story: Good News About a Good God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018).

Baggett, David. "Moral Apologetics & Christian Theology," *Moral Apologetics*, published February 10, 2021, accessed February 19, 2021, https://www.moralapologetics.com/wordpress/2021/2/10/moral-apologetics-amp-christian-theology.

_____. "On *Psychopathy* and Moral Apologetics," Moral Apologetics, published December 11, 2014, accessed February 24, 2020, https://www.moralapologetics.com/wordpress/on-psychopathy-and-moral-apologetics?rq=psychopath.

_____. "Pro: The Moral Argument is Convincing," in *C. S. Lewis's Christian Apologetics: Pro and Con*, ed. Gregory Bassham (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2015).

Balfour, Arthur James. *Theism and Humanism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915).

Beck, W. David. "God's Existence," in R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas, eds., *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997).

Beckwith, Francis J. *Defending Life: A Moral and Legal Case Against Abortion Choice* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Bedke, Matthew S. "Cognitivism and Non-Cognitivism," in Tristram McPherson and David Plunkett, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017).

Bissex, Michael. "The Objectivity of Ethics: A Response to J. L. Mackie's Error Theory," *The Catholic Social Science Review*, vol. 24 (2019): 75-89.

Blackburn, Simon. *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

_____. *Spreading the Word: Groundings in the Philosophy of Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

Bray, Gerald. *The Personal God: Is the classical understanding of God tenable?* (Carlisle, CA: Paternoster Press, 1998).

Brighouse, M. H. "Blackburn's Projectivism: An Objection," *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 59 (1990): 225-233.

Brink, David O. "Moral Realism and the Sceptical Arguments from Disagreement and Queerness," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 62, no. 2 (1984): 111-125.

_____. *The Autonomy of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Brody, Baruch. *Abortion and the Sanctity of Human Life: A Philosophical View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1975).

Brower, J. E. "Simplicity and Aseity," in Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Burns, Elizabeth. "Must Theists Believe in a Personal God?" *The Royal Institute of Philosophy*, *Think* 23, vol. 8 (Autumn 2009): 77-86.

Bush, L. Russ. "Athanasius," in *Classical Readings in Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983).

Campbell, D. E. and R. D. Putnam. *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2010).

Campbell, Jr., Ronnie P. *Worldviews and the Problem of Evil* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019).

Carnell, Edward John. *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948).

Cave, Peter. *Humanism* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2009).

Clark, David K. "Miracles in the World Religions," in R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas, *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997).

Clarke, W. Norris. *Explorations in Metaphysics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).

Copan, Paul and Mark D. Linville. *The Moral Argument* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011).

Copan, Paul and Matthew Flannagan. *Did God Really Command Genocide? Coming to Terms with the Justice of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2014).

Copan, Paul. *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011).

_____. *True for You, But Not For Me* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1998).

Craig, William Lane and Erik J. Wielenberg. *A Debate on God and Morality: What is the Best Account of Objective Moral Values and Duties?*, ed. Adam Lloyd Johnson (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021).

Craig, William Lane and J. P. Moreland. *Philosophical Foundations For a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

Craig, William Lane and Joe Gorra. *A Reasonable Response: Answers to Tough Questions on God, Christianity, and the Bible* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2013).

Craig, William Lane. "On the Goodness of God," published December 9, 2012, https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/question-answer/on-the-goodness-of-god.

_____. *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2010).

_____. *Reasonable Faith*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

Creel, Richard E. *Divine Impassibility: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

Cuneo, Terence. "Saying What We Mean: An Argument Against Expressivism," in Russ Shafer-Landau, ed., *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

_____. *The Normative Web: An Argument for Moral Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Davies, Brian. *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil* (London, Continuum, 2006).

Davies, Brian. *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Davis, Stephen T. "God's Actions," in R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas, *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997).

Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion* (New York, NY: Mariner Books, 2008).

De Burgh, W. G. *From Morality to Religion* (London: MacDonald & Evans, 1938).

DeLapp, Kevin. *Moral Realism* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

Dore, Clement. "A Moral Argument" in *Theism* (Boston, MA: D. Reidel, 1984).

Dumsday, Travis. "Divine Hiddenness, Free-Will, and the Victims of Wrongdoing," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers* 27, no. 4 (2010), 423-438.

