

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY  
RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

Humanity's Desire for Perfection:  
A Defense for Christian Theism

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the  
Rawlings School of Divinity  
Ph.D. in Theology & Apologetics

By  
Billy Camp  
March 2022  
Montgomery, AL

**RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY AT LIBERTY UNIVERSITY**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**IN THEOLOGY AND APOLOGETICS**

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Doctoral Degree Committee of Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University for acceptance, a Dissertation entitled *Humanity's Desire for Perfection: A Defense for Christian Theism*, presented by Billy Camp in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theology and Apologetics.

Committee Members:

Chair: Dr. Ronnie Campbell

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Reader #1: Dr. Chad Thornhill

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Reader #2: Dr. Leo Percer

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date:

## **ABSTRACT**

Amid the milieu of ethical theories and presuppositions about morals, a significant disconnect exists at the confluence of moral theories and human behavior. One may parse the issue as follows: If objective morals exist, humans are to live by them; however, no one lives a perfectly moral life. According to the moral standards identified by different theistic ethical theories (i.e., divine command theory, natural law, and virtue ethics), one may surmise that objective morals exist and that humans imperfectly live a moral life according to these standards. If it is the case that both secularists and theists recognize this issue, then explanations and solutions must be offered to alleviate the tension or else dispel the problem altogether. This study seeks to demonstrate that a person must receive some form of divine assistance from a perfectly moral being to live a moral life. Since God is both the source and the arbiter of morals, this study proposes that it is at least possible that He also provides the assistance needed for humans to live up to His expectations.

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## DEDICATION

To my wife, Shelby, and children, Kinley, Roman, and Lewis

*Thank you for the constant support, encouragement, and patience you have shown to me.*

*Without your help, I would not be where I am today.*

To my father-in-law, Matt Vega

*You became a father to me and treated me as your son. You have shown me what a faithful father*

*looks like to his family and God.*

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*“Morality is a mountain which we cannot climb by our own efforts; and if we could we should only perish in the ice and unbreathable air of the summit, lacking those wings with which the rest of the journey has to be accomplished. For it is from there that the real ascent begins. The ropes and axes are ‘done away’ and the rest is a matter of flying.”*<sup>1</sup>

-C. S. Lewis

## Chapter 1: The Research Problem

### Introduction

Why be moral? This question has dominated philosophical, sociological, and theological conversations throughout human history. Every society and culture has had to wrestle with identifying, evaluating, and implementing morality. This constitutes an essential element for creating a worldview. Although various worldviews explain why morals exist, there is still a gap between why someone feels compelled to live a moral life and why they fail to live by it perfectly.<sup>2</sup> Even within Christianity, the gap exists. The great theologian and apologist, C. S. Lewis, explained the issue best in responding to the perennial question, “If Christianity is true, why are not all Christians obviously nicer than all non-Christians?”<sup>3</sup> In response to this question, he says,

What lies behind that question is partly something very reasonable and partly something that is not reasonable at all. The reasonable part is this. If conversion to Christianity makes no improvement in a man’s outward actions—if he continues to be just as

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, “Man or Rabbit,” in *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 113.

<sup>2</sup>At this point in the research the author assumes there is an objective moral law, but this will be developed further in a later section. The following list of authors do not necessarily provide an argument for theism, but they provide reasons for taking objective morality seriously. Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); David O. Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*, Cambridge studies in philosophy (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Terence Cuneo, *The Normative Web: An Argument for Moral Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Kevin Michael DeLapp, *Moral Realism*, Bloomsbury ethics (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013); Andrew Fisher, *Metaethics: An Introduction* (Durham: Acumen Publishers, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity: A Revised and Amplified Edition, with a New Introduction, of the Three Books, Broadcast Talks, Christian Behaviour, and Beyond Personality*, 1st HarperCollins ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 207.

snobbish or spiteful or envious or ambitious as he was before—then I think we must suspect that his “conversion” was largely imaginary; and after one’s original conversion, every time one thinks one has made an advance, that is the test to apply. Fine feelings, new insights, greater interest in “religion” mean nothing unless they make our actual behavior better. . . .<sup>4</sup>

The problem elucidated by Lewis is a sad reality. Many people may accept in varying degrees a belief in objective morality. Still, if they exhibit no change or not even a desire to change, then they fail to respond to the very thing God established as a sign giving directions to him (i.e., morals).<sup>5</sup>

A person’s acquiescence to the moral law varies widely upon a spectrum. On one extreme, one may follow the moral law but fail to acknowledge God as the moral lawgiver. This is a crucial concept for moral apologetics because the moral argument rests upon the assumption that objective morals are identifiable by all people. However, their acquiescence to the moral law does not get them down the road. If it is possible to live a moral life with no assistance, God is removed from the equation. On the opposite extreme, there may be those who have bought into the fact that morals are a result of a divine moral lawgiver but fail to respond to them due to their rebelliousness or volitional obstinance. To this point, Lewis, once again, fitly describes the necessity of moral transformation,

The Christian way is different: harder, and easier. Christ says “Give me All. I don’t want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want You. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don’t want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. I don’t want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Immanuel Kant said it this way, “Two things fill the mind with every new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect upon them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me. I do not seek or conjecture either of them as if they were veiled obscurities or extravagances beyond the horizon of my vision; I see them before me and connect them immediately with the consciousness of my existence.” Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott, 4th revised ed., 1889.

you think wicked—the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself: my own will shall become yours.”<sup>6</sup>

The case Lewis makes is what Immanuel Kant called “Spener’s problem”: How do we become not just better men, but other men, new men?<sup>7</sup> In Kant’s view, humanity is under the evil maxim, and requires the “revolution of the will.”<sup>8</sup> Kant explains that a maxim is the subjective principle behind an action (i.e., the prescription behind an action). There are only two maxims: evil and good. A morally good maxim meets three criteria. First, they are specific enough to prescribe one good action rather than another. Second, they are general enough to be taught to children. Third, they are exceptionless, so it is never the case they should be broken. These are hard to illustrate with a good example, which has been one challenge in Kantian moral philosophy; however, Kant uses the categorical imperative as a litmus test.

The revolution of the will reverses the order of the evil maxim, which prioritizes inclination over duty, with the exact opposite. The prioritizing of the good is continual progress from bad to better, but in the sight of God, it is viewed as a unity which “amounts to his being actually a good man (pleasing to Him); and thus viewed, this change can be regarded as a revolution.”<sup>9</sup> Lewis also addresses the same problem and insists that “God became man to turn creatures into sons: not simply to produce better men of the old kind but to produce a new kind

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<sup>6</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007), 156–7.

<sup>7</sup> Immanuel Kant’s coining of the term “Spener’s Problem” is based on his response to the German pietist, Philipp Jakob Spener, who made the original statement. See Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (New York: Abaris Books, 1979), 97.

<sup>8</sup> More will be said concerning Kant’s view of the revolution of the will when John Hare’s view of moral transformation is assessed below.

<sup>9</sup> Immanuel Kant, Allen W. Wood, and George Di Giovanni, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, Cambridge texts in the history of philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

of man.”<sup>10</sup> The point to be derived from these statements is that humanity finds itself in a predicament regarding paltry attempts of living morally. Since people continually fail to live a moral life, one must appeal to some resource outside of himself or herself to resolve the problem or else lower the moral standard.

The requirement that humans must become someone or something new is a central tenet in Christianity. Although it comes in different forms of doctrine, the universal principle is the same—humans live a moral life imperfectly and need help. This observation raises a quintessential question for both theists and non-theists: Is it possible to live a moral life apart from outside assistance?

The moral landscape ranges drastically about this one point. The moral law is a vital component in establishing a multipronged defense of Christian theism—namely the defense of the monotheistic God of the Bible. The apologetic method of using the moral law to make a case for theism has been widely used throughout time.<sup>11</sup> It is a misnomer to say, “*The Moral Argument*,” as if there is but one definitive formulation or variant. There are many forms of the moral argument, which all share the common goal of showing how morality prescriptively construed points to theism.<sup>12</sup> Different apologists have created unique ways to structure the moral argument that land significant blows to naturalism. However, each argument elicits different objections. The variety of moral arguments, in addition to other theistic arguments—

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<sup>10</sup> Lewis, *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*, 170.

<sup>11</sup> For a few notable examples of authors who have accomplished the task of categorizing different ethical systems and their representatives as they use a version of the moral law, see John Hare, *God and Morality: A Philosophical History* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); David Baggett and Marybeth Baggett, *The Morals of the Story: Good News about a Good God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018); David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *The Moral Argument: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>12</sup> For an explanation of various moral arguments see Baggett and Walls, *The Moral Argument*.

such as the cosmological, teleological, and ontological arguments—are what make a cumulative case for theism so compelling. One particular cumulative case advanced by David Baggett and Jerry Walls uses an abductive method.<sup>13</sup> The attractiveness of their approach enables theists to use information gathered from varying sources, even secular theories, to point to theism as the *likely best* explanation for moral phenomena. Overall, the advantage of the moral argument is that a case for objective morals can be created that points to the existence of God based on making sense of what all people know and experience about morals. Thus, this places the first cog in moving toward the need for divine assistance for moral transformation as it relates to morality and perfection.

One's worldview must include a grounding for morality, which affects the motivation factor for being moral. Regardless of one's belief in the grounding of morality, a common thought generally surfaces in people's lives: humans want to be moral.<sup>14</sup> However, immorality continues to be a universal and rampant issue. Since there is no common consensus between societies and cultures for the grounding of morality each person seemingly is left to their own beliefs.<sup>15</sup> This has become a defining characteristic in postmodernity. Subjectivism in western society dominates philosophical, sociological, and even theological discussions. If one's

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<sup>13</sup> For an explanation of their abductive case, see David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 27–9. For a more detailed explanation, see David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 54–78. Their approach affirms, “So it is not that secular theories fail altogether to explain anything morally. . .they don’t explain as many moral facts. . .nor do they explain moral facts as well as theism, but they are not without their resources and insights. . . . Recognizing such a point is entirely consistent with our argument that an explanation that includes this world *conjoined with God* makes a *fuller* case and provides the *better* explanation of the full range of moral facts in need of explanation.” *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>14</sup> Exceptions exist to this point, but the general aggregate of humanity shows a common desire to strive for a moral life.

<sup>15</sup> See Lewis’ appendix to *The Abolition of Man* for examples. C. S. Lewis, “The Abolition of Man,” in *The Complete C. S. Lewis Signature Classics* (New York: HarperOne, 2002), 731–8.

convictions or beliefs about morality are grounded within humanity, it is easy to run into problems. One major problem is that the reason to be moral is individualistic and subjective. However, one may ask, can the drive to be moral, or more specifically, the desire to be perfect, be grounded and satisfied by natural, non-spiritual means?<sup>16</sup>

The argument that moral facts exist and are likely best explained by the existence of a divine creator leads one to ask for further clarity on the matter. If theism provides the likely best explanation for moral facts, then there must also exist an expectation on God's part for humans to live up to those morals. The reality exists that humans continually fail to live according to the moral law. A myriad of reasons may be adduced for why humanity fails to live up to the moral law. The Apostle Paul contends that individuals fail because they, "do not honor [God] as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking"<sup>17</sup> Augustine of Hippo identified the evil within him as "foul," but it was still attractive to him. He states, "I loved my own perdition and my own faults, not the things for which I committed wrong, but the wrong itself."<sup>18</sup> Thomas Aquinas quotes another one of Augustine's statements about sin by saying that sin is a "languor of nature."<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Aquinas identifies people's choice to sin as an "inordinate act."<sup>20</sup> Kant stated that humanity follows the evil maxim because of the "dear self" that is "curved in on itself." These few statements serve as illustrations of the teachings associated with humanity's problem with sin. One need not get into different theological doctrines

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<sup>16</sup> The definition of these terms will be made clearer in chapters two and three below.

<sup>17</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, 2.4.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologiae*, question 82, article 1, quotes Augustine's statement in *Psalms 118*, Sermon 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

of sin (i.e., original sin, total depravity, etc.) to understand that sin prohibits a person from living a moral life.<sup>21</sup>

If it is identifiable and observable that humans do not live moral lives and are far from living them perfectly, what then is the resolve from a theistic view? Is it true that God would ask individuals to live moral lives, but know they are not able to do so? John Hare asserts there is a gap between the requirements of the moral law and humanity's ability to live up to it. He aligns with Kant in saying that "'ought' implies 'can.'"<sup>22</sup> The dictum "ought implies can" is a major assumption to explain because it carries the weight of moral obligations and the expectation to follow them. The "moral gap," Hare posits, must be closed either by divine assistance or some other comparable secular theory.<sup>23</sup> The non-theistic solutions Hare proposes for consideration include 1. Puffing up human capacity; 2. Reducing the demand; or 3. Secular substitutes for divine assistance.<sup>24</sup> Hare shows these options fail to close the gap like divine assistance can. He leaves open the discussion for Christian doctrine because he only addressed the issues philosophically to show that divine assistance must be involved. His final comment to his book is, "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."<sup>25</sup> Hare's version of the moral argument offers a simple point of

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<sup>21</sup> More will be said below regarding how these doctrines impact moral transformation, but at this juncture only a cursory mention is necessary to point to man's inability to live a moral life perfectly.

<sup>22</sup> John Hare, *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance*, Oxford studies in theological ethics (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 23.

<sup>23</sup> Hare's postulation is that, "The effect of these two points [ought and can] is to bring it about that morality, in its full critical form, is, first, something I ought to be practising [sic]; second, something for which my natural capacities are inadequate. . . ; and, third, something that I should treat as the command of some other at least possible being who is practising [sic] it." Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Hare addresses each one of these options in detail in the following sections of his book: 1. Puffing up the capacity, Ibid., 99–115., 2. Reducing the command, Ibid., 142–69., and 3. Secular substitutes, Ibid., 170–88. A secondary explanation of his position can be seen in Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, 214–42.

<sup>25</sup> Hare, *The Moral Gap*, 275.

clarity: humanity is expected to live according to the moral law, but only when offered assistance from the One who created it can humanity actually live by it. “Ought implies can” thus stands in need of a qualification: “with God’s assistance.”

If Christian theism is to be valid, it must be able to respond to humanity’s desire to live a perfectly moral life and offer the assistance needed to meet that goal. This is possible because of the Christian doctrine of unity with Christ, which closes the gap, offers needed assistance, and fulfills the desire for perfection.

### Research Statement

The purpose of this study will be to create and develop a new apologetic argument based on humanity’s desire to strive for moral perfection. This will be accomplished by first explaining the various theoretical foundations for morality and how they respond to the problem of moral perfectionism. Second, a defense will be made against secular theories and interlocutors to show their deficiencies in changing people’s hearts to meet the universal standard of moral perfection and transformation. Third, a case will be made that the Christian doctrine of “unity with Christ” is the likely best explanation for divine assistance in moral transformation.

### Research Significance

This project has the potential to make a major impact on postmodernity in Western culture. First, it simultaneously validates humanity’s desire to live a moral life and invalidates secular substitutions for God’s divine assistance for moral perfection. This delivers a fatal blow to postmodernity’s failed attempts of creating a moral system that is epistemically, ontologically, and experientially true.

Second, it can marry together moral apologetics and orthodox Christian teachings. Since moral arguments generally try to show that God is the likely best explanation for moral phenomena and then reason to the God of the Bible, this argument from moral perfection arrives at the more robust theology of an *Anselmian* Christian God.

Third, this project seeks to teach orthodox and sound Christian doctrine that gives glory to God, honor to the church, and presents the Gospel message to those outside of Christ.

### The Purpose and Method

Why another work on the moral argument? Both secularists and theists of varying stripes and everyone in-between have attempted to weigh in on what a moral life is and how to evaluate it. Issues arise when establishing the metaphysical nature of morals and the veracity of their axiomatic components. This has resulted in more contentions with little consensus and minimal resolve. Philosophers have offered a broad spectrum of solutions to the metaphysical and epistemic questions generated out of the milieu of promulgated views. Still, these are met with more objections and responses as new perspectives are touted. Not surprisingly, Christians generally and apologists specifically have continued to wrestle with the topic of morals and ethics. The task of apologists has been to make sense of these issues from a Christian worldview and to offer detailed, systematic explanations for why theism provides the likely best account for the existence of these issues. A secondary task of apologists is to propose pragmatic ways for a Christian to live a moral life and to disseminate those teachings in a practical manner that remains true to biblical teachings and human capacity.

Amid the milieu of ethical theories and presuppositions about morals, a significant disconnect exists at the confluence of moral theories and human behavior.<sup>26</sup> One may parse the issue as follows: If objective morals exist, humans are to live by them; however, no one lives a perfectly moral life. According to the moral standards identified by different theistic ethical theories (i.e., divine command theory, natural law, and virtue ethics), one may surmise that objective morals exist, and that humans imperfectly live a moral life according to these standards. If it is the case that both secularists and theists recognize this issue, then explanations and solutions must be offered to alleviate the tension or else dispel the problem altogether.

This problem introduces the need for moral transformation. If a person fails to live morally, there must be an explanation for the failure, not only an explanation but also a solution. Given this observation, a theist may derive a few different conclusions from the issue. First, there may be a misunderstanding about God's expectations for a moral life and the performative aspect of it. Second, humans may actively and willfully choose to live contrary to God's expectations for a moral life. Third, it may be the case that humans either lack the ability or the capacity to live morally. Fourthly, a person must receive some kind of assistance to live a moral life. Emphasis will be placed upon the fourth conclusion as the most viable option for a solution to the above issue. If God is both the source and the arbiter of morals, is it at least possible that he also provides the assistance needed for humans to live up to his expectations?