Epistle 38, 8; translation by R. Deferrari, *Saint Basil. The Letters* (New York, NY: Putnam's, 1926).

Erickson, Millard. *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013).

_____. *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995).

Euthyphro, trans. Lane Cooper, in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961).

Evans, C. Stephen. *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Ewing, A. C. *The Morality of Punishment: With Some Suggestions for a General Theory of Ethics* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1929).

_____. *Value and Reality: The Philosophical Case for Theism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973).

_____. *Value and Reality: The Philosophical Case for Theism* (London: Routledge, 2016).

Farmer, H. H. *The World and God: A Study of Prayer, Providence and Miracle in Christian Experience* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1933).

_____. *Towards Belief in God* (London: SCM, 1942).

Feser, Edward. *Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009).

Fisher, Andrew. *Metaethics: An Introduction* (Durham: Acumen, 2011).

Friedman, R. Z. "Does the 'Death of God' Really Matter?" *International Philosophical Quarterly* 23 (1983): 321-332.

Geach, P. T. "Ascriptivism," *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 69, no. 2 (April 1960): 221-225;

_____. "Assertion," *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 74, no. 4 (October 1965): 449-465.

George, Robert P. "Embryo Ethics," *Daedalus*, Winter 2008.

Gibbard, Allan. *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings. A Theory of Normative Judgement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

Guinness, Os. *God in the Dark: The Assurance of Faith Beyond a Shadow of Doubt* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

Habermas, Jürgen. *Time of Transitions*, ed. and trans. Ciaran Cronin and Max Pensky (Cambridge: Polity, 2006).

Hare, John E. *God and Morality: A Philosophical History* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007).

_____. *God's Call: Moral Realism, God's Commands, and Human Autonomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001).

_____. *God's Command* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

_____. *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

Hare, R. M. *Essays in Ethical Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

_____. *Moral Thinkings: Its Levels, Methods and Point* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

_____. *Sorting Out Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

_____. *The Language of Morals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952).

Hart, David Bentley. *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

John of Damascus. *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 1.8; 1.14.

Johnston, Jeremiah J. *Unimaginable: What Our World Would Be Like without Christianity* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2017).

Jones, Clay. *Why Does God Allow Evil? Compelling Answers for Life's Toughest Questions* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2017).

Jordan, Stephen S. "C. S. Lewis and 8 Reasons for Believing in Objective Morality," Moral Apologetics, published January 18, 2019, accessed January 26, 2020, https://www.moralapologetics.com/wordpress/2019/1/18/c-s-lewis-and-8-reasons-for-believing-in-objective-morality.

Joyce, Richard. *The Evolution of Morality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004).

_____. *Groundwork in the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. H. J. Paton (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1964).

_____. *Lectures in Ethics*, trans. Louis Infield (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1963).

_____. *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (New York: Abaris Books, 1979).

Keener, Craig S. *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*, vols. 1 and 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

Kuhse, Helga and Peter Singer. *Should the Baby Live? The Problem of Handicapped Infants* (New York, NY: Oxford, 1985).

Kurtz, Paul. *Forbidden Fruit* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1988).

Leftow, Brian. "Anselm's Perfect-Being Theology," in Brian Davies and Brian Leftow, eds., *Cambridge Companion to Anselm* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

_____. "God's Deontic Perfection," *Res Philosophica*, vol. 90 (2013): 81-92.

_____. "Is God an Abstract Object?" *Nous*, 24 (1990), 581-598.

_____. "Naturalistic Pantheism," in Andrei A. Buckareff and Yujin Nagasawa, eds., *Alternative Concepts of God: Essays on the Metaphysics of the Divine* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Lemos, John. "The Problems with Emotivism," *Journal of Philosophical Research*, vol. 25 (January 2000): 285-309.

Lewis, C. S. *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014).

_____. *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001).

_____. *Miracles* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001).

_____. *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001).

_____. *The Problem of Pain* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001).

_____. *The Screwtape Letters* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2001).

_____. *The Weight of Glory* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001).

_____. *The World's Last Night and Other Essays* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2017).

Licona, Michael R. *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010).

Linville, Mark D. "God is Necessary for Morality" in Michael Peterson and Ray VanArragon, eds., *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd edition (Wiley-Blackwell, 2019).