How will this project accomplish the goal of creating a new apologetic argument from the desire for moral perfection? The purpose of this research is to extend the discussion of moral

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<sup>26</sup> A gap exists between the ethical theories advanced by moral apologists and the practical nature of their resolutions. This is not to say they fail in their attempts or evade the topic; but rather many of these apologists only give a cursory nod toward the performative nature of their views in their works. Granted, the purpose of their primary sources is to establish a particular ethical theory; however, the information leaves the reader wanting more of a resolution.

apologetics to the performative aspect of morals. There are three legs to this project. The first leg will explain the theoretical foundations that undergird the form of morality advanced throughout this project. Specifically, the works of moral apologists who have paved the way for this discussion will be analyzed to show their arguments only take individuals to theism but not to the Christian God.

The second leg will be a defense against secular theories and various interlocutors who present challenges to the argument advanced in this project. The goal will be to show that other worldviews outside of Christian theism are deficient in changing human hearts to meet the universal standard of moral perfection and transformation.

Finally, having argued for the need for a bridge that spans between moral arguments and the solution for moral transformation, a case will be made that the Christian doctrine of “unity with Christ” is the likely best explanation for divine assistance in moral transformation. The orthodox doctrine of unity with Christ explains the need for moral perfection and satisfies the requirements necessary to make it possible.

### Key Concepts and Terms

As this study advances toward creating a new apologetic method, it is essential to delineate clear and decisive terms used throughout the project. Establishing a proper definition of these key concepts and terms will aid the reader.

#### **Perfectionism**

Before a deeper dive can be taken into the vast world of Christian theism as a solution for humanity’s needs, it is essential to establish a definition for perfection as it will be used throughout this project. Semantically, the term takes on a wide range of definitions. In its most

simplistic form, perfection means, “The quality or state of being perfect: such as freedom from fault or defect, the quality or state of being saintly, an exemplification of supreme excellence or an unsurpassable degree of accuracy or excellence.”<sup>27</sup> In one respect, these definitions demand a degree of objectivity of completeness. That is to say that perfection, whether anyone has actually obtained it or not, insists upon actually being accomplished. On the other hand, there is a degree of subjectivity or progression. It is not so much the fact that one will actually reach perfection as it is that someone or something is considered perfect because they are perceived as being perfect.

The wide semantic range of this term makes it amorphous. Unless it is understood in a univocal context, hemmed in with proper parameters, and bolstered with adequate scaffolding, much of the discussion will crumble. Consider that one may speak of perfection regarding aesthetics. Aesthetically, a sunset over a mountain landscape may be deemed as perfect. An artist, architect, or craftsman may call the result of their hard work, “perfect.” An athlete can execute a complicated maneuver perfectly. A triangle can be perfectly symmetrical having all sides and angles equal, but at the same time it may not be a proper fit for a certain occasion. In fact, an isosceles triangle may fit perfectly in one instance rather than an acute triangle and vice versa. This brings to light another important aspect of perfection; it requires a standard and a judgment.

It is hard or nearly impossible to speak of perfection in any constructive way if no standard exists by which to judge perfection. Individuals express this by “judging the judges.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, “Perfection,” accessed March 27, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/perfection>.

<sup>28</sup> Ravi Zacharias is credited with this illustration. In *The Logic of God*, Zacharias explains that the way we speak about judgment calls in life shows a deeper, universal understanding about how we view objectivity. What does this say about standards and judgments of perfection? Consider the way people act during sporting events drives this point home in an illustrative way. How many baseball players get in an uproar over whether the umpire called the correct ball or strike? The comical comparison between modernists and postmodernists in a game of baseball makes the point. The postmodernist umpire exclaims, “There’s balls and strikes, and they aren’t anything

How many judges go uncontested in a sporting event that utilizes subjective standards by which to weigh contestants? It is usually the loser who approaches the judge insisting they were scored unfairly. One need not look any further than the most recent Olympics to illustrate this. A figure skater who executes a seemingly flawless routine can receive differing points between judges. If she believes she deserves more points than she was awarded, who is at fault? Who has the final say in the matter? The expectation is there must exist some universal standard for the action, a presupposition that the action is executable, and an assumption that one can recognize it and judge it correctly.

The matter becomes more difficult when thinking about humans on a more intrinsic scale. In one respect, human perfection is spoken of in ontological terms. One may call humans perfect if they fit the mold for what the ideal human should be. Once again, this is generic unless it is narrowed down. A perfect human is based on more than physical descriptors. If naturalism is true and humans are no more than material beings composed of atoms colliding together, then many conversations humans have about perfection are spurious. However, human experience seems to speak to the contrary. There appears to be a basic, universal assumption that values and principles do exist even in respect to humans and their actions. Thus, the conversation turns to other philosophical complexities. Humans not only desire physical perfection, they search existentially for perfection beyond physical limitations. This difficulty is highlighted throughout Michael Hyde's book on the history of perfection.<sup>29</sup>

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until I call them." His call contrasts with the modernist who asserts, "I call them as I see them." These anecdotes show that people typically do not like to be judged by relative and subjective standards. This applies even in conversations about aesthetics. People have this unique expectation that there can be a standard of perfection.

<sup>29</sup> In chapter two, a case will be made for moral realism. It is the assumption thus far in the research that an objective moral standard must exist because it makes the most sense for why humans speak in the way they do about moral perfection.

Hyde sets out trying to answer why humans “embody a metaphysical desire for perfection.”<sup>30</sup> He explains that humans desire acknowledgment. This desire for acknowledgement is more than affirmation or validation, it is a search for completeness or wholeness in life. This understanding is driven by his definition of perfection. He explains that perfection is “achieving a state of completeness in our lives whereby, at least for the moment, we feel secure, comfortable, and at home with ourselves, others, and our immediate surroundings.”<sup>31</sup> He further states that, “perfection admits a certain ontological significance: perfection is essential to our well-being.”<sup>32</sup> When taken generally, Hyde’s definition and understanding of perfection make sense, but this project desires to delve deeper into perfection as it relates to morality and a moral life.<sup>33</sup>

The options for human perfection likewise are elucidated in John Passmore’s work, *The Perfectibility of Man*. He posits that human perfection can be spoken of in the following distinctions:

- (1) there is some task in which each and every man can perfect himself technically;
- (2) he is capable of wholly subordinating himself to God’s will;
- (3) he can attain to his natural end;
- (4) he can be entirely free of any moral defect;
- (5) he can make of himself a being who is metaphysically perfect;
- (6) he can make of himself a being who is harmonious and orderly;
- (7) he can live in the manner of an ideally perfect human being;
- (8) he can become godlike.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Michael J. Hyde, *Perfection: Coming to Terms with Being Human* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), xi–xii.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* “Our passion for perfection is admirable; it defines who we are as metaphysical animals, creatures who have a longing, a nostalgia, for security, comfort, and completeness in our lives.” *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>33</sup> More will be said about Hyde’s view of perfection as it relates to Christianity later.

<sup>34</sup> John Arthur Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man*, 3rd ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2000), 21.

Passmore's observations are valid, although one can see they cannot all be true simultaneously. Unless one delineates what is being discussed, a wide range of interpretations can be granted. Therefore, perfection will be narrowed down to the realm of morality. The desire humans feel to live perfect lives and to strive for perfectibility is a major part of humanity. It is one thing to recognize the desire, it is another thing to find a solution for why people do not feel as if they are perfect.

In philosophy, perfectionism became a theory for how one should live life. Although perfectionism reaches back further than the twenty-first century, modern authors have sought to coalesce previous views to establish a firmer definition for perfection. One author, Thomas Hurka, explains the moral theory in these terms,

This moral theory starts from an account of the good human life, or the intrinsically desirable life. And it characterizes this life in a distinctive way. Certain properties, it says, constitute human nature or are definitive of humanity—they make humans human. The good life, it then says, develops these properties to a high degree or realizes what is central to human nature. Different versions of the theory may disagree about what the relevant properties are and so disagree about the content of the good life. But they share the foundational idea that what is good, ultimately, is the development of human nature.<sup>35</sup>

For Hurka, and other advocates of perfectionism, they place the emphasis of a perfect life on something obtainable by humans: happiness, experiences, a *good* life, etc. Hurka gives two definitions for perfection, one from last century by Sir Hamilton Williams and a more recent version by John Rawls.<sup>36</sup> The culmination of their definitions sets perfectionism in completely humanistic terms. In Hurka's use of the word, he says, "the human good rests somehow in

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<sup>35</sup> Thomas Hurka, *Perfectionism*, Oxford Ethics Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3.

<sup>36</sup> The reader may be interested in seeing both Hamilton and Rawls's definitions for perfection. Hamilton states that perfection is, "the full and harmonious development of all our faculties, corporeal and mental, intellectual and moral." Rawls shows that perfectionism leads one to, "maximize the achievement of human excellence in art, science, and culture." Cited in *Ibid.*, 4.

human nature.”<sup>37</sup> That is to say that when one develops their natures, it is “to develop some capacities and also defines an ideal of excellence.”<sup>38</sup> Many who discuss perfectionism focus on the human and naturalistic explanation for perfection. Whether or not one is talking about human nature or morals, the foundation is to be understood on human terms.

This fits within a naturalistic worldview, which believes nothing exists outside of the material world. If there are no non-natural aspects of life, then human nature is based on one’s current understanding of how humans function. This brings to light several issues. One obvious issue is that human nature, from an evolutionist perspective, is subject to change and is ever progressing. Identifying “humanness” becomes even more complicated because it is based on knowledge of what humans are in a specified time. Hurka says, that, “the best perfectionism, then, equates human nature with the properties essential to humans and conditioned on their being living things.”<sup>39</sup> Other moral perfectionists agree with Hurka’s statement, but others seek to find the purpose of living outside of human nature or at least in a different component of it. One example is within a moralistic perfection, which,

. . . Takes one human essential property to be something like practical rationality and characterizes this property in such a way that realizing it to a high degree requires developing the dispositions commonly considered virtuous, such as temperance, justice, and honesty, or abiding by the rules—“Do not kill,” “Do not lie”—commonly counted as moral. Moralism makes goodness by perfectionist standards in part the same as goodness by the lights of commonsense morality. It makes the degree to which humans develop their natures depend on the degree to which they fulfil popular notions of morality.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 19.

A naturalistic perfectionist will continue to struggle with determining what constitutes a perfect life until they can identify what the ultimate good is for humans. If the ultimate good is only found in natural terms—like human nature—one must still wrestle with the fact that humans do not only speak in natural terms. There appears to exist a standard for living beyond simple humanistic ideals. In step with the proposal above, some solution must be offered that resolves the tension of incomplete perfection. The solution being proposed here is that Christianity offers the exact option needed to correspond to actual human experience and expectations.

### **Unity with Christ**

If Christianity offers the likely best solution for the problem elucidated above, then there needs to be a clear, decisive understanding of that solution. It has been proposed that unity with Christ is that solution.

The Bible uses perfection in different contexts. Typically, perfection is used synonymously with “complete” or “full.” A handful of interchangeable terms are used between the Old and New Testaments to convey the concept of perfection. In the Old Testament, at least two Hebrew terms are used to denote an individual as perfect.<sup>41</sup> The first term is *shālēm*. It is used to describe persons who are “finished, whole, or complete.” Specifically, *shālēm* describes someone’s heart as perfect because of their singular devotion to God. A second Hebrew term is *tāmīm*, which is used to characterize someone or something as “sound or unblemished.” Often, *tāmīm* is used to describe God, his way, and his word (e.g., Psa. 18:30, 19:7).

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<sup>41</sup> There are other terms used throughout the Hebrew Old Testament, but they are used only once. The focus of this study is to examine the topic from a moral apologetics standpoint. However, there is rich and fertile ground in regard to how Judaism has treated the topic of perfection. For a treatment of the various terms and the interaction with Jewish positions see M. L. Satlow, “Philo on Human Perfection,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 59, no. 2 (2008): 500–519.

In the New Testament, there is one term translated as “perfect.” The New Testament term is *Teleios*. *Teleios* conveys the concept of something being “full, complete, or perfect.” Out of the more familiar instances of this word, one may recognize its use in Matthew 5:48 where Jesus says, “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect.” Jesus’ statement brings to light two but intricately connected concepts. First, there is a call to perfection. Second, the standard of perfection is derived from God’s own ontology.

The biblical expectation for perfection is tied to the demand to live “innocent” or “blameless” lives. Throughout the Bible individuals like Noah (Gen. 6:9), Job (Job 1:1), and Jesus (Heb. 7:26) are labeled as innocent or blameless. They not only stand out as interesting examples, but also as moral exemplars. By their example, these men establish a general call to all people to be found innocent and blameless (Psa. 15:2–5; Phil. 2:14–15). Noticeably, the uniqueness of Jesus stands out from the others and will be explained further.

The uniqueness of these individuals is that the standard imposed on them is not from a subjective human standpoint, rather, the ideal of innocence, blamelessness, and perfection is from God. In moral terms, perhaps God is not only the very definition for goodness, but he himself is goodness. This is the case Robert Adams makes in his book, *Finite and Infinite Goods*. Specifically, Adams argues how to define the good. In Platonic terms, within Adams’ model, God is the good. “If God is the Good itself,” Adams posits, “then the Good is not an abstract object but a concrete (though not a physical) individual. Indeed, it is a *person*, or importantly like a person.”<sup>42</sup> Therefore, when people are called to a standard of perfection—goodness—they are called to live like God. Once again, the overarching issue resurfaces in Adams’ discussion. He

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<sup>42</sup> Robert Merrihew Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 14.

insists that, “One of our main problems in being for the good is that because of our finitude we can be for it only in very imperfect and fragmentary ways. We cannot attend to more than a small fraction of actual and possible good, and what we can do about what we do attend to is very limited.”<sup>43</sup> Humans are called to live a good life, but they must also realize the standard of perfection is unattainable due to humanity’s finitude.

Typically, Christian theologians contend against human perfectibility in relation to this world. Due to the pervasiveness of sin, no one can be perfect. However, a broader view of perfection shows that although one may not reach perfection, *per se* on this earth, there is an other-worldly component that looks beyond this world for the desire for perfection to be fulfilled. This can be found in one’s connection to Jesus and the hope for eternal life after one’s existence on this earth.

When considering what it means to be united with Christ, one must bring together multiple Christian doctrines; namely, those doctrines that relate to salvation. Paul the Apostle explains that the Christian life is characterized by being in Christ (Eph. 1:7), united in his death (Rom. 6:5), and clothed in him (Gal. 3:27). When reflecting on his own relationship to Christ, Paul says, “I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith. . .” (Phi. 3:8–9). Unity with Christ is the point where sin is removed from an individual’s life, where the old person dies and a new one is born, and where a life is no longer lived for self but for God. It is in this unity that God’s own Spirit is given as a seal/guarantee (Eph 1:13–14; Gal 3:14; Rom 5:5) and to provide aide for living a sanctified life.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 8.

Without the salvation offered by Jesus Christ, no human could stand before God. When Jesus died on the cross, he paid the price for sin. The apostle Peter explains, “[Jesus] himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (1 Pet. 2:24). Again, he states, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God” (1 Pet. 3:18). What Peter teaches here is that Jesus, who was perfect, paid the cost of sin, so sinful humans might be able to live for God and one day be in his presence perfected.

The gap created between God’s standard for morality and humanity’s failure to live up to that mark requires assistance. As John Hare explained earlier, the dictum “ought implies can” requires a qualifier: with God’s assistance. Hare believes that his solution for extra-human assistance—atonement, justification, and sanctification—provide a “version of such assistance.”<sup>44</sup> He further remarks that “What has changed after incorporation [with Christ] is the availability of the new life; there may still be a gap between what we ought to do and what we do.”<sup>45</sup> C.S. Lewis adds to this when he spoke of Jesus giving “a new self.”<sup>46</sup> The new self is to be identified and understood as united with Jesus. In this new life, individuals are no longer viewed as what they were, but as a new creation clothed in Jesus. The new life in Christ entails transformation. This transformation is the removal of sin and bestowal of further assistance needed to live a new life in Christ—sanctification. In this moment, an individual is sanctified, and set apart for God’s purpose. Therefore, one can echo Paul’s benediction in saying, “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and

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<sup>44</sup> Hare, *The Moral Gap*, 270–1.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>46</sup> Lewis, *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*, 156–7.

body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it” (1 Thess 5:23–24). The degree to which one lives this new life in accordance with the ultimate good is shaped by one’s view of sanctification. The views of Christian sanctification explain to what extent one can expect to live a new life transformed into the image of Jesus. If unity with Christ is to be considered the likely best solution for living a moral life, then it must be able to offer a solution for the problem of sin and the assistance needed to live in accordance with the standard of morality by which humans are expected to live.

### Summary of Chapters

Now that the foundation of this research has been laid by examining the research problem, methodology, and major definitions, it is important to see the general outline for how this project will proceed. Chapter two will establish a case in defense of moral realism to show there exists an objective standard for how humans should live morally. Although every objection against moral realism cannot be handled due to the limitation of a work like this, those major, salient objections that challenge the performative aspect of moral realism will be addressed. Special emphasis will be placed on: 1. Taking objective morality seriously; 2. Understanding moral values, judgments, and obligations; and 3. Tracing the impact of moral realism through the performative aspect of the moral argument. Chapter three will attempt to show that the form of theism found in Christianity is the likely best solution for the existence of these moral facts; and that when married together with the Christian teaching of unity with Christ, Christian theism offers a viable solution for humanity’s desire for moral perfection. The goal is to show that unity with Christ has the ability to release the tension of living imperfectly while needing and expecting perfection. Chapter four will develop a tripartite argument for Christian theism based on a unified version of natural law, divine command theory, and virtue ethics. This will give a

comparative analysis between naturalistic explanations of perfection and the argument established throughout this work, thus showing that unity with Christ meets and exceeds the criteria humans expect for perfection. Chapter five will discuss how unity with Christ fits into the argument for Christian theism. The task will be to show that unity with Christ makes sense of humanity's desire for perfection and the failure to live a perfect life. Finally, chapter six will conclude the study by addressing possible objections to the argument established throughout this work and a few considerations for further study will be presented.