_____. "Moral Argument" in Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Religion* (Blackwell).

_____. "The Moral Argument," in William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

Luthardt, Christoph Ernst. *Apologetic Lectures on the Moral Truths of Christianity*, trans. Sophia Taylor (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1873).

Macintyre, Alisdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

Mackie, J. L. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, reprint (London: Penguin Books, 1990).

_____. *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

Manson, T. W. *Ethics and the Gospel* (London: SCM Press, 1960).

Marks, Joel. *Ethics without Morals: In Defence of Amorality* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013).

_____. *Hard Atheism and the Ethics of Desire: An Alternative to Morality* (Gewerbestrasse: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

Martineau, James. *Types of Ethical Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889).

Matthews, W. R. *Studies in Christian Philosophy* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1921).

Mavrodes, George. "Religion and the Queerness of Morality" in *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*, eds. Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986).

Mawson, T. J. *Belief in God: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005).

_____. *The Divine Attributes* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

McDowell, Sean. *Ethix: Being Bold in a Whatever World* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2006).

McInerny, Ralph. "The Poverty of Prescriptivism," *Am. J. Juris*, vol. 17, (1972).

Meister, Chad. *Evil: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing, 2012).

Metaxas, Eric. *Amazing Grace: William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2007).

_____. *Miracles* (New York, NY: Plume, 2015).

Meyer, Stephen C. *Signature in the Cell: DNA and the Evidence for Intelligent Design* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2009).

Milliken, John. "*Euthyphro*, the Good, and the Right," *Philosophia Christia* 11:1 (2009), 145-155.

Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1981).

Moreland, J. P. "Humanness, Personhood, and the Right to Die," *Faith and Philosophy* 12.1 (January 1995): 95-112.

_____. *Love Your God with All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1997).

_____. *Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987).

Morris, Thomas V. *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986).

Moser, Paul K. "Cognitive Idolatry and Divine Hiding," in Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul K. Moser, eds., *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Muller, Richard A. *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology*, second edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017).

Murray, Michael J. "Deus Absconditus," in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, eds. Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul Moser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Islam: Religion, History, and Civilization* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2002).

Newman, John Henry. *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (London: Burns, Oates, & Co., 1874).

Nielson, Kai. *Ethics without God* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1990).

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter A. Kaufmann and Reginald J. Hollingdale (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1968).

_____. *Twilight of the Idols* in Walter Kaufmann, ed. and trans., *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1982).

Oman, John. *Grace and Personality*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1919).

Oppy, Graham. *Describing Gods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

Owen, H. P. *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1965).

Page, Ben. "Wherein Lies the Debate? Concerning Whether God is a Person," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 85 (June 2019): 297-317.

Paley, William. *Natural Theology: Or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of The Deity, Collected From the Appearances of Nature* (London: Wilks and Taylor, 1803).

Pearcey, Nancy. *Finding Truth: 5 Principles for Unmasking Atheism, Secularism, and Other God Substitutes* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2015).

_____. *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004).

Plantinga, Alvin. "Advice to Christian Philosophers," *Faith and Philosophy*: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers, vol. 1, issue 3 (1984): 253-271.

_____. *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

_____. *Warrant: The Current Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

_____. *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000).

_____. *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Pouivet, Roger. "Against Theistic Personalism: What Modern Epistemology Does to Classical Theism," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2018): 8.

Rachel, James. *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1993).

Railton, Peter. "Moral Realism," *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 95, no. 2 (April 1986): 163-207.

Rashdall, Hastings. *God and Man* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1930).

_____. *King's College Lectures on Immortality*, ed. W. R. Matthews (London: London Press, 1920).

_____. *Philosophy and Religion*, (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916).

_____. *The Theory of Good and Evil*, vols. 1&2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907).

Reichenbach, Bruce R. "Knowledge, Truth, and Value in the Narnian Chronicles" in David Baggett, Gary R. Habermas, and Jerry L. Walls, eds., *C. S. Lewis as Philosopher: Knowledge, Truth, and Beauty* (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University Press, 2017).

Relton, H. Maurice. "The Christian Contribution to the Conception of Eternal Life," in *King's College Lectures on Immortality*, ed. W. R. Matthews (London: London Press, 1920).