## Chapter 2: Moral Realism

### Introduction

For this project to advance in the proper direction toward a solution for humanity's need for perfection, one must first understand the nature of morality. A lot of ink has been spilled discussing the importance of understanding morality in its various contexts. Grasping morality entails more than a cursory look at generic discussions about what people consider ethical decisions. Understanding morality means comprehending its objectivity, knowability, and enforceability.<sup>47</sup>

A key component to any apologetic argument from morals is to show that morality, properly construed, is objective. The claim that morality is objective has garnered considerable attention from both sides of the argument. Furthermore, the debate is not limited to theism alone. Many philosophers, both secular and theistic, have commented on the peculiar nature of morality. The existence of moral phenomena has piqued the interest of individuals, which will form the basis of this chapter. If morality is objective, then there is a definite standard by which to live.

This chapter will seek to explain three main aspects of morality; thus, creating a cumulative argument for taking the moral law seriously. First, a case will be made for moral realism; that is to say morality is objective and potentially absolute. Second, it will be explained that moral facts are knowable and discoverable by all rational humans. Third, based on the objectivity and knowability of moral facts, a defense will be made for moral obligations.

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<sup>47</sup> David Baggett and Jerry Walls not only create an abductive argument for morality, but also a cumulative one. In the second part of their work, *God & Cosmos*, they detail four moral facts—ontology, epistemology, practical, and rational—that need further explanation in a moral argument. See Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, 115–272.

## Moral Realism

A popular genre of literature and entertainment that has flooded the bookshelves and movie theaters takes place in post-apocalyptic/dystopian worlds. What does society look like when it has been stripped of social and economic infrastructures, people live by their own rules, and survival is the driving force for everyday life? Beyond the purely entertainment factor of these works lies something deeper that speaks to the inner most complexities of humanity. These complexities are usually revealed when the protagonist must wrestle with whether he should compromise his own values, break some unenforced personal rule, or save an innocent life at a great personal expense. The decision is usually exacerbated by taking place in a dark, vile society that functions on chaos, disorder, and filth. A flood of examples may come to mind to illustrate this point; which is the reason for speaking in generic terms. The pull humans feel to relate to a character's decisions in a society at rock-bottom speaks to something that is known universally in all humans—moral decisions matter.

Even though society in the twenty-first century is not characterized as post-apocalyptic or dystopian, the deeper complexities of humanity are revealed, nonetheless. There may exist, in varying degrees, social and economic infrastructures with enforced societal laws, but humans still struggle with dilemmas concerning how they should act. This shows that moral dilemmas are not biased to time and place. Since a moral dilemma is characterized by two or more competing value claims, herein lies the point of establishing moral realism. If objective moral facts exist, they should be recognizable by all people. As illustrated above, there seemingly exists a *prima facie* notion that moral facts are real and draw people's attention.

An armchair sociologist can see that American society has become increasingly more relativistic in its ideals. Relativism believes there is no such thing as a universal morality,

because all that exist are plural moralities and social mores.<sup>48</sup> In this respect, relativism equates moral laws to human laws, which means they are founded on humanistic principles subject to change. This pragmatic approach to morality places the foundation of morality on what individuals or groups believe. Moral realism, on the other hand, insists that, “Moral judgements enjoy a special sort of objectivity: such judgements, when true, are so independently of what any human being, anywhere, in any circumstance whatever, thinks of them.”<sup>49</sup> Similar to other philosophical and ethical theories, there are various forms of moral realism.<sup>50</sup> These forms, although different, share important features. First, as Kevin DeLapp explains, “[Moral realism] is designed to help shed light on what morality itself is.”<sup>51</sup> Second, moral realism uses the basic, universal principles of logic to make a positive case for morality. Third, it employs common sense and intuition as key factors in its argumentation. Fourth, it is not dependent upon theistic arguments.<sup>52</sup> Given these basic features of moral realism, a few apodictic conclusions may be drawn regarding the present discussion.

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<sup>48</sup> James David Velleman, *Foundations for Moral Relativism*, Second expanded edition. (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2015), 1.

<sup>49</sup> Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, 2.

<sup>50</sup> Terence Cuneo gives a brief overview of the different types of moral realism. In a summative manner he says, “Some philosophers characterize realism as the view that some of our moral beliefs are true; others maintain that it is the position that there are moral facts. Some claim that realism is simply the view that moral propositions are true independent of our best evidence for them; others maintain that it is the position that moral propositions are true independent of our ability to assign truth conditions to them. Some philosophers claim that realism is committed to the thesis that entities have moral properties independent of facts about the attitudes of moral agents; others maintain that realists hold that entities have moral properties independent of persons responding to those entities.” Cuneo, *The Normative Web*, 1.

<sup>51</sup> DeLapp, *Moral Realism*, 1.

<sup>52</sup> Each of these features deserve more attention and consideration, however, space does not permit for a thorough examination of each one. The aforementioned works provide more context to these issues that the reader may wish to consider in a more in-depth manner.

First, moral realism, if true, can provide a base foundation for discussing a universal standard for living expected by all rational beings. Much of the current discussion is founded upon the assumption that humans expect other humans to behave in particular ways. If there is no standard for living, or a universal consensus, then many thoughts, feelings, and experiences people have about morality are illusory. Second, if this universal standard of living is expected by all humans, there must exist, to some degree, the potential capacity to actually do what is expected. If a standard is imposed on humans that is unable to be accomplished, then objections may be offered for why one should not expect the standard to be true.

### **A Case for Objective Morality**

There are many reasons to take objective morality seriously. There appears to be a universal consensus that humans are to behave in a certain way. Is it true that humans believe certain actions are intrinsically or inherently right or wrong regardless of how someone thinks or feels?<sup>53</sup> One would be hard pressed to think that torturing babies for fun is wrong because a society or culture decides it to be that way. The aversion and repulsion toward a horrendous act reach deeper than cultural norms. When a skeptic needs evidence to prove that torturing babies for fun is wrong, “He doesn’t need an argument,” Paul Copan notes, “he really needs psychological and spiritual help.”<sup>54</sup> Couched within these preliminary statements are observations of human nature that point to why, for *prima facie* reasons, objective morality should be taken seriously.

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<sup>53</sup> Objections to this point will be elucidated below. The point here is to show there are valuable reasons to take objective morality seriously, and to some extent humans understand, on a basic level, some things are wrong and no argument or evidence is needed to prove it.

<sup>54</sup> Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, eds., *Passionate Conviction: Modern Discourses on Christian Apologetics*. (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2007), 45, accessed May 12, 2021, <https://www.overdrive.com/search?q=E2CBDF3D-C3FA-4DF7-AEEF-5D298C401C4B>.

The six observations highlighted below do not constitute an exhaustive list detailing every aspect of objective morality.<sup>55</sup> However, these basic observations serve as presuppositions that coincide to a universal human experience. They relate to the current study because they show that humans have a pull or motivation to live up to some kind of standard and at least expect others to do the same. If it is a human expectation to live in a particular way, is there ever a reason to do otherwise? If objective morals exist, it should follow that humans expect them to be done to some obtainable degree. An objectivist theory of morality insists that moral statements are more than feelings of preference or based on cultural consensus, they actually make claims about the moral status of persons and acts.

### Discussing Moral Matters

It may be common in a relativistic society for people casually to cast off objective moral statements under the guise of “Everything is relative!” However, their own standard quickly betrays them when their views are given little respect. Most people, when it gets down to brass tacks, believe there is an objective standard for living and for how to treat one another, whether they openly acknowledge it or not. Consider how people discuss moral matters. If morality is subjective, then people should not get upset when someone takes a different view than their own.<sup>56</sup> However, people argue, debate, discuss, and reason over issues. All one must do is listen

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<sup>55</sup> These six observations are derived from Scott Rae’s book, *Moral Choices*. Scott B Rae, *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics*, 2018, 35–7. As noted, this is not an exhaustive list, and many of these points are covered in varying degrees throughout the works of those moral realists mentioned earlier in this work. For a longer list consider the points made in a dissertation written by Stephen Jordan. He identifies 15 reasons to take morality seriously: 1. Obviousness, 2. General consensus, 3. Moral reasoning, 4. Moral order, 5. Unlivable world, 6. Measuring value systems, 7. Social reform, 8. Justice, injustice, and punishment, 9. Stand of behavior, 10. Praise and blame, 11. Mistreatment, 12. Moral obligations, 13. Guilt, 14. Making excuses, 15. Moral progress/improvement. Stephen S. Jordan, “Morality and the Personhood of God: A Moral Argument for the Existence of a Personal God” (Liberty University, 2021), 34–57, <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/2870/>.

<sup>56</sup> Schafer-Landau makes the following observation: “We can well explain the point and persistence of moral disagreement by attributing to agents the presupposition that there is a right answer awaiting discovery. Were they convinced that there was no truth of the matter, most interlocutors would see their continued disagreement as

to an agitated individual make statements like, “That is unfair!” “You cannot do that!” or “That is wrong!” If everyone’s opinions should be given equal respect, then why do people get upset about moral matters? If there is no universal, objective standard for fairness, good and evil, and right and wrong; then it is impossible for one individual to impose their beliefs on someone else. However, this happens all the time. Consider someone that admits good and evil are illusions. “A moment after they have admitted that good and evil are illusions,” Lewis demonstrates, “you will find them exhorting us to work for posterity, to educate, revolutionise [sic], liquidate, live and die for the good of the human race.”<sup>57</sup> This double speak is inconsistent, but goes to show the point being advanced here.

One must take note that the way people discuss moral matters differs vastly from how they discuss preferences. Discussions about morality, for example whether rape is acceptable, usually differs greatly from a discussion about one’s favorite flavor of ice cream. The simple fact that people discuss moral matters gives weight to the point that there is more to morality than subjective opinions.

One of David Enoch’s arguments in establishing a robust realism is that the absence of moral objectivity in discussions of interpersonal disagreements and conflicts has, “implications that are objectionable on first-order, moral grounds, and should therefore be rejected.”<sup>58</sup> While establishing a positive case for realism, he attempts to show that detractors like subjectivism are false. In one particular case, Enoch produces a *Reductio* argument for taking morality seriously

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pointless; as pointless as, say, entering an intractable debate about whether red or orange was *really* the most beautiful colour [sic].” Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, 23.

<sup>57</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 58.

<sup>58</sup> David Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 16.

in interpersonal disagreements and conflicts by showing that subjectivism cannot offer the solutions needed.

1. Caricaturized Subjectivism.<sup>59</sup> (For *Reductio*.)
2. If Caricaturized Subjectivism is true, then interpersonal conflicts due to moral disagreements are really just interpersonal conflicts due to differences in mere preferences. (From the content of Caricaturized Subjectivism.)
3. Therefore, interpersonal conflicts due to moral disagreements are just interpersonal conflicts due to differences in mere preferences. (From 1 and 2.)
4. Impartiality, that is, roughly: when an interpersonal conflict (of the relevant kind) is a matter merely of preferences, then an impartial, egalitarian solution is called for, and it is wrong to just stand one's ground.<sup>60</sup>
5. Therefore, in cases of interpersonal conflict (of the relevant kind) due to moral disagreement, an impartial, egalitarian solution is called for, and it is wrong to just stand one's ground. (From 3 and 4.)
6. However, in cases of interpersonal conflict (of the relevant kind) due to moral disagreement often an impartial solution is *not* called for, and it is permissible, and even required, to stand one's ground.
7. Therefore, Caricaturized Subjectivism is false. (From 1, 5, and 6, by *Reductio*.)<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Enoch describes this metaethical view as: "Moral judgments report simple preferences, ones that are exactly on a par with a preference for playing tennis or for catching a movie." *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>60</sup> Enoch explains that impartiality as a moral principle can be described in the following terms. "In an interpersonal conflict, we should step back from our mere preferences, or feelings, or attitudes, or some such, and to the extent the conflict is due to those, an impartial, egalitarian solution is called for. Furthermore, each party to the conflict should acknowledge as much: Standing one's ground is, in such cases, morally wrong." *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 25–6.

As the argument shows, it is usually the case that an impartial, egalitarian solution is neither expected nor sought after if someone is discussing a matter of great moral worth. In theory, before the discussion begins, one may insist that it is possible; but in reality, this is not the way people actually talk about moral matters.

### Moral Reformers

Western society is indebted to the great work of moral reformers like Martin Luther King Jr. who championed for the equal rights of all humans. King's call for moral reform during the civil rights movement entailed more than a request for culture to change. He appealed to a higher, transcendent standard for morality. Although King advocated for people to acknowledge God's moral law, he appealed to the objective morality found within each human regardless of their acceptance of his theological perspective. The call for racial equality and overall acceptance of human dignity would be "logically impossible" in a normative relativistic society.<sup>62</sup>

The argument for moral reformers can be construed in the following way. If M is a moral reformer, then M is a person who believes culture x has an incorrect moral code; and M claims the acts declared by culture x's moral code are wrong and need to change. If cultural relativism is true, then moral reformers like M are mistaken. However, not every moral reformer is mistaken; therefore, cultural relativism is not valid. It would be a difficult task to convince someone that a moral reformer like Martin Luther King Jr. was mistaken when he advocated for societal reforms during the civil rights movement. Ethical systems must offer reasons why these reformers made valid appeals. Martin Luther King Jr. and other reformers rarely argue from the standpoint of societal codes; rather, they appeal to a higher, transcendent standard outside of humanity. "Social

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<sup>62</sup> J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 2nd Edition. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 428.

reformers have some degree of faith in the goodness and perfectibility of human beings,” Passmore observes.<sup>63</sup> The moral reformer dilemma thus gives another reason for taking objective morality seriously.

### Moral Mistakes

When people think about Hitler, Stalin, and Pol Pot they do not gloss over their deeds as something deserving a simple slap on the wrist. There is a universal disgust at the thought of genocide and other malevolent acts done to humans. These deeds are considered egregious moral errors that must not continue. How should humans look at the infamous deeds of individuals who touted for the removal of another people group because they did not fit their cultural standard? If moral relativism is true, one cannot disapprovingly speak out against these acts, without some logical inconsistencies, because they were being done for the advancement of their cultural agenda. Even in a utilitarian moral system, these deeds can be justified because it brought about the greatest good for the greatest number of people to exterminate those individuals who acted contrary to the way their society was structured.

To follow an anti-realism theory of morality, one would have to say that the great evils done in the twentieth century were not moral mistakes. However, human experience looks upon these deeds with repulsion. There are no calculations needed to weigh out whether these deeds are good or bad. They are wrong, whether people understand why they know them to be wrong or not. The strangeness of identifying things as universally acknowledged moral mistakes fits within a system of morality that is objective against one that is subjective. There is “nothing

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<sup>63</sup> Hyde, *Perfection*, 5.

strange” about it, Shafer-Landau observes, “but something we all understand.”<sup>64</sup> Therefore, the way humans talk about moral mistakes points to taking objective morality seriously.

### Victims of Injustice

So far it has been shown that people discuss and argue moral matters, expect certain moral changes to be done, and believe moral mistakes happen. These points take on a personal aspect when certain deeds are done to an individual. People on the receiving end of some actions feel victimized. They take up a strong stance that they, in some way, have been mistreated and deserve justice. Specifically, they feel as if not only their personal preferences have been overridden but some great wrong has been done that even others should recognize.<sup>65</sup>

One may view injustices contextually or personally.<sup>66</sup> From a contextual standpoint, acts of injustice result from situational circumstances and expectations. On a personal level, injustices are conceptualized as a breach in the normal function and expectation for how humans operate in the world. To be “all in” in a relativistic system of morality would say that people cannot be victims of injustice if a culture arbitrarily decides what is acceptable behavior or not. Personal experience speaks otherwise. The victims of the holocaust or victims of egregious acts against human dignity do not look to society alone for explanations and resolutions for how they are being treated. Even the individual who exclaims, “That is not fair!” when treated contrary to

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<sup>64</sup> Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, 26.

<sup>65</sup> Lewis made the following observation, “My argument against God is that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of *just* and *unjust*? . . . What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust? . . . Of course I could have given up my idea of justice by saying it was nothing but a private idea of my own. But if I did that, then my argument against God collapsed too—for the argument depended on saying that the world was really unjust, not simply that it did not happen to please my private fancies.” Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 41.

<sup>66</sup> Lionel Faccenda and Nathalie Pantaléon, “Analysis of the Relationships between Sensitivity to Injustice, Principles of Justice and Belief in a Just World,” *Journal of Moral Education* 40, no. 4 (December 2011): 491–511.

their expectation appeals to something beyond what relativism is able to offer. The most plausible explanation is that objective morality is to be taken seriously.

### Cultural Consensus

Objective morality not only has a response to cultural relativism, it also is not undermined by it. According to moral realism, moral facts are discoverable and people can be mistaken about them. Simply because a different culture fails to acknowledge some moral fact does not negate the existence of the objective fact. Morality, like science, is subject to verification. Morality is discoverable just like mathematical principles. Whether one knows it or not, a basic principle like  $2+2=4$  is a universal concept that anyone can discover. This explains why people have been mistaken about moral issues throughout time. Relativism says that morality can change over time and between cultures. However, this presents many logical inconsistencies. If one holds that moral facts are discoverable, then it is not that facts change but that people discover them. It is a universal, timeless fact that murdering is wrong. Just because it was believed in previous generations that the sun circled the earth does not negate the actual truth of reality. It was discovered and verified through scientific explanations that the earth circles the sun. If morality is subjective, then it was right for previous generations to enslave other humans and demean human dignity. People do not believe this is the case, and even though some cultures may believe it today it does not make it right.

Many discrepancies between cultures are not over moral facts but over the application of them. A moral relativist may look at a culture that believes it is morally inexcusable to kill a cow and conclude that their stance on morality differs vastly from another culture that says killing cows is amoral. However, the undergirding principle for why an individual feels strongly against killing a cow is because they believe their departed ancestor resides in the cow. Therefore, it

would be wrong for them to kill the cow because they are killing a relative. The basic principle remains, but it is construed differently.

For one to conclude that morality must be subjective because different cultures hold different moral principles is to place too much emphasis on the debates. “If scientific disagreements don’t undermine the objective status of science,” Shafer-Landau explains, “then moral disagreements shouldn’t undermine the objective status of morality.”<sup>67</sup> Therefore, the difference between cultures does not undermine moral realism, but rather upholds the universal principles found within it.

### A Moral World

Moral obligations and judgments are a part of human experience in the world.<sup>68</sup> People maintain the peculiar assumption they are expected to act in a certain manner and that they would be judged if they did not. These obligations and judgments are universal and recognizable regardless of how one feels about them. This says something about moral values and the human ability to recognize them epistemically. This connects back to the argument for moral realism. There are certain aspects of this world and reality that point to objective morality. As the argument for moral realism advances below, emphasis will be placed on understanding moral values, knowledge, judgments, and obligations.

How do anti-realists conceive of a world without objective morality? Richard Dawkins boldly asserts that, “The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect

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<sup>67</sup> Russ Shafer-Landau, *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 70.

<sup>68</sup> The topic of moral obligations and judgments will be discussed in chapter two.

if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.”<sup>69</sup> If Dawkins is correct, then “indifference” should be the accepted standard; however, this is not the case. People do not see the world and its morals as a thing of indifference. The first six points conflict greatly with his pessimistic view of reality. If the world only displays indifference, then it is contrary to people’s perception of reality.

## Summary

Six reasons have been given for taking objective morality seriously. Although a full defense has not been given for objective morality, the above points at least provide a probable case for understanding the objectiveness of morality. Time does not permit to address every objection to the case made above, however, it is essential to bring to light how this impacts the current discussion.<sup>70</sup>

How does the objectivity of morality relate to perfection? Elucidated above were reasons people hold themselves and others to some kind of standard of morality. The expectation is that the standard entails more than “do not murder” or “do not steal.” Paul Copan writes, “There’s virtually no dispute that racism, theft, fraud, child abuse, murder, and rape are morally wrong. Even despots who carry out such acts will publicly deny rather than own up to such heinous acts.”<sup>71</sup> If these were the only objective aspects to morality, then one could easily live a “perfect

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<sup>69</sup> Richard Dawkins, *River out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life*, Science masters (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995), 132–3.

<sup>70</sup> For a discussion of objections against the case made here see David Enoch, “How Is Moral Disagreement a Problem for Realism?,” *The Journal of Ethics* 13, no. 1 (March 2009): 15–50; Justin Morton, “Can Theists Avoid Epistemological Objections to Moral (and Normative) Realism?,” *Faith and Philosophy* 36, no. 3 (2019): 291–312; Camil Golub, “Is There a Good Moral Argument against Moral Realism?,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 24, no. 1 (March 2021): 151–164; Justin Horn, “On Moral Objections to Moral Realism,” *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 54, no. 2 (June 2020): 345–354.

<sup>71</sup> Paul Copan, *True for You but Not for Me: Overcoming Objections to Christian Faith*, Rev. ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2009), 55.

life” by not following through on these actions. However, there is much more at stake. Morality not only involves avoiding evil, but also actively doing good. As one author commented, “Each human being has an immense capacity for evil. Each human being understands, *a priori*, perhaps not what is good, but certainly what is not. And if there is something that is *not good*, then there is something that *is good*.”<sup>72</sup> On some level, avoiding evil is a vital component of living a moral life, but what would be said of the individual who saw a child drowning and decided not to act? Would they be guilty of murder? Would someone hold them culpable for not doing good? The expectation people feel to act upon some moral principle points toward understanding the desire for perfection outside of purely humanistic explanations. Even though objective morality exists why do people feel guilty for not living up to a particular standard? Before further explanations can be given for what provides the best explanation for these beliefs, one must understand how moral knowledge is acquired.

### Moral Knowledge

If objective morals exist, how does one come to know about these moral facts? In the present discussion, the case is being made that the moral law comes from a perfectly divine being that expects individuals to live in a particular way; however, before a complete case for theism can be made, attention will be given to secular substitutes that attempt to explain moral knowledge.

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<sup>72</sup> Jordan B. Peterson, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2018), 194–5.

## Epistemology

Humans possess different types of knowledge. In a basic form, humans have knowledge about reality, the universe, and humanity. For example, it is possible to know that two hydrogen atoms can bond with an oxygen atom to form water,  $2 + 2 = 4$ , and George Washington was the first president of the United States. Different methods may be employed to come to a knowledge of these facts, but the facts are not necessarily dependent upon the method. Regardless, one can test these facts to determine if they are true or false. This leads to two pertinent questions: Does knowledge about moral facts differ from other facts of reality and are moral facts discoverable like other epistemological facts?

A few limitations need to be mentioned before the study can proceed. First, conversations about epistemology focus on what humans can or cannot know about the world and reality. In a simplified account, people can know certain facts that are vastly different than a Matrix version of reality.<sup>73</sup> For the present discussion, it will be assumed that the Matrix model is invalid.

Second, another basic component of epistemology is that everyone has beliefs that are either true or false. The range of these beliefs are vast and diverse. For this discussion, epistemology will be narrowed down to what people can know about moral facts, and not a general study of epistemology (although some foundational concepts will be referenced throughout). If the case being made up to this point is to be valid, the argument rests upon people knowing what is true or false about morality. In other words, objective morality rests upon the

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<sup>73</sup> A Matrix view of reality is akin to what Plato describes in the allegory of *The Cave*. For an interesting theistic perspective on a mind-dependent reality consider Steven B. Cowan and James S. Spiegel, *Idealism and Christian Philosophy*, vol. 2, Idealism and Christianity (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), accessed April 6, 2022, <http://www.bloomsburycollections.com/book/idealism-and-christian-philosophy-idealism-and-christianity-volume-2>.

assumption that all properly functioning, rational beings can know what is objectively right or wrong. The issue comes when considering how humans come to know these moral facts.<sup>74</sup>

### **Acquiring Knowledge**

Humans gain knowledge by education, parental guidance, peer interactions, personal growth, societal connections, and human flourishing. These are all valid ways of gaining knowledge about certain aspects of the world and reality, but they do not tell the whole story for understanding morality. Stephen Evans bifurcates ethical theories based on a distinction given by the philosopher Gilbert Harman. In response to Harman's observation that relativists, skeptics, nihilists and non-cognitivists oppose advocates of absolute values and a universal moral law; Evans compartmentalizes the views into moral realists and moral skeptics. Moral realists hold there is such a thing as, "objective moral knowledge, where objective moral knowledge is understood as knowledge of moral propositions whose truth is 'stance-independent.'" <sup>75</sup> Moral skeptics, on the other hand, do not believe humans can have objective moral knowledge. The importance of drawing upon truths that are stance-independent is there is no equivocation. They exist independently of someone's personal beliefs or feelings. Even if someone does not buy into moral realism wholesale, the potential still stands for them to understand that certain ethical theories offer a weaker stance compared to other options—namely the version of theism offered here.

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<sup>74</sup> This author is not arguing that non-theists cannot know moral facts. A main part of the argument espoused here is that God makes the most plausible sense for the moral knowledge humans possess. Since this is an abductive argument showing God as the likely best solution for the moral phenomena humans experience, one does not have to show that naturalism is wrong, rather, the task is to show that theism makes a stronger, more plausible case.

<sup>75</sup> Stephen C. Evans, "Worldviews, Moral Seemings, and Moral Epistemology," *The Review of Metaphysics* 73, no. 4, Philosophy Education Society (June 2020): 815.

In continuation of Evans' argumentation, he highlights an important point derived from the distinction between moral realists and moral skeptics. On each side of the chasm, proponents are convinced that their view is the correct view of reality. Does such a divide serve as a counterexample to moral realism? Can both views of reality simultaneously be true? The law of non-contradiction would say that both views cannot be right at the same time. One can be right while the other is wrong or they both equally are wrong, but they both cannot stand together. Aside from knowing that one or both views are wrong, the question may be asked, "Which one offers the most explanatory power to answer the questions of moral knowledge?" The goal here will not be to show that moral skepticism is wrong, but rather than moral realism offers a more plausible solution for moral knowledge with one specific qualification elucidated below.

By way of reiteration, it may be important to show what morality is in other ethical systems. Scott Smith gives a summarized list of basic views of morality outside of theism. He says morality can be,

1. Physical things, or the product of evolutionary processes
2. Just ways of behaving, or moving our body parts
3. The results of our imposition of our self-legislating reason upon matter
4. Emotive utterances
5. The results of utilitarian calculations
6. Our constructs, individually or socially (relativist)
7. Just something due to how we happen to interpret (talk or conceive of) things (i.e., postmodern).<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> R. Scott Smith, *In Search of Moral Knowledge: Overcoming the Fact-Value Dichotomy* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 315. Smith shows in previous sections of his work that each of these options has their own weaknesses. He summarizes his view to show, "these understandings of the ontology of these morals

Given these options, how do these theories explain the knowledge of certain basic moral facts? Suppose one was to inject one of the following statements—murder, rape, and torturing babies for fun is wrong, and love and justice are virtues— into a given ethical system.<sup>77</sup> What would be the response when asked if these statements are true or false? How does one come to the knowledge these things are veridical or not? How one comes to know what is true is not nearly as important as knowing the rock-bottom foundation for understanding some things are right or wrong.

Two overarching categories in ethics is cognitivism and non-cognitivism. Non-cognitivism holds there is no knowledge of moral facts. One ethical system in this category is emotivism. Emotivism demotes statements about morality to statements of feeling. People do not make statements about the objectivity of morality, but only speak in terms of emotion. “Murder is wrong” is equivalent to saying, “Murder, yuck!” Statements about morality do not express facts but only emotional feelings about a topic. Emotivism, sometimes confused with a cognitivist subjectivism, does not believe morality can be said to be right or wrong. Conversely, cognitivism maintains that moral statements have truth-values. Ethical systems like utilitarianism, egoism, and virtue ethics believe in truth-values and can speak concretely about morality although there are disputes about the objectivity or subjectivity of the action under dispute.

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would undercut morality, making it possible that (for example) these principles could have turned out otherwise or are just descriptive matters of fact.” Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Smith picks these five points as classic examples of accepted views of morality, which he believes very few people contest. This author agrees with Smith’s observation for obvious reasons given for moral realism. Smith, *In Search of Moral Knowledge*, 312.

A cognitivist theory may not buy into moral realism, but it does share in the fact that truth claims exist. The question becomes, how does one come to a knowledge of these truth claims especially regarding statements about morality?

### Conscience/Intuition

When the case was made for moral realism above, the point was introduced that moral realism is not dependent upon a theistic view of morality. In this section the topic of conscience, and more specifically intuition, will be addressed as potential candidates to explain moral knowledge. People appeal to conscience as a guide for making moral decisions, and while they are correct in using that term, they typically are referring to intuition.<sup>78</sup> Intuitionism looks to an internal explanation for believing the rightness or wrongness of a moral matter.

The philosophers who align with intuitionism take conscience to a different degree. One intuitionist, Jonathan Haidt, defines intuition as, “the best word to describe the dozens or hundreds of rapid, effortless moral judgments and decisions that we all make every day. Only a few of these intuitions come to us embedded in full-blown emotions.”<sup>79</sup> He establishes that moral judgment is a cognitive process. Robert Audi argues that, “[The moral property of an act]. . . is grounded in a certain set of natural properties, roughly in the sense that when something has a moral property, say being obligatory, it has this property in virtue of possessing the (grounding) natural properties.”<sup>80</sup> Audi’s view is that moral properties and their potential obligatory nature

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<sup>78</sup> A fuller discussion of conscience will fit in a natural law argument addressed in another section.

<sup>79</sup> Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Vintage Books, 2013), 53.

<sup>80</sup> Robert Audi, *Rationality and Religious Commitment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 142.

are just natural facts in and of themselves.<sup>81</sup> G. E. Moore comments on his understanding of intuition by saying,

If I am asked “What is good?” my answer is that good is good, and that is the end of the matter. Or if I am asked “How is good to be defined?” my answer is that it cannot be defined, and that is all I have to say about it. . . . My point is that “good” is a simple notion, just as “yellow” is a simple notion; that, just as you cannot, by any manner of means, explain to any one who does not already know it, what yellow is, so you cannot explain what good is.<sup>82</sup>

No doubt the simplicity of such a definition of intuition is appealing. It is appealing for some of the same reasons given for understanding moral realism. People possess a foundational capacity to understand and draw conclusions about morality. This is shared by both theists and nontheists because it is a part of the fabric of the universe that humans understand without many other qualifiers.

Consider the version of intuitionism touted by philosopher Erik Wielenberg. He argues for a non-natural, non-theistic version of moralism. Wielenberg believes, “there are *sui generis* objective ethical facts that do not reduce to natural or supernatural facts.”<sup>83</sup> In his defense he states that these facts, “are not reducible to other kinds of properties, including natural properties that can be studied by the empirical sciences and supernatural properties involving God.”<sup>84</sup> He contends that moral knowledge comes from intuition, and that some moral facts are simply brute facts. These facts are just some things that all people know about morality that are non-reducible—they are part of the furniture of the universe. Wielenberg’s attempt at explaining

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<sup>81</sup> Audi gets close to a theistic version of moral knowledge but finds more value in divorcing theism away from his view. He argues that morally obligatory acts make more sense instead of a Divine Command Theory.

<sup>82</sup> G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 7.

<sup>83</sup> Erik J. Wielenberg, “In Defense of Non-Natural, Non-Theistic Moral Realism,” *Faith and Philosophy* 26, no. 1 (January 2009): 23.Wi

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

moral knowledge is innovative and intriguing, but it lacks the ability to bind moral obligations on individuals. What is the motivation and impetus for living a moral life in a non-natural, non-theistic version of morality? There are weaknesses here, but they will be explicated in a latter section. It will suffice to say that Wielenberg's account of moral knowledge falls prey to what other naturalistic versions of morality suffer—a lack of grounding for moral obligations.

In contrast to an intuitionist account of moral knowledge, philosopher J. L. Mackie posits a moral error theory. In response to moral realism he states, “If there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe.”<sup>85</sup> He then turns to intuitionism and states, “Correspondingly, if we were aware of [objective values], it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else.”<sup>86</sup> Mackie's objection to objective moral knowledge is only “strange” if naturalism is true, but in a theistic universe there is a proper explanation.

One may be asking at this point what is the issue with intuitionism? First, there is the obvious issue that some versions of intuitionism are grounded in naturalism. The explanatory power of naturalism to provide an account of objective moral facts is weak compared to theism. Naturalism's weakness is that evolution cannot account for non-natural forms without an infinite regress of evolutionary hypotheses for explanations for the existence of intuition itself or consigning it to a lower principle all together. Second, without some kind of foundation for the grounding of intuition, people are left to decide what is right or wrong based on their feelings about it. Herein lies one issue in epistemology. Can two people have differing views about moral

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<sup>85</sup> J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (New York: Penguin, 1977), 38.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

issues? Take for example one person may believe throwing frogs alive into a fire is wrong while another sees no moral issue. They may not agree on the morality of the issue—throwing frogs alive into a fire—but are there other self-evident factors at play upon which they can agree? It may be self-evident that causing unjustified pain is wrong, but applying that principle is different between people. Intuition can justify some propositional statements about morality, but it fails on many accounts to provide a full explanation for moral issues.

### **Theism and Moral Knowledge**

Up to this point naturalistic explanations have been given primarily as potential solutions for the issues created when examining moral phenomena. Little has been mentioned from a theistic standpoint, which has been done strategically. The goal has been to show that naturalistic explanations for the unique and strange nature of morality do not get someone all the way down the road for a complete understanding of it. In this section theism will be offered as a possible solution for understanding moral knowledge within the parameters of moral realism shown previously.

No knockdown, end-all-be-all explanation has been offered to this point. Much of what has been done in previous sections has been to offer possible solutions, and the following section on theism will not differ much from this process. Even though theism will be introduced here, one still has a long way to go before arriving at Christian theism. Minimally the goal will be to show that theism offers some valuable insight for grasping moral knowledge.

It has been shown there are self-evident, objective moral truths in the world. Interrelated with this has been the task of figuring out how humans come to a knowledge of these facts. A nontheist, naturalist may posit that self-evident truths do not need an explanation. Theism usually responds with the formulation of a moral argument.

1. If God does not exist, objective moral values do not exist.
2. Objective moral values do exist.
3. Therefore, God exists (probably).

The logical construction of this argument is valid, and although it does not go without its opponents, premise two typically stands accepted. The challenge comes in proving premise one. Is it true that without God objective moral values do not exist? This question involves a few different responses. First, one may see that moral values have an ontological connection to God's existence.<sup>87</sup> Second, how can someone know that moral values come from God? The second question deserves further consideration, given the discussion of epistemology.

A basic account of theism holds that a completely perfect being created the universe and designed humans for a particular purpose. The designer not only determines the purpose of human creation, but also provides the needed faculties to grasp and comprehend their purpose. The existence of objective moral values seems to be one of those basic designed components. Humans stand out differently from the rest of the created world. More specifically, humans share certain intrinsic values not found elsewhere. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, an atheist, shows the distinctiveness of humans in contrast to lower animals,

Lower animals, such as lions, are not moral agents. They do not make free choices. Their actions are not determined by any conception of what is moral or not. That explains why moral rules and principles do not apply to lower animals any more than they apply to avalanches that kill people. You don't need to add that humans were made in God's image or that we are His favorite species or anything religious.<sup>88</sup>

Sinnott-Armstrong makes his statement in response whether it is immoral for one lion to force sex upon another lion. The difference between a lion forcing sex and a human committing rape,

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<sup>87</sup> This will be developed in another section about moral obligations.

<sup>88</sup> Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, *Morality without God?*, Philosophy in action (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 34.

in Sinnott-Armstrong's view, is that humans are moral agents who are able to make free choices. This is a very interesting take, because naturalism is deficient in providing a reason why humans are moral agents with free choice. This description of humans fits more in a theistic worldview than in a naturalistic one. Theism says that humans are created as moral agents with the free ability to choose to live morally or not. If humans evolved into moral agents, then it is equally possible that humans could have evolved into believing that it is morally acceptable to rape. However, if moral realism is true, there are self-evident facts about morality that transcend human experience (nonnatural), which fit more within a theistic worldview where a transcendent mind created humans as moral agents and provides further instructions for how they should live.