Richard of St. Victor. *De Trinitate*, III.2

Rist, John M. *Real Ethics: Rethinking the Foundations of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Ritchie, Angus. *From Morality to Metaphysics: The Theistic Implications of our Ethical Commitments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Robinson, Daniel N. *Praise and Blame: Moral Realism and Its Applications* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

Ross, W. D. *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946).

Ruse, Michael. *Darwinism Defended* (London: Addison-Wesley, 1982).

Scalise, Brian T. "Tawḥīdic Allah or the Trinity in View of Inherent Human Relatedness" (PhD diss., Liberty University Rawlings School of Divinity, 2014), *Doctoral Dissertations and Projects*, 922, https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/922.

_____. *Trinity and Allah in Anthropological Perspective* (Self-published, CreateSpace, 2014).

Schroeder, Mark. "What is the Frege-Geach Problem?" *Philosophy Compass*, vol. 3, issue 4 (July 2008): 703-720.

Schueler, G. F. "Modus Ponens and Moral Realism," *Ethics*, vol. 98, no. 3 (April 1988): 492-500.

Shafer-Landau, Russ, ed. *Oxford Studies in Metaethics, vol. 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

_____. *Moral Realism: A Defense* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Singer, Peter. "Sanctity of Life or Quality of Life?" *Pediatrics* 73 (July 1973).

_____. "Should We Trust Our Moral Intuitions?" Project Syndicate, published March 2007, accessed June 30, 2019, https://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/200703--.htm.

_____. *Rethinking Life and Death: The Collapse of Traditional Ethics* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994).

Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter. *Morality Without God?* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Smith, R. Scott. *In Search of Moral Knowledge: Overcoming the Fact-Value Dichotomy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014).

Sorley, W. R. *Moral Values and the Idea of God: The Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of Aberdeen in 1914 and 1915* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918).

_____. *Moral Values and the Idea of God*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: MacMillan, 1930).

Stark, Rodney. "Why Gods Should Matter in Social Science," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 49, no. 39 (June 6, 2003): B7.

_____. "Why Gods Should Matter in Social Science," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 49, no. 39 (June 6, 2003): B7; also available online at http://chronicle.com/free/v49/i39/39b00701.htm.

_____. *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

_____. *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (New York, NY: Random House, 2005).

Stevenson, Charles L. *Ethics and Language* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1944).

Stump, Eleonore. "Atonement According to Aquinas," in T. V. Morris, ed., *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1988).

Swinburne, Richard. *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

_____. *The Coherence of Theism*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Taylor, A. E. *The Faith of a Moralist* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1951).

Taylor, Richard. *Ethics, Faith, and Reason* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1985).

Te Velde, Rudi A. "The Divine Person(s): Trinity, Person, and Analogous Naming," in Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Tinder, Glen. *The Fabric of Hope* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

Tooley, Michael. "In Defense of Abortion and Infanticide," in *The Abortion Controversy 25 Years after Roe v. Wade*, 2nd ed., eds. Louis Pojman and Francis J. Beckwith (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1998).

_____. *Abortion and Infanticide* (New York, NY: Oxford, 1983).

Unwin, Nicholas. "Norms and Negation: A Problem for Gibbard's Logic," *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 51, issue 202 (January 2001): 60-75.

_____. "Quasi-Realism, Negation and the Frege-Geach Problem," *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 49, issue 196 (July 1999): 337-352.

Volf, Miroslav. *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006).

Ward, Keith. "Is God a Person?" in Gijsbert van den Brink, Luco J. van den Bron, and Marcel Sarot, eds., *Christian Faith and Philosophical Theology: Essays in Honour of Vincent Brummer* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1992).

Warren, Mary Anne. "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion," in *The Problem of Abortion*, ed. Joel Feinberg (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1984).

Webb, Clement C. J. *Divine Personality and Human Life* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1920).

_____. *God and Personality* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1920).

_____. *Kant's Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926).

_____. *Religion and Theism: The Forwood Lectures Delivered at Liverpool University, 1933* (Oxford: Unwin Brothers Ltd., 1934).

Wielenberg, Erik J. *Robust Ethics: The Metaphysics and Epistemology of Godless Normative Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

_____. *Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Wright, N. T. *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992).

Wurmbrand, Richard. *Tortured for Christ* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1967).