What is meant by "further instructions"? If the existence of a perfect being is conceivable, then it is also plausible this being would also share information with its creation. This is part of the value of a design argument for creation.<sup>89</sup> If something exhibits the qualities of being designed, then it would be logically consistent to believe a designer is also involved.<sup>90</sup> This

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<sup>89</sup> The limitations of this research do not provide space for considering other arguments for God's existence like the cosmological argument. One may consider further study in this field by examining the following works: William Lane Craig, *The Kalām Cosmological Argument* (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble Books, 1979); William Lane Craig, *The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz* (London: Macmillan, 1980); J. P. Moreland, ed., *The Creation Hypothesis: Scientific Evidence for an Intelligent Designer* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994); C. Stephen Evans, *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God: A New Look at Theistic Arguments* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>90</sup> Apologists have focused on the fine-tuning of the universe as needing an intelligent designer. Precursors to this defense can be found in ancient Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle. Plato said that man can know God by the existence of the soul and, "from the order of the motion of the stars, and of all things under the dominion of the Mind which ordered the universe." Plato, *Laws*, 12.966. Modern apologists may be more familiar with the following argument:

1. The fine-tuning of the universe is due to either physical necessity, chance, or design.
2. It is not due to physical necessity or chance.
3. Therefore, it is due to design.

For a fuller explanation see William Lane Craig, *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision*, 1st ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), 110–20.

does not give a full proof for God, but it introduces the idea of a personal God who cares deeply about His creation and expects it to function in a certain way.<sup>91</sup>

Theism supports the case that God has the ability and intentional desire to reveal himself to his creation. Baggett and Walls say that theism can utilize several explanations for moral knowledge: Natural law, conscience, moral intuitions, general revelation, [the way] minds are structured, distinctive features of consciousness, how we use and acquire language, our natural tendencies toward socialization, and the constitutive rules of institutions.<sup>92</sup> These explanations are part of how God reveals himself and the information he desires humanity to know. It may be observed that there are two components to revelation: general and special. When speaking of general revelation, Boa and Bowman suggest, “. . . God gave us our faculty of reason and directed his revelation to it.”<sup>93</sup> Human rationality then becomes a sign to point to God and also a tool to be utilized by God. “Therefore, God expects us to employ our reasoning abilities” Boa and Bowman continue, “both to recognize his true revelation and to detect the fraudulent revelations of other religions.”<sup>94</sup> This is evidenced throughout the preceding sections of this chapter. It does not take much reworking to accept, if there is a God, that he utilizes aspects of his created order for his own purposes.

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<sup>91</sup> Craig speaks to this in his defense of Classical Apologetics in *Five Views of Apologetics*. He concludes, “in any case, even if one insists on using a fuller definition of ‘God,’ I have said from the start that I am quite happy to admit that the kalam argument does not prove the existence of God, so construed, but simply of a Personal Creator of the universe, and the argument can proceed from there. Has this Creator remained distant and aloof from the world that he has made, or has he revealed himself more fully to humankind that we might know him more completely? Here one moves to the claims of Jesus of Nazareth to be the unique personal revelation of such a Creator. It will then be the Christian evidentialist’s turn to take over the oars from the natural theologian.” Steven B. Cowan and William Lane Craig, eds., *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 208.

<sup>92</sup> Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 165.

<sup>93</sup> Kenneth Boa and Robert M. Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons: An Integrative Approach to Defending Christianity: An Apologetics Handbook* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001), 90–1.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

Why revelation? Richard Swinburne introduces the probability of revelation by examining some of the evidence for God. He says, “[It is] quite likely that there is a God, all-powerful and all-good, who made the Earth and its inhabitants, then. . . it becomes to some extent likely that he will become incarnate at some time in human history for certain purposes, and claims that he has done so require a lot less in the way of historical evidence than they would do otherwise.<sup>95</sup> The amount of evidence needed to get from God to the probability of him giving some kind of revelation is quite reasonable to grasp. Different reasons may be supposed for why God would do this, but one option fits the moral discussion. “There are matters which it would be very good for us to know,” Swinburne elucidates, “which are such that either we could not find them out for ourselves, or we have not previously proved persistent or honest enough with ourselves to do so.”<sup>96</sup> This is why the two views of revelation—general and special—are important.

### General Revelation

General revelation refers to “God's self-manifestation through nature, history, and the inner being of the human person.”<sup>97</sup> What is meant here is that God can place guideposts or signs pointing to him that are universally available and the content is such that people can recognize it. First, He may choose to manifest himself through certain aspects of nature; in those aspects that

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<sup>95</sup> Richard Swinburne, *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 79–80. Plantinga analyzes this probability by beginning with the proposition, “A God would make some kind of revelation (of himself, or perhaps of what we need to know about him) to mankind.” Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 274.

<sup>96</sup> Swinburne, *Revelation*, 80. Swinburne identifies four reasons why humans need this revelation: 1. Humans need to learn a lot more about God's nature; 2. Humans need to have the revelation of Jesus Christ who became flesh to atone for sin; 3. Humans need encouragement to do what is good and to avoid bad in the future; and 4. Humans need clarity on which actions are good and which actions are bad. *Ibid.*, 80–5.

<sup>97</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013).

show a design. Second, He can also manifest through the details of history that show his interaction throughout time. Third, and the most interesting for the current study, is that God could manifest himself in the inner being—intuition or conscience—of humans so they may know Him and certain parts of his will. Reasons have been given for why intuition alone is not a viable option for gaining moral knowledge, but when considered with a more robust theistic worldview, it can serve as a guidepost for the moral law.

### Special Revelation

Special revelation is, “God's manifestation of himself to particular persons at definite times and places, enabling those persons to enter into a redemptive relationship with him.”<sup>98</sup> Erickson's definition of special revelation focuses on God revealing himself in such a way that leads people to know him on an intimate level. A key of special revelation is that God provides information that is more detailed and specific than what is given through general revelation. The moral code within all humans, identified through general revelation, is not as complete as what is given through special revelation. The ultimate form of special revelation is when God manifested himself to humanity through the incarnation, thus becoming a part of humanity to disclose himself.

### Morality and Revelation

Some may struggle with the fact that God has not given enough evidence to believe his existence. Although the present discussion is concerned with morality, there is a consistent point across arguments for God's existence. Could God provide more evidence for his existence? Yes, he could drop pamphlets from the sky every morning declaring his existence. However, within

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

Christianity, these things are unnecessary. Christianity says that God has provided the exact evidence needed for an individual to trust him. The goal is for humans to believe in God and have faith in Him. The evidence presented from morality points to God as the likely best explanation for its unique nature. Why would God require such a high standard of living? Could it be that he requires such a high standard for living while knowing that humans cannot do it on their own merit? Does this produce more or less faith and dependence on God? If living a moral life is solely based on what humans are able to do, then there is little need for God. However, the standard is so high that humans must depend on God's assistance to live up to the standard that not only God declares but also instills within humans. In reality, the standard is not solely based on what humans *do* but also on what humans *become*. This will become more evident as a closer look is taken at the standard God has set for people, which will show that God is concerned about his creation coming into proper order with him.

## **Summary**

This quick analysis of moral knowledge has been to point to something beyond the material world for the grounding of morality. A handful of naturalistic options were given as possible solutions for gaining moral knowledge. Finally, theism has been offered as a plausible solution for gaining moral knowledge with the hope that it is seen as the likely best solution.

A few key concepts deserve reiteration. It has been shown that moral facts are knowable like scientific facts, but they are not necessarily discovered by scientific means. Naturalism holds that moral knowledge results from evolutionary, adaptive changes in the human race that enable humans to function in a society together, reproduce, and flourish. Naturalism fails to ground morality, to distinguish between competing morals, and to offer a viable solution for why humans should live morally. At this point in the research attention will be given to the

expectation humans have to live according to the moral law. How specific is the moral law and to what degree are humans expected to live up to it? This will be accomplished by looking at moral obligations.

### Moral Obligations

There are two ways to talk about moral issues. First, one may speak about morality from a theoretical standpoint. Conversations about morality are all well and good, but they are only intellectual fodder unless they are carried from the theoretical to the practical. Thus, the second way to discuss morals has to do with their practical nature. Much of what has been introduced in this chapter has been from a theoretical perspective. Some philosophical peaks needed traversing, but overall, the case made for moral realism has the advantage of appealing to one's practical understanding of morality. This section will take the conversation one step further by dealing with moral obligations. The rubber meets the road when conversations about morality turn to what one "ought" to do. The nature of obligations may cause one to ask a few questions. What constitutes a moral obligation? Is naturalism able to produce moral obligations? What explanation can be given for moral obligations that makes the most sense to human knowledge, experience, and expectations?

#### **The Nature of Obligations**

"The moralities accepted among men may differ—though not, at bottom, so widely as is often claimed—but they all agree in prescribing a behavior which their adherents fail to practice."<sup>99</sup> This quote from C. S. Lewis introduces two critical aspects about moral obligations that need further clarification. First, objective morals, founded on universally accepted

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<sup>99</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 11.

principles, entail prescriptive behaviors. Second, although certain behaviors are prescriptive, people do not always follow them. The first concept will be the focus of this section while the second will be addressed further along.

When speaking of obligations, one may use one of three terms to convey the idea of an obligation. First, something can be forbidden. A forbidden act is obligatory to avoid doing. Second, an obligatory act is one that must be done. Third, a permissible act is one that is not forbidden to do.<sup>100</sup> These terms can be played out in many different contexts, for example in business, law, or medicine. However, obligations addressed here concern moral actions and not just ethical decisions.<sup>101</sup>

Prescriptive behavior is about what is right and wrong to do.<sup>102</sup> Someone may say, “it is wrong to murder,” while someone else says it is “wrong to eat cereal with a fork.” The distinction between these statements should be apparent. In the first instance a moral statement is being made and in the second one is speaking of etiquette. By way of particularism, one can conclude this. Particularism refers to the point that “One can know some things directly and simply without having to have criteria for how one knows them and without having to know how or even that one knows them.”<sup>103</sup> However, not all statements are as easily identifiable. What is

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<sup>100</sup> C. Stephen Evans, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3.

<sup>101</sup> The distinction between morals and ethics is sometimes overlooked or dismissed all together. One may find Scott Rae’s distinction helpful: “Most people use the terms morality and ethics interchangeably. Technically, morality refers to the actual content of right and wrong, and ethics refers to the process of determining, or discovering, right and wrong. In other words, morality deals with moral knowledge and ethics with moral reasoning and justification. Thus, ethics is both an art and a science. It does involve precision like the sciences, but like art, it is an inexact and sometimes intuitive discipline. Morality is the end result of ethical deliberation, the substance of right and wrong.” Rae, *Moral Choices*, 19–20.

<sup>102</sup> This author acknowledges that the terms right and wrong, good and evil, have not been fully explained at this point. The goal is not to put the cart before horse, but rather not to tip the hand too early. The author has chosen to focus on the nature of moral obligations first before providing a definition for what is good and evil. This will make more sense as the argument progresses.

<sup>103</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 87.

meant by stating, “It is wrong to drive on the left side of the road in America”?<sup>104</sup> Does this constitute a moral issue or something else altogether? J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig detail a set of necessary conditions for defining morality:

1. A judgment is moral only if it is accepted as a supremely authoritative, overriding guide to conduct, attitudes, and motives.
2. A judgment is moral only if it is a prescriptive imperative that recommends actions, attitudes, and motives and not merely a factual description about actions, attitudes, and motives.
3. A judgment is moral only if it is universalizable, that is, it applies equally to all relevantly similar situations.
4. A judgment is moral only if it makes reference to proper human flourishing, human dignity, the welfare of others, the prevention of harm and the provision of benefit.<sup>105</sup>

The nature of morality listed here and explained above, provide a platform for discussing the binding effect of morality upon humans. Thus, considering the nature of morality, what is meant by moral obligations?

Stephen Evans delineates four *special features* of moral obligations that make them unique from other obligations.<sup>106</sup> First, an obligation is binary—either it ought to be done or it ought not to be done; 2. Once an individual identifies an obligation to be done, further deliberation is unnecessary; 3. Moral obligations require accountability or responsibility; and 4.

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<sup>104</sup> Once again, this author acknowledges that without a proper understanding of value claims like right and wrong, good and evil, one may not know how to classify this particular statement, but the current focus is on the nature of obligations not moral value.

<sup>105</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 414–5.

<sup>106</sup> Evans, *God and Moral Obligation*, 12–5.

They are universal to all persons. Because of these special features, one has an obligation not to torture babies for fun, while no such obligation is imposed on someone who eats cereal with a fork.

### **The Ought Knot**

A common difficulty is with the meaning of the word “ought”? “Ought” is used in several contexts.<sup>107</sup> For instance, an *aesthetic ought* deals in the realm of taste and beauty.<sup>108</sup> An *operational ought* may be referring to something performing or functioning according to its intended purpose (this can be biological or engineered). A *rational ought* may be that something should be believed because of some evidence. Finally, the one more pertinent to this discussion is a *moral ought*. A *moral ought* maintains that some action, constituted as a moral act, must be done. A moral ought, founded on moral realism, says that one ought to perform (or abstain from) an action regardless of one’s thoughts, feelings, or emotions about it. By contrast, a moral ought, derived from some other standpoint—cultural, personal, natural, etc.—may still consist of expectations but from a subjective perspective. Clearly the different uses of “ought” bring about

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<sup>107</sup> Owen McLeod makes a defense that a “just plain ought,” the type being advanced here, stands out from other oughts like: prudential, legal, etiquettical, aesthetic, religious, and so on. Owen McLeod, “Just Plain ‘Ought,’” *The Journal of Ethics* 5, no. 4 (2001): 269–291.

<sup>108</sup> M.W. Rowe quotes Kant saying, “As regards the agreeable every one concedes that this judgement, which he bases on a private feeling, and in which he declares that the object pleases him, is restricted to him personally. Thus he does not take it amiss if, when he says that Canary wine is agreeable, another corrects the expression and reminds him that he ought to say; it is agreeable to me. . . . The beautiful stands on quite a different footing. It would be on the contrary ridiculous if any one who plumed himself on his taste were to think of justifying himself by saying: This object (the building we see, the dress that person has on, the concert we hear, the poem submitted to our criticism) is beautiful for me For if it merely pleases him, he must not call it beautiful Many things possess for him charm and agreeableness—no one cares about that, but when he puts a thing on a pedestal and calls it beautiful, he demands the same delight from others. . . . Thus he says the thing is beautiful; and it is not as if he counted on others agreeing in his judgement of liking owing to his having found them in such agreement on a number of occasions, but he demands this agreement of them. He blames them if they judge differently.” Quoted in M.W. Rowe, “The Objectivity of Aesthetic Judgments,” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 39, no. 1 (1999): 40. Rowe’s point is that aesthetics are based on subjectivity and cannot be filed in the same category as truly objective matters—in other words the kind produced in morality.

an issue in the present discussion. The confusion of *oughts*, especially in morality, creates a knot of beliefs, perspectives, and issues. To untie the ought knot, further clarification is needed. Specifically, clarification about what provides the best explanation for moral obligations that fit within the provided context.

The German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, is attributed with the dictum, “Ought implies can.”<sup>109</sup> According to Kant’s philosophy, there are certain acts, derived from the moral law, that all humans are expected to do. These imperatives, categorically identified, are universally recognized and applicable to all people regardless of any one person’s beliefs or goals. These imperatives constitute a duty, which are expected and able to be followed.

For Kant, an action ought to be done if it passes the categorical test; but does Kant’s test provide the best explanation for moral obligations? From another perspective, the well-known philosopher, David Hume, brought to light what has been called the “is-ought” challenge. The challenge comes when trying to explain how one moves from the *is* of nature to the *ought* of morality. An *is* can be derived from looking at science and the natural world. Some argue that morality is an evolutionary adaptation like opposable thumbs, fingernails, and teeth.<sup>110</sup> How can these natural facts impose an ought upon humans? Within a naturalistic system, there is no expectation for someone to live a certain way that is different from the expectation one has to eat. “If naturalism is true,” Lewis asserts, “then ‘I ought’ is the same sort of statements as ‘I itch.’”<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, The Cambridge edition of the works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 540.

<sup>110</sup> Michael Ruse, *The Darwinian Paradigm: Essays on Its History, Philosophy, and Religious Implications* (London: Routledge, 1989), 261–2.

<sup>111</sup> Lewis, *Miracles*, 45.

When people speak about what someone ought to do, they are usually expressing a statement that has more binding force than some subjective feeling or emotion. Evans, once again, provides some help in understanding moral obligations. He shows that obligations push one toward the right motivation to be moral. These obligations “[i]nvolve a kind of verdict on an action,” Evans posits, “they make it possible to bring reflection on action to closure and make a decision about the action by providing a decisive reason for action, they are the kinds of things people are rightly held responsible for doing or omitting, and they hold for human persons just as human persons.”<sup>112</sup> Evans’ appeal is that obligations are held for humans because humans know these facts to be true. Humans not only know what to do, they are expected to actually do what is obligatorily binding.

#### Naturalistic Explanations

There are at least three naturalistic explanations for moral obligations.<sup>113</sup> First, moral obligations are part of biology and psychology. Second, moral obligations are a result of human interactions in societies. Third, moral obligations are a result of rational demands humans impose upon themselves as rational beings.<sup>114</sup> Each of these points deserve their own comment, but for the sake of space, a response will be given to them collectively.

Out of the number of authors mentioned throughout this work, theist or not, many have had their own contentions with naturalism’s efficacy to explain obligations or not. Many of their contentions have been against naturalism’s inability to produce a plausible and consistent

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<sup>112</sup> Evans, *God and Moral Obligation*, 15.

<sup>113</sup> This author is indebted to the works of Stephen Evans who writes extensively on the topic of moral obligations. Many other authors may be credited as well, but Evans’ works hold a valuable place in the discussion. The following three naturalistic explanations are taken from Evans, *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God*, 116–31.

<sup>114</sup> Evans uses “naturalistic reductive accounts,” “social contract theories,” and “self-legislation theories” to distinguish his three points. *Ibid.*

explanation for moral phenomena. Their discontent results from them looking for an explanation that matches human experience in a strictly materialistic world. The dissatisfaction comes from the self-realization humans have that they are more than a group of atoms colliding into each other. Although this seems to be the case, those naturalists who disagree have the burden of proof.

One naturalist, Bertrand Russell, abandoned his cognitivist view of ethics for a non-cognitivist perspective. Upon reflection of humanity's beliefs and desires he concluded that they are only, "the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms."<sup>115</sup> Thus, beliefs and desires are nothing more than humans being humans in a solely materialistic world. He shows that, "good and bad are derivative from desire."<sup>116</sup> The obligations people feel are just the result of humans interacting in social contexts. The only obligation humans have is to do "acts so as to produce harmonious rather than discordant desires." According to Russell, these acts are good because they would not disrupt human interactions.<sup>117</sup>

In a Russellian world, as George Mavrodes contends, it would be very strange to have obligations like humans experience with pleasure, happiness, esteem, contentment, self-realization, and knowledge experience.<sup>118</sup> The obligations people experience are a "special relation to certain actions," Mavrodes concludes.<sup>119</sup> The strangeness of such expectations are hard to justify in a world that has no grounding for morality.

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<sup>115</sup> Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship," in *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays* (The Floating Press, 2010), 62.

<sup>116</sup> Bertrand Russell, *An Outline of Philosophy*, Routledge classics (London: Routledge, 2009), 238.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>118</sup> George I. Mavrodes, "Religion and the Queerness of Morality," in *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment: New Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

Although there are exceptions to the rule (e.g., Wielenberg's defense), most naturalists purport that moral values and obligations are potentially grounded with at least one natural property.<sup>120</sup> Those who hold to a non-natural belief must face the supervenience challenge. The challenge results from holding to the belief that the normative supervenes on the natural and that there are "metaphysically necessary connections between discontinuous properties."<sup>121</sup> Recall that Wielenberg holds that non-natural properties are *sui generis*; thus, they are of a different kind of thing all together from natural properties. Since non-natural properties differ from the natural; the non-natural facts, like one would expect for morality, must supervene on the natural. However, how does a value like goodness supervene on a property like feeding the hungry? This seems unintelligible, because a physical object cannot reach out to communicate with an abstract concept like goodness for it to supervene upon it. Furthermore, how is it decided which property is supervened upon another? The arbitrariness of this leads to many other challenges unless there is a concrete standard or some other way to determine which value is placed on what property.

Assume for the moment that natural properties produce obligations (whether some non-natural property supervenes on it or not). If moral obligations come from at least one natural property, is there a common consensus and expectation for the action to be done? Even if naturalism can produce a version of moral obligations, are these obligations enforceable and apt to produce judgments, guilt, and accountability?

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<sup>120</sup> See Wielenberg, "In Defense of Non-Natural, Non-Theistic Moral Realism," 24. Wielenberg also lists a number of other philosophers who essentially teach the same form of non-natural realism as him. His references include: Moore, *Principia Ethica*; Colin McGinn, *Ethics, Evil, and Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 7–60; Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*; Michael Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>121</sup> Victor Moberger, "The Mackiean Supervenience Challenge," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 22, no. 1 (February 2019): 222.

Two of the unique qualities of obligations is that some actions are considered permissible while others are forbidden. One may dismiss these distinctions insisting that moral obligations are illusory. However, as it has been noted, moral obligations are insistent. Whether someone has a theoretical explanation or not, people usually have a practical view of whether certain actions should or should not be done. If an act is permissible or forbidden, who gets the final judgment on the matter? It is hardly possible to demand someone to do something if it is just as possible for them to say, “Who are you to tell me what to do?” As it has been said, humans do expect other humans to behave in a particular way and even feel as if some great wrong has been done if others do not live up to that same standard. Their feelings of outrage or disappointment may be just as illusory as the original obligation, but one does not easily cast out their own convictions and emotions of guilt, shame, and dishonor.

J.L. Mackie thinks that what humans feel is simply a “moral error.” He shows that moral skepticism readily admits “a belief in objective values is built into ordinary moral thoughts and language” but it also acknowledges, “this ingrained belief is false.”<sup>122</sup> Therefore, when people feel obligations or have reasons for an action, it is from the “nature of the thing,” like playing chess by the rules.<sup>123</sup> This might cause one to ask: Who decided that humans are playing chess and who made the rules? Mackie contends that humans do not discover the rules but create them.<sup>124</sup> Thus, it is up to each individual to determine the good in their own life. In a final response to the matter, Mackie says,

My hope is that concrete moral issues can be argued out without appeal to any mythical objective values or requirements or obligations or transcendental necessities, but also

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<sup>122</sup> Mackie, *Ethics*, 48–9.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

without appeal to a fictitiously unitary and measurable happiness or to invalid arguments that attempt to establish the general happiness as a peculiarly authoritative end.

If one accepts Mackie's conclusion, then moral obligations become no more than personal preference, illusory feelings, and erroneous beliefs.

The above positions can be distilled down into two main views: 1. Objective morality exists and entails moral obligations; or 2. Objective morality does not exist, and moral obligations are illusory. These few naturalistic explanations for moral obligations face several problems hinted at throughout this section. One major issue not brought to light is how humanity's desire for perfection fits into these views. In the first view, it makes logical sense that humans feel the desire to live a perfectly moral life if objective morality exists. If people possess the rational capabilities to identify what is good and have a pull toward them, then it would follow that people would make them their end. On the other view, however, since there are no moral obligations, humanity's desire for perfection is either nonexistent or completely subjective. This may appear to be in line with what humans experience, but it requires the dismissal of both objective morals and moral obligations which is implausible given the facts presented earlier. Therefore, the first view seems the more plausible reason humans feel the desire to live a perfect life; but does naturalism offer the best solution or does it leave one wanting?

To determine what offers the best solution for humanity's desire for perfection in the context of moral obligations, it is important to bring in another option besides naturalism. The goal throughout this work has been to present an abductive argument for theism, namely the kind found in Christianity. Some forms of naturalism provide a potential solution, but one must ask the question does naturalism offer the likely best solution? Therefore, the next section will

introduce a theistic explanation for moral obligations that will hopefully provide a more robust solution.

### Theistic Explanation

Can people be good without God? This question has been implied in a few ways leading to this point. It will be the purpose of this section to consider the implications of a theistic model for unwinding the ought knot. As it has been shown, there are issues with naturalism's ability to produce obligations and moral values to the extent that humans expect. In Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, Ivan Karamazov states that without God "everything is permitted." This famous statement has become the focus of many debates about theism's relationship to moral obligations. Can moral obligations exist without God? The atheist philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, took this statement literally. Commenting on Dostoevsky, Sartre says,

Existentialists. . . find it extremely disturbing that God no longer exists, for along with his disappearance goes the possibility of finding values in an intelligible heaven. There could no longer be any *a priori* good, since there would be no infinite and perfect consciousness to conceive of it. Nowhere is it written that good exists, that we must be honest or must not lie, since we are on a plane shared only by men. . . . If, therefore, God does not exist, we will encounter no values or orders that can legitimize our conduct. Thus, we have neither behind us, nor before us, in the luminous realm of values, any means of justification or excuse. We are left alone and without excuse.<sup>125</sup>

In the sentiment of Nietzsche's "death of God," Sartre's point is that when God is removed from the picture there is no place for objective morality or value. If Sartre is right, does theism give the best explanation for moral values and obligations? Mackie agrees in stating, "Moral properties constitute so odd a cluster of properties and relations that they are most unlikely to

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<sup>125</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, ed. John Kulka, trans. Carol Macomber (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 28–9, accessed June 4, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/j.ctv15vwkx>.

have arisen in the ordinary course of events without an all-powerful god to create them.”<sup>126</sup> Are these writers correct in saying that theism produces the likely best solution for moral values (even though they disagree with it)? One may frame the argument with these premises.

1. If there are objectively binding moral obligations, then God exists.
2. There are objectively binding moral obligations.
3. (Probably) God exists.

The famous dialogue between Socrates and Euthyphro in Plato’s *Euthyphro*, presents a well-known dilemma: Does God command things because they are good, or are things good because God commands them? This dilemma serves an important role in figuring out theism’s relationship with moral obligations. The two horns of the dilemma can be illustrated in the following scenario. Is murder wrong because God says it is wrong or does God forbid murder because it is wrong regardless of what he commands?

Each horn has been defended by different forms of theism. On the one extreme is the voluntarist perspective. This side concludes that God can command whatever he desires because he is God. Therefore, if he wants to say that rape or torturing babies is good, then he could command it to be done.<sup>127</sup> Proponents of this view are labeled as “Divine Command Theorists.” A radical version is sometimes called “Ockhamism” because of its extreme voluntarism. William of Ockham took his view to the extreme in the sense that he believed God had the full right to command whatever he desired without restrictions (although Ockham did not believe God would do it). On the opposite extreme of the dilemma is the view that values of good and evil exist

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<sup>126</sup> J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and against the Existence of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 115.

<sup>127</sup> Very few DCTs actually ascribe to this extreme form of the argument. It is mentioned here as a beginning point, but the typical response to this horn will be expounded upon throughout this section.

independent of God. If one holds to this stance, God becomes superfluous in discussions about morality because he is not needed for goodness. According to this postulation, “God and morality are distinct, and not just conceptually; God isn't the foundation of moral goodness, but rather at most the source of some of our moral knowledge.”<sup>128</sup> Consequently, God is simply reporting the facts or pointing in the direction of what is good without any association to himself. Such a view runs counter to an orthodox Christian version of theism.

This classic dilemma illustrates the two most common views of a theistic solution for morality. As it can be seen, both sides are not without their points of contention. Most of these contentions will be reserved for a more in-depth response in the next chapter. Until then, one salient issue cannot go unaddressed. Undoubtedly, the discussion of moral values is the common point of friction between these sides. To call something good or bad requires a definition for *goodness* and *badness*.

There is a difference between calling something good and calling something right. The latter concerns deontic obligations and duties, while the former is axiological about value. Robert Adams does a masterful job clarifying this distinction. Earlier Adams was introduced as offering a definition of the good that is synonymous with God. His alternate version of a typical Divine Command Theory says that God is not only associated with the good, but He is ontologically the Good. If God himself is the good, then what he commands as right is an extension of his ontological goodness. Therefore, Adams' solution to the Euthyphro dilemma is to say that God will make no abhorrent commands because they would go against his very nature as the good. Baggett and Walls agree with this distinction by arguing for a “nonvoluntarist account of the

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<sup>128</sup> Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 39.

good and a voluntarist account of the right.”<sup>129</sup> Those opposing this view reject the existence of one universal good. For example, Wielenberg contests, “There is not merely one ultimate Intrinsic Good from which all other good and evil in the world is derived; rather, there is a multitude of intrinsic goods and evils scattered throughout our world.”<sup>130</sup> Even though some may reject the existence of an ultimate good, many ethicists speak of goodness as a foundation for ethical decisions.

Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* has become a standard reference point for many ethical systems. A salient part of Aristotle’s philosophy identifies that every act or purpose, “seems to aim at some good. . . .”<sup>131</sup> The good of some actions may be found in the end of another action while others may point to an end that many things share together. Thus, “the good is that at which everything aims.”<sup>132</sup> Greek philosophers, like Aristotle and his contemporaries, distinguished between ends and an “end in itself.” Some actions that appear to be an end are simply a means to get to another end. Therefore, what is the ultimate end to which all things point? Aristotle believed the final end was happiness (*eudaemonia*). He sought to explain the natural, innate desire in humans to pursue the good. This intrinsic pursuit of the good requires goodness to be founded in some capacity which then makes it have a limit (if you can obtain it, it is limited). For everything to point to a common good they must share common qualities, or rather those things that are worth obtaining will share the same quality. Aristotle shows that virtue (*arete*) is the correct character or quality needed to point to happiness as the ultimate good.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>130</sup> Erik J. Wielenberg, “The Moral Argument for God’s Existence; or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Godless Morality,” *The Philosophers’ Magazine*, no. 86 (2019): 3.

<sup>131</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1.1.1.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

Virtue, in the Greek mind, deals with potentiality. Consider an acorn. An acorn has the potential to become an oak tree, and becoming an oak tree is its *excellency*. What is the excellence of a knife or horse? Is the excellence of a knife to cut and of a horse to run? What is the comparable understanding of humans? Do humans have some distinctive aspect to themselves that is not found in other non-human beings? If taken in the Greek mindset, man is to grow into the proper virtues that constitute a proper human nature. Aristotle argued that pursuing the good is not an ought because it is a simple part of nature.<sup>133</sup>

In this respect the ultimate good is limited. However, what has been argued up to this point is that the good is not limited but infinite. To reach the ultimate good would be to reach God or rather to be God. This would fit one definition of perfection in chapter one. Humans find they do not reach perfection, which means the ultimate exists outside of one's reach. One must not miss the point that those things that share in the nature of the ultimate good, which is God, are worth pursuing and are even a driving force to reach a greater end.

The good is more than an individual standard, it is universal, ultimate, and infinite; and it applies to all humans at all times. Consider, again, one of Wielenberg's discoveries:

Each of us is obligated to pursue the highest good. Yet we cannot sensibly pursue the highest good unless we believe that the highest good is attainable. We cannot sensibly believe that the highest good is attainable unless we believe that there is a being who will make it possible that the highest good comes into existence—and a little reflection reveals that the only being who could accomplish this is God. Hence, we cannot sensibly pursue the highest good unless we believe that God exists.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> This point will be explicated in the next chapter. The connection humans have to the good in a theistic worldview will say a lot about how the topic of perfection is handled. Moral values must be rigid for a standard to be imposed on human actions. Without a standard, there will exist no drive for moral perfection.

<sup>134</sup> Erik J. Wielenberg, *God and the Reach of Reason* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 81. Recall from earlier that Wielenberg does not believe in the highest good, but rather smaller goods and evils scattered throughout the universe. His theoretical option is not valid to him, but one worth pursuing in the present discussion because his conclusion is correct—without God there is no highest good.

Although he rejects this conclusion, Wielenberg challenges the consistency of those who advocate for the ultimate good. Therefore, he says, “Atheists must either act irrationally (pursuing the highest good while believing it to be unattainable) or do something wrong by neglecting to pursue the highest good.”<sup>135</sup> Theism accepts this challenge and welcomes it as a viable and consistent conclusion.

The version of theism advanced here states that humans are on a different plane than God. God, who is the good, is not constrained by obligations because goodness exudes from his being. He acts in such a way that accords with his very nature. Finite humans on the other hand must act under obligation, which serves as training wheels, until humans can act fully according to God’s plan for morality.<sup>136</sup> John Hare, commenting on Kant, says, “The difference between us is that God does not have obligations, because the function of obligation is to constrain inclination, and God does not have inclinations to be constrained; God’s will is perfectly holy, as ours can never be.”<sup>137</sup> He further notes four aspects of morality derived from a Kantian ethic. The fourth conception is that humans have “double motivation.”<sup>138</sup> The qualities of this double motivation is that humans have, “an affection for advantage, which is directed toward one’s own happiness and perfection, and an affection for justice, which is directed toward what is good in

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<sup>135</sup> Erik J. Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 81.

<sup>136</sup> See Mavrodes, “Religion and the Queerness of Morality.”

<sup>137</sup> Hare, *God and Morality*, 143.

<sup>138</sup> John Hare, “Is Moral Goodness without Belief in God Rationally Stable,” in *Is Goodness without God Good Enough?: A Debate on Faith, Secularism, and Ethics*, ed. Robert K. Garcia and Nathan L. King (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 87. The other three conceptions of morality noted by Hare are: 1. Morality requires us to share the morally permissible ends of those affected by our actions, in the sense of making those ends our own ends; 2. Morality requires us not to rank our own advantage above that of others, just because it is ours; this is because morality requires us to treat all human beings as having the same worth; and 3. “Ought” implies “can,” in the sense that if it is not the case that we can do something, the question whether we ought to do it does not properly arise. *Ibid.* 86–7.

itself independently of its relation to us.”<sup>139</sup> The first component is an internal quality requiring moral transformation to the degree advocated here that is only accomplished by unity with Christ. The latter is a result of the first, because humanity no longer lives for self but realizes a new priority of living (i.e., sanctification) that has its end in God alone.<sup>140</sup>

Hare explains that the demands should motivate by showing “the route God has chosen for us to reach the destination of being co-lovers with God.”<sup>141</sup> Stephen Evans agrees with the same concept from Hare but frames it in terms of pursuing the good. Evans’s focus is on moral obligations, which takes a different approach from Hare’s focus on the commands themselves. This method puts a spin on the motivation to be moral. According to Evans, God “has also given [human persons] the *potential for the greatest possible good*, an eternal life characterized by friendship with God and others who are friends of God and therefore love the good.”<sup>142</sup> To love the good is to love God because God is the ultimate good.

Another aspect of motivation is that one may not be motivated to live morally because an individual does care about God or does not care *enough* about him (volitional). Skepticism, even within Christianity, is a detrimental mindset because it entails a reluctance to obey without a satisfactory amount of subjective evidence to act. As it has been noted, one does not have to believe in God to know that moral obligations exist.<sup>143</sup> One of the objections raised against

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 88–9.

<sup>140</sup> The epistemic aspect of transformation is only one key in understanding what unity with Christ entails. More will be said in chapter five concerning a holistic approach to sanctification, although there will be limitations on this study. For proof of concept consider Stanley N. Gundry, ed., *Five Views on Sanctification*, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

<sup>141</sup> John Hare, *God’s Call: Moral Realism, God’s Commands, and Human Autonomy* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001), 119.

<sup>142</sup> Evans, *God and Moral Obligation*, 28.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 20–2.

Divine Command Theory is what Evans calls the “promulgation objection.” This objection raises the notion that a command from God must be explicit and easily identifiable with God as the source of it. Evans raises several responses to this objection. He appeals to the conscience again but also elucidates the point that God can use different ways to make his plan or obligations known. This introduces the topic of “divine hiddenness” and moral knowledge. To bring in the previous discussion, different terms are used to describe how people perceive moral obligation in their life. Two essential terms are *conscience* and *intuition*. Evans defines conscience as “a faculty whereby humans can immediately discern the rightness or wrongness of particular acts or of general principles about how one should act (perhaps by way of discerning the right-making or wrong-making character of some general feature of the act or act-type).”<sup>144</sup> The argument from conscience seems to reconcile the “pull,” “call,” or “inner voice” humans feel or *hear* when they know they need to do something or not. Furthermore, this conscience or intuition can be an aspect of general revelation, which is meant to point to God.

One must wrestle with this theologically to grasp the relevance of God’s actions, given a strong Divine Command Theory. The thrust of it is to show that moral obligations exist and are inextricably tied to God and his nature. This does not mean that one who fails to connect these truths is absolved from the culpability of sin solely based on ignorance, but rather that one has the reasoning faculties to see that moral obligations must be seated somewhere outside of humans and natural law.

A Divine Command Theory for the right, says that God can tell humans to act in a particular way and that they ought to do it because it is right. Anything that is good will have similar characteristics to God’s nature, which is why God will not command something that is

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 41.

contrary to his good nature since he is ontologically the good. Therefore, one must consider the value of moral claims. Richard Swinburne explains three kinds of goodness and three kinds of badness. First, goodness may be considered as the overall, the important, and the overriding. Second, is a continuation of the first, but it entails that there are certain universal properties that make it good. Third, goodness may be in respect to “exemplifying” or “forwarding” what is good. With these in mind, Swinburne advances that, “To be ‘morally good’. . . an action must minimally have. . . overall goodness, of overriding importance, deriving from universal properties; and to be ‘morally bad’ as I shall define the term, an action must minimally have badness of the second kind.”<sup>145</sup> The moral life then becomes doing what has qualities of the ultimate good and pursuing the good in itself as an end. “My proposed criterion for the goodness of an action being moral goodness” Swinburne notes, “is now that it have overall goodness arising from universal properties belonging to the set of standard moral properties, the positive ones counting for and the negative ones counting against its overall goodness; a belief that an action is morally good is a belief that its goodness is of this kind.”<sup>146</sup> Although a person may disagree with a few of these points, there is a general consensus that a system for determining moral values makes sense to human experience. Without getting caught in the metaethical weeds, it is not too far-fetched to concede that moral values are important and are essential for conversations about the point of morality.

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<sup>145</sup> Richard Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1989), 14. Swinburne says that badness is, “. . .the opposite of moral goodness, in the sense that on the first account the morally bad is the overall bad, which it is of overriding importance should not be done; and on the second account it is the overall bad which it is of overriding importance should not be done, where that badness derives from universal properties; and on the third account it is badness of a particular kind (e.g. arising from harm to humans).” *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

The goal of this section has been to show that moral obligations, of the nature humans experience, are likely best understood in a theistic world. The goal has been to untie the *ought knot*. It has been shown that naturalistic explanations present possible solutions, but the weaknesses require one to look elsewhere for a plausible explanation. Herein lies the impetus for introducing theism. In an introductory way, theism has been presented as a viable option, because it provides a grounding of moral obligations in the existence and nature of God as the ultimate good to which humans are driven.

### **Summary**

In the previous sections of this chapter, the concept of moral realism was introduced by showing that objective morality should be taken seriously and that humans need a grounding for moral knowledge that is nonnatural. The idea was introduced that theism possibly explains moral phenomena. By introducing God into the discussion, the bar has been raised for taking morality seriously. Theism points to a God as the likely source for the grounding of objective morality and the source of moral knowledge. If these two points have been shown, then it is a logical extension to assume that God has a plan in place for humans to live moral lives. Minimally, the bar has been set to show that if objective morals exist then it is logical for humans to follow them. This has created a case for moral obligations. Since humans possess a pull or desire to be good, the desire must be located outside of human nature because of the shared, universal nature of morality that is objective rather than subjective.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter has been to lay a foundation for an abductive argument for God based on moral phenomena. The moral phenomena under examination at this point are those

that undergird the desire humans have for perfection. Humans possess a drive for perfection because they experience the weight of moral realism and its invaluable intricacies that intertwine with human nature. It has been proposed that humans live in a world that has a very high standard of morality that cannot be explained as easily from natural properties. The objectiveness of morality, the knowledge itself, and its subsequent obligations are likely best understood in nonnatural, theistic terms. Therefore, when humans speak about other humans living and acting in a particular way, they are appealing to something more than humanistic foundations. The goal of the next chapter will be to show that theism resolves the perfection issue. It will be shown that a generic version of theism is not enough, but the version of theism found in Christianity provides the likely best solution.

### Chapter 3: Theism and Moral Realism

Few works have traced the history of the moral argument with its various adaptations and developments throughout time. One such work, written by Baggett and Walls, creates a record of major influencers who contributed to the advancement of the moral argument. In their work, they cover writers from antiquity to modernity. Their purpose in chronicling the moral argument is to show, “the abiding conviction that morality provides an indispensable and vitally hopeful window of insight into ultimate reality.”<sup>147</sup> The window into ultimate reality shows that morality is inextricably tied to the human understanding of how the world operates.

Although it would be impossible for a dissertation to outline all the forms of the moral argument, it is vitally important to identify at least a few individuals who effectively (1) identify the objectivity of morality; (2) regard the demand of morality as extremely high; and (3) who illustrate the finitude of humans to live by the moral law perfectly. After illustrating these three points, a tripartite argument will be given in chapter four utilizing the three Christian forms of the moral argument to show how a certain type of theism aptly replies to the need introduced in chapter two.

#### A Theistic Argument for the Moral Law

The focus of chapter two was to establish the viability of moral realism in discussions about the nature of morality. A key concept of moral realism is that moral facts are objective and knowable by all rational beings and a part of the moral law. In H.P. Owen’s defense of morality, he succinctly identifies three principles of morality established above:

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<sup>147</sup> Baggett and Walls, *The Moral Argument*, 4.

1. It is necessary to affirm the existence of moral principles and practices that theists share with agnostics and that constitute what is called “natural law.”
2. We cannot claim with certainty that any element in Christian morality is wholly distinctive to it and lacks any non-Christian parallel.
3. We must. . . conserve everything that is valid in the concept of moral autonomy.<sup>148</sup>

The theistic perspective on these assumptions compounds the argument made in chapter two.

Theism contends that moral realism is a part of God’s creation of a moral code—general revelation—within humans in a created moral reality. This created reality of morality is provided for humans so they can know, identify, and respond to what is good or bad and right or wrong. Humans can know through conscience or intuition aspects of morality, but there is still much to explain about the moral law itself. This moral law is necessary and indispensable for any moral theory because moral facts cannot, as Mark Murphy describes, be “danglers.”<sup>149</sup> C. S. Lewis describes moral facts as the keys on a piano, and the moral law serves as the sheet music determining the way the keys are to be played.<sup>150</sup> The purpose of this section will be to explain a theistic argument for the moral law by focusing on key individuals and their contribution and advancement of the argument with special focus on the three qualification mentioned in this chapter’s introduction.

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<sup>148</sup> H. P. Owen, “Morality and Christian Theism,” *Religious Studies* 20, no. 1 (March 1984): 5–6.

<sup>149</sup> Mark C. Murphy, *God and Moral Law: On the Theistic Explanation of Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 49–50.

<sup>150</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 10–11.

## Voices of Morality

Introduced above was the idea that Christian moral apologists have paved the way for understanding how morality, properly construed, points to theism as the likely best solution for humanity's desire for moral perfection. This is the case because objective morality sets a standard for how humans are expected to live. If there is any standard, it is extremely high compared to what humans actually attempt to do in their lives. Thus, there is seemingly a gap between the moral law and humanity's finitude to live by it. The authors below have been chosen because they serve as vital steppingstones along the path of human history. These individuals may be seen as archeologists, discovering moral facts, instead of an architect creating them.

### **Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)**

A major key player in apologetics is Thomas Aquinas. Admittedly, Aquinas is not a typical moral apologist, *per se*, because he does not have a full, definitive formulation of the moral argument. However, the purpose of this chapter is to highlight individuals who meet the three criteria elucidated earlier. Therefore, Aquinas serves a vital role as an apologist, but more importantly one who makes a significant contribution to the argument advanced here.

To understand Aquinas's defense of theism, and subsequently his view of morality, one needs to consider his "five ways."<sup>151</sup> It is impossible to examine all five proofs here because they are outside of the purview of this work; however, his fourth way will garner special focus. The fourth way is an observation about the gradation found in things. For example, in human interactions there are beings who are more or less good. If there is a comparison of things on a scale of more or less, then there must also exist something that is considered "the most." If there

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<sup>151</sup> Aquinas' five ways about God are: prime mover, the first cause, the necessary being, the absolute being, and the grand designer.

are any degrees in something like goodness or perfection, then there must also be that which is the most good or perfect. Aquinas's theory builds from Anselm's ontological argument establishing the conceptual validity of an ultimate.<sup>152</sup> Thus, it is presupposed that one can conceive of an ontologically superior concept like goodness or perfection. If this is true, then it is also logically consistent to conclude that the ultimate cause of goodness and perfection exists. Here is the value of Aquinas's fourth way. His argument to the existence of God can be broken down in these terms:

1. There are beings which are "more" good, true, noble etc. (in short: more perfect) than others.
2. If such comparative terms like more or less are truly predicated of beings, then they describe varying degrees of approximation with respect to (w.r.t) an existing maximum of perfection.
3. According to Aristotle an existing maximum of perfection (or a maximum of truth) is also a maximum of being.

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<sup>152</sup> The premises of Anselm's ontological argument are as follows:

1. It is a conceptual truth (or, so to speak, true by definition) that God is a being than which none greater can be imagined (that is, the greatest possible being that can be imagined).
2. God exists as an idea in the mind.
3. A being that exists as an idea in the mind and in reality is, other things being equal, greater than a being that exists only as an idea in the mind.
4. Thus, if God exists only as an idea in the mind, then we can imagine something that is greater than God (that is, a greatest possible being that does exist).
5. But we cannot imagine something that is greater than God (for it is a contradiction to suppose that we can imagine a being greater than the greatest possible being that can be imagined.)
6. Therefore, God exists.

This formulation is taken from Kenneth Einar Himma, "Anselm: Ontological Argument for God's Existence," *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, n.d., accessed July 16, 2021, <https://iep.utm.edu/>.

4. The maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus; i.e. the maximum of perfection and being is the cause of all things w.r.t. to [sic] perfection and being.
5. There is a thing which is the cause of all things w.r.t. perfection and being.
6. This we call God.<sup>153</sup>

Essentially, Aquinas boils down the nature of God as possessing all perfection by stating, “All created perfections are in God. Hence, He is spoken of as universally perfect, because He lacks not. . . any excellence which may be found in any genus.”<sup>154</sup> In these terms God is the first cause of all things including goodness and perfection since they extend from him. Therefore, “God is the first principle, not material, but in the order of efficient cause, which must be most perfect. . . . For a thing is perfect in proportion to its state of actuality, because we call that perfect which lacks nothing of the mode of its perfection.”<sup>155</sup> What Aquinas accomplishes here is a type of moral argument, as Craig likewise identifies, because the ultimate being is what people call “God.”<sup>156</sup>

The unique explication of Aquinas’s fourth way as a type of moral argument leads one to connect the objectivity of goodness to both God and humans. Since there is a clear distinction between God and finite humans, one may be led to ask how far that divide separates. In a series of articles under the question of “the state of perfection,” Aquinas endeavors to ask whether

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<sup>153</sup> This argumentation is derived from Aquinas’ work but this formulation is from Paul Weingartner, *God’s Existence - Can It Be Proven? A Logical Commentary on the Five Ways of Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 10, *Metaphysical research* (Frankfurt: Ontos Verl, 2010), 88.

<sup>154</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.4.2.

<sup>155</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.4.1.

<sup>156</sup> William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 104.

humans can be perfect in this life or not.<sup>157</sup> In the objections, two main Scriptures are referenced to show human imperfection. Aquinas's response to these objections starts from a foundation of Aristotle's definition of perfection and the one established in the fourth way, which states, "The perfect is that which lacks nothing."<sup>158</sup> To show human imperfection, he asks whether it is possible to love all of one's neighbors as commanded by Jesus (Matt. 22:39). It seems this would be a failure on the part of every Christian because to love every neighbor according to the expected degree of the second greatest commandment would be impossible. How does one resolve Christ's command to be perfect (Matt. 5:48) with man's inability to live a perfect life? These two scriptural references add complexity to the idea of human imperfection.

These objections are not easily dismissed because they are created by specific commands given by God. If the command to love or to be perfect were human creations, then one could argue against their obligatory nature; however, these verses show divine commands. Thus, Aquinas responds to the complexity of these two objections by delineating a threefold perfection. First, there is absolute perfection. Absolute perfection would involve loving God as much as God can be loved. This type of perfection is unattainable by any being other than God. Second, there is total perfection. Total perfection, on the part of the lover, is to love God completely, but this once again is not attainable on this side of heaven. Third, is the lowest level of perfection, which is the removal of obstacles that impede one's love of God. At this point Aquinas answers,

Such perfection as this can be had in this life, and in two ways. First, by the removal from man's affections of all that is contrary to charity, such as mortal sin; and there can be no charity apart from this perfection, wherefore it is necessary for salvation. Secondly, by the removal from man's affections not only of whatever is contrary to charity, but also of whatever hinders the mind's affections from tending wholly to God. Charity is possible

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<sup>157</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II.184.2.

<sup>158</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 3.6.

apart from this perfection, for instance in those who are beginners and in those who are proficient.<sup>159</sup>

The perfection Aquinas explains revolves around the concept of love. Humans are to love God and conform their lives to his standards. Since humans are imperfect, they cannot conform totally and completely. However, they can reach some degree by removing sin and obstacles that prohibit the love of God. This is accomplished with a lower degree of divine love that is, “to love nothing more than God, or contrary to God, or equally with God, and whoever fails from this degree of perfection nowise fulfils the precept.”<sup>160</sup> Various degrees of goodness, love, and perfection are attainable by finite humans, but the highest degree is reserved for God alone.

The unique relationship that finite humans have with the ultimate good is a result of God’s creation. In another one of Aquinas’ works, he explains, “Created things are made like unto God by the fact that they attain to divine goodness. If then, all things tend toward God as an ultimate end, so that they may attain His goodness, it follows that the ultimate end of things is to become like God.”<sup>161</sup> “Moreover,” he continues, “all created things are, in a sense, images of the first agent, that is, of God, ‘for the agent makes a product to his own likeness.’ Now, the function of a perfect image is to represent its prototype by likeness to it; this is why an image is made. Therefore, all things exist to attain to the divine likeness, as to their ultimate end.”<sup>162</sup> The fact that humans are made in the image of the Creator forces one to confront the high demand of morality. If a person does not live up to the prescribed standard, then he or she is not merely

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<sup>159</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II.184.2.

<sup>160</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II.184.3.

<sup>161</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3.19.1.

<sup>162</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3.19.4.

disobeying a command, they are going against their created purpose. The decision to act contrary to the divine standard runs contrary to multiple instances of what Aquinas calls “Law.”

In an extended section on the Law, Aquinas distinguishes between four types of law. First, there is the eternal law. The eternal law is the plum line for judging acts, and the standard is derived from the divine reason of God the ruler.<sup>163</sup> Second, is the natural law. The natural law consists of the eternal law imprinted upon the hearts of humans which enables them to determine the proper execution of acts or ends.<sup>164</sup> Third, is the human law. The human law is created as the result and application of reasoning through the natural law’s principles as they relate to human interactions. Finally, there is the divine law.<sup>165</sup> The divine law entails those rules and guidelines given to people that go beyond the natural and human laws.<sup>166</sup> The natural and divine laws serve a prominent role in establishing a Christian ethic because of their relationship to obligations. Essentially, the two main sources of moral obligations are, “The natural law, which are the dictates of God’s eternal practical reason to which we have epistemic access, and the divine law, which are the special revelations of God’s will.”<sup>167</sup> When taken together these twin components help undergird a more robust approach for understanding the divine standard of morality.

This leads to a further discussion about moral goodness. In Aquinas’s work, goodness is a part of being. Everything possesses its own goodness because of its being. He agrees with Aristotle that goodness is that which all things desire. Aquinas shows that God is good because

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<sup>163</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II–II.91.1

<sup>164</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II–II.91.2

<sup>165</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II–II.91.3

<sup>166</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II–II.91.4

<sup>167</sup> J. Clanton and Kraig Martin, “Aquinas and Scotus on the Metaphysical Foundations of Morality,” *Religions* 10, no. 2 (February 14, 2019): 4.

of his desirableness and his ontological existence as the ultimate good. He is the first effective cause of all things, including goodness. As it has been identified, perfection is the completion of a being's goodness. Humans stand out differently because they desire to pursue some good beyond their human nature. Aquinas explains in the following excerpt:

But since it behooves a man to do his utmost to strive onward even to Divine things, as even the Philosopher declares. . . and as Scripture often admonishes us—for instance: "Be ye perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mat. 5:48), we must needs place some virtues between the social or human virtues, and the exemplar virtues which are Divine. Now these virtues differ by reason of a difference of movement and term: so that some are virtues of men who are on their way and tending towards the Divine similitude; and these are called "perfecting" virtues.<sup>168</sup>

In summation, Aquinas raised the bar of morality by introducing his natural law theory. Once a person understands the framework for what is good and the expectation to do it, then they can consider how they are to live up to that good.

### **Immanuel Kant (1724–1804)**

One of the more prominent moral thinkers is the German philosopher Immanuel Kant. Kant is well-known for showing that the standard of rationality points to the ultimate principle of morality. The appeal of such a system is that the emphasis is placed on human capacity for making rational, ethical decisions based on universally recognized objective imperatives. Thus, Kant's development of a deontic system of ethics is both relatable and practical for humans to understand. As introduced in chapter one, Kant is quintessential for understanding the high standard of morality expected of humans due to his "ought implies can" dictum (OIC). Kant believed that humans could know what to do and effectively do it. His litmus test for determining the ethicality of a decision is the "categorical imperative." The categorical imperative states that

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<sup>168</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I–II.61.5.

humans should, “act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.” An action is imperative if a person is expected to do it while also having the freedom of choice or autonomy. It is categorical by being independent of any subjective will a person may have regarding a particular action. If an action is identified by the categorical imperative, it will possess the qualities of being universally recognized and upheld as a universal law.

It was Kant’s belief this way of rationalizing and weighing decisions fits best with a proper construal of the good. Kant drew upon conceptions of the good akin to an Aristotelian teleological formulation. He contended that an action derived from the good maxim will have the highest good as its motivation. This highest good is what leads to true happiness.<sup>169</sup> Kant distinguished between two senses of “the highest good” (*summum bonum*): the supreme good and the complete/perfect good. The supreme good (*supremum*) is found in virtue and the worthiness of happiness. Virtue is supreme because it, “provides ultimate reasons for action, reasons which override all others.”<sup>170</sup> Although virtue has a relation to happiness it does not produce the ultimate form of happiness. Thus, the second sense of “the highest good” is the complete or perfect good, formulated by impartial reasoning, which prioritizes morally lawful conduct as a condition.<sup>171</sup> Herein lies the robust nature of Kant’s ethical theory when compounded with his theistic postulations.

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<sup>169</sup> Kant speaks of happiness as, “the satisfaction of all our inclinations.” Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 677.

<sup>170</sup> Peter Byrne, “Kant’s Moral Proof of the Existence of God,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 32, no. 4 (August 1979): 338.

<sup>171</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary Gregor, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, n.d.), sec. 5:111.

Kant recognizes that humans possess the desire to live a perfect life, while simultaneously recognizing that the perfect life is unattainable by finite humans in this life. Thus, the completion of the highest good must be located beyond human experience in this life. Kant proposes,

There is not the least ground in the moral law for a necessary connection between the morality and the proportionate happiness of a being belonging to the world as part of it and hence dependent upon it, who for that reason cannot by his will be a cause of this nature and, as far as his happiness is concerned, cannot by his own powers make it harmonize thoroughly with his practical principles. Nevertheless, in the practical task of pure reason, that is, in the necessary pursuit of the highest good, such a connection is postulated as necessary: we ought to strive to promote the highest good (which must therefore be possible). Accordingly, the existence of a cause of all nature, distinct from nature, which contains the ground of this connection, namely of the exact correspondence of happiness with morality, is also postulated.<sup>172</sup>

Kant's proposal is that humanity cannot create a world where morality and happiness harmonize to the degree humans experience, without first placing the highest good beyond human conventions. As he notes, there must exist the first cause that contains within it the ability to ground the connection in pursuing the highest good. These items together make it necessary to postulate God.

Kantian philosophers are familiar with the basic aspects of his moral theory, while few consider the ramifications of the theistic foundation of his theories. Kant saw that the moral law within humans was a guide or piece of evidence pointing to God. Naturalistic moral theorists are quick to use aspects of Kant's philosophy while simultaneously rejecting his theistic underpinnings. To dismiss Kant's theistic beliefs weakens his moral theory. When evaluating proofs for God's existence, Kant was not keen on the ontological or cosmological arguments. Interestingly, however, in his *Beweisgrund*, Kant shows that God is a necessary postulate for

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<sup>172</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, sec. 5:125.

understanding both the ontological nature of the moral law and to some degree, the designed order of the universe. Although Kant is not viewed in the same light as other moral apologists, he still constructed a variation of the moral argument. Considering the points presented earlier, one may construct Kant's moral argument in the following way:

1. Humans are morally obligated to conform their lives perfectly to the moral law.
2. A person is not morally obligated to do something he or she cannot do.
3. Therefore, moral perfection must be possible.
4. Moral perfection is not possible in this life.
5. Therefore, the moral self must survive death.

The case for moral realism in chapter two and compounded with OIC, shows the soundness of the first premise. If humans have moral obligations, then they must also be expected to accomplish them. This premise remains true even outside of a theistic argument. If there is a moral law, it must be followed as if it were as simple as a law of nature.

The OIC dictum also establishes the second premise. No one can be expected to do something they are not capable of doing. Capability is not based on one's volitional acceptance of an action. That would relegate an action's obligatory nature to relativistic causes, and it has been shown that relativism does not fit with moral realism. An action must be morally obligatory if it is within a human's ability to complete. Thus, one moves to the third premise.

If the first two premises are logically sound and valid, then they subsequently lead to the third premise. Here both theists and non-theists alike raise objections. In theory, humans should be able to produce not just one or a handful of examples of morally perfect people, but it should be the majority. However, when people evaluate the morality of individuals, they can only

produce a handful who might possibly be considered morally perfect.<sup>173</sup> If moral perfection is possible, how come there are not more morally perfect beings? It may be easier to conclude, as the fourth premise states, that moral perfection is impossible in this life, because the desire for perfection exists even with the knowledge and actuality of imperfection. If it is impossible in this life, then there must be a point when it is possible or else the whole enterprise fails.

Thus, humanity's desire for perfection extends beyond physical experiences to find its completion. Since Kant places morality (along with other values) above other human endeavors, the locus of goodness is placed beyond human experience. Kant's conception of the good aligns with much of what has been considered up to this point. The good becomes equivalent to God, which means the fulfillment of good must be understood from a divine perspective.

Kant's belief in God's existence as a necessary postulate for understanding the moral law resultantly raises the moral law to a higher plane. When speaking of this necessary connection, Kant explains, ". . .there is in us not merely the warrant but also the necessity, as a need connected with duty, to presuppose the possibility of this highest good, which, since it is possible only under the condition of the existence of God, connects the presupposition of the existence of God inseparably with duty; that is, it is morally necessary to assume the existence of God."<sup>174</sup> Therefore, he continues, "The moral law is holy (inflexible) and demands holiness of morals. . . ."<sup>175</sup> When the moral law is seen as an extension of God's nature it takes on a new nature of its own. It is inflexible because it is an extension of God's perfect, unchanging nature. Therefore,

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<sup>173</sup> More will be discussed on this topic in the next chapter. Christian theists will be quick to identify several verses from the Bible explaining that the moral status of people seems to default to imperfect rather than perfect. This may be true pre-conversion, but one has to ask, does it remain the same after conversion?

<sup>174</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 105.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 5:128.

anyone who wishes to follow the moral law must understand God's nature. This places the moral law higher while also reinforcing humanity's finitude. Kant further states,

. . . although all the moral perfection that a human being can attain is still only virtue, that is, a disposition conformed with law from respect for law, and thus consciousness of a continuing propensity to transgression or at least impurity, that is, an admixture of many spurious (not moral) motives to observe the law, hence a self-esteem combined with humility; and so, with respect to the holiness that the Christian law demands, nothing remains for a creature but endless progress, though for that very reason he is justified in hoping for his endless duration.<sup>176</sup>

The continual progress one makes (i.e., virtue) must be aided by divine supplementation and seen as something that cannot be accomplished fully by finite humans. Kant's solution for how one is expected to get to this point is what he calls the "revolution of man's will." Before one can understand his stance on the revolution of the will, it is important to see how he frames the necessity of this revolution.

The revolution of the will occurs when the evil maxim is replaced with the good maxim. That is to say that the prioritization of humanity's desire is replaced with the pursuit of the good. For Kant this revolution is the point at which the reprioritization of the evil and the good maxims is accomplished, and thus a virtuous life begins. In Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Bare Reason* he introduces what makes a person good or bad. Kant takes the first step in explaining that something is good or bad based on the maxims. "The rock-bottom basis for the adoption of our maxims must itself lie in free choice, so it can't be something we meet with in experience; therefore, the good or evil in man. . . is termed 'innate' only in the sense of being posited as the basis for. . . every use of freedom in experiences; so it is conceived of as present in man at the time of birth—though birth needn't be its cause."<sup>177</sup> Kant believes that humans have a propensity

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Bare Reason*, ed. Jonathan Bennett, 2017, 9.

to evil because of the “subjective basis for the possibility of the maxims’ deviating from the moral law.”<sup>178</sup> He bases his point on three aspects of humans: 1. Frailty of human nature; 2. The propensity of mixing immoral with moral incentives—impurity; and 3. The propensity to adopt bad maxims, or in other words the wickedness of human nature or the human heart.<sup>179</sup> These three aspects elucidate Kant’s theory that humanity needs to change to pursue the highest good.

What is the difference between a person of good morals and a morally good person? The former does not have the law as the sole and supreme incentive of moral conduct while the latter’s conduct always has the law as the incentive. The pursuit of the law stretches beyond duty for duty’s sake. One pursues and lives for the law because of its connection with the supreme good, which is best framed as God. The distance between God’s standard for morality and his expectation for humanity’s obedience provides invaluable insight for the distinction between the pursuit of the good over the bad. In a similar vein with H.P. Owen’s three observations about the moral law explained earlier is moral autonomy.<sup>180</sup> Kant maintained that humans have moral autonomy to live by the moral law. This makes the most sense in his argumentation for why there is a departure from the good to the bad. A person may be spoken of as “bad” because, “he is conscious of the moral law but has nevertheless allowed occasional departures from it into his maxim.”<sup>181</sup> The propensity to choose evil shows a bad decision but does not necessitate that a person is bad enough to where he cannot choose the good.

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>180</sup> See the beginning of chapter three for the full quote.

<sup>181</sup> Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Bare Reason*, 15.

Kant's proposition is that even the lowest person does not repudiate the moral law. He further explains that any person would act according to the moral law if there were no other competing incentives. Essentially, if the supreme maxim became the basis of his will, then he would be morally good.<sup>182</sup> Does the propensity for the reversal of incentives lie at the base of human nature? Kant believes,

This evil lies deep, because it corrupts the basis of all maxims; as a natural propensity it can't be wiped out by human powers, because that would have to be done through good maxims, and we're discussing a situation where the ultimate objective basis of all maxims is corrupted. Yet it must be possible for it to be outweighed because it is found in man, a being whose actions are free.<sup>183</sup>

A person cannot override the evil maxim by doing more good. There must be something beyond humans to make the initial change that opens the possibility of all other changes. The small margin between an overemphasis on humanity's abilities and the reduction of a person's moral accountability and expectation requires careful consideration. A proper balance between the two fits within a Kantian framework since he likewise seeks to establish the same point.

Kant identifies that the lurking evil at the heart of a person, which is formed by a lifestyle of relative morals, runs counter to the good because it seeks no other interest besides its own. Admitting the incentives of a good maxim into one's life is an arduous process, but it is required for removing the evil maxims. Kant says that people are created good, which means they are created "for" good. Some have found fault with this idea because they contend that Kant is inconsistent and contradicts himself regarding this matter.<sup>184</sup> However, a more critical reading of

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>184</sup> Seiorl Morgan argues that Kant's *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, is "at odds in tone with the bulk of his earlier work on the subject, in which he champions human freedom and exalts the dignity of rational agency and the nobility of the good will's commitment to morality, the Religion paints a dark portrait of humanity as a race perpetually in bondage to its own sinful nature; its central claim being that all human beings

Kant's view provides clarity on the matter. First, Kant highlights three aspects of human nature: 1. As a living being, humans have a predisposition to animality; 2. As a living and reason-possessing being, humans have a predisposition to humanity; 3. As a reason-possessing and morally accountable being, humans have a predisposition to personality.<sup>185</sup> Second, Kant explains that each one of these observations are basic facts of life. The facts prove that humanity is good, but only when the moral law sets parameters and boundaries around these three aspects.

Is there an initial cause that brings about the reprioritization of the maxims? "Even if some supernatural cooperation was needed for him to become good (or better)—some positive assistance or reductive of obstacles—his own free will must come into play in two ways," Kant explains, "he must first make himself worthy to receive this help, and then he must accept it. . . , i.e. he must admit this positive increase in power into his maxim."<sup>186</sup> Kant contends that naturalistic solutions for how a naturally bad person turns oneself into a good person are inadequate. Since it has been considered that humans turn to the evil, then the reverse must also be a possibility. "For despite the fall," Kant tells, "the command telling us we ought to become better resounds in full strength in our souls; so it must be within our power to do this, even if what we're able to do isn't in itself sufficient to achieve this, and only makes us receptive to an inscrutable higher assistance."<sup>187</sup> The good maxim is not something that is regained due to being lost, it is restoring the purity of the moral law's ability to become the ultimate basis of all maxims. How can a person become not merely a law-abiding individual but a morally good

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possess a radical propensity to evil that makes evil deeds inevitable for us." Seiriol Morgan, "The Missing Formal Proof of Humanity's Radical Evil in Kant's 'Religion,'" *The Philosophical Review* 114, no. 1 (January 2005): 63.

<sup>185</sup> Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Bare Reason*, 11.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

person? “It has to happen through a revolution in the man’s attitude, a going over to the maxim of the attitude’s holiness. He can become a new man only by a kind of rebirth, as it were a new creation, and a change of heart.”<sup>188</sup> Kant’s point was introduced earlier as “the revolution of the will.” Consider the following lengthier quotation,

Because of the purity of the principle he has adopted as the supreme maxim of his will, and because of its stability, he can hope to find himself on the good (though narrow) path of continual progress from bad to better. For him who sees through to the intelligible basis of the heart (i.e. of all the maxims of the will), and for whom this unending journey towards being a good man is a single step, i.e. for God, this amounts to his actually being a good man (pleasing to God; and to that extent this change can be regarded as a revolution. But in the judgment of men, who can assess themselves and the strength of their maxims only by how well they come, over time, to dominate the inclinations generated by their way of sensing this change must be regarded as but an everlasting struggle toward the better, and thus as a gradual reform of that perverted cast of mind, the propensity to evil.”<sup>189</sup>

Kant’s solution for humanity’s ineptitude is to seek divine assistance and undergo the revolution of the will.

The revolution of the will may be seen from two vantage points. The first viewpoint is from humanity’s perspective. The revolution of the will from this angle is an ongoing process. The gradual change from acting on the evil maxim to accepting the good maxim is a progression. When viewed this way there is continual progress to be made that is never accomplished while in this life. On the other hand is the view from God’s standpoint. From God’s view, the revolution of the will is taken as one complete moment. God, the moral adjudicator, sees all the progress and the future life as one whole. Thus, God declares an individual is blameless or innocent when the parts are added together to make the whole. The bifurcation of views on the revolution of the will, leads one to a conclusion that fits within Kant’s moral argument. A person never reaches

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 25.

moral perfection on this earth because all his or her acts are seen as moral progress waiting to be completed in another life. Kant explains, “. . . Man’s moral growth has to start not by improving his conduct but by transforming his way of thinking and laying the foundations of his character. Yet customarily people tackle this differently, fighting abasing vices piecemeal while leaving undisturbed their common root.”<sup>190</sup> However, God sees the beginning, middle, and end. In Christian terms, God see each person united in Christ, a new man, not just better.

Does Kant’s view of the revolution of the will fit within a larger framework of religion or does he deviate from orthodox teachings? Kant distinguishes between two types of religion that may result from his beliefs. First, one may ascribe to “favour-seeking religion.” This religion finds happiness when a person flatters himself in believing that God can make him eternally happy. It also involves the individual feeling this way without making any changes to himself in becoming better. A favor-seeker believes, “God can make him a better man without his having to do anything but ask for it, which amounts to doing nothing at all, because asking an all-seeing Being for something is equivalent to merely wanting it.” The second religion is a “moral religion.” Christianity fits this description because it calls an individual to live a good, moral life. “It is a basic principle that each person must do everything in his power to become a better man,” Kant says, “and that what is not within his power will be made up for through cooperation from above—but only if. . . he has worked on becoming a better man through his basic predisposition to good.”<sup>191</sup> From a Kantian perspective, the heavy emphasis placed on humanity’s response to

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 27. There are a few objections that may be raised here from a purely Christian perspective, and many of these will be dealt with in a later section. Issues are raised against Kant in regard to a possible Pelagian nuance to his ethical theory. Jacqueline Marina explains how Kant is not Pelagian, by working through his view of grace. The accusation of Kant offering up Pelagian thoughts is in regard to how the revolution of the will is produced. Some essential questions that need to be answered are: Can one turn to the good without assistance from God? If turning to the good maxim is the individual responsibility of a person, then it is a meritorious act not needing God. However, if God is the one who brings about the change by placing faith as a foundational, first order

the moral law results from divine assistance and human free will. These two components working together is what results in a moral life. “Now it is our universal human duty to elevate ourselves to this ideal of moral perfection,” Kant concludes, “i.e., to this archetype of the moral disposition in all its purity; and the idea itself. . . can give us power to this.”<sup>192</sup> Perfection, in Kantian thought, can only make sense from God’s perspective. If it were up to man alone, perfection remains unattainable.

Kant’s contribution to the present discussion has provided valuable insight on the high standard of morality expected of humans. An important component is his development of the OIC dictum, which lays emphasis on human autonomy to live up to the moral standard. However, humans can only get so far without further assistance provided by God. Kant has brought to light that assistance is needed in shifting the evil and good maxims. Without the revolution of the will and God’s assistance, humanity is left with no solution or remedy for the desire and failure to live a perfect life.

### **William Sorley (1855–1935)**

William Sorley’s moral argument builds upon Kant’s teaching of practical reason and his doctrine of postulates. In his splendid book *Moral Values and the Idea of God*, Sorley seeks to create an argument for understanding why moral values exist in the way they do. As he builds his case, he shows that moral values require a moral lawgiver. He argues along the same lines as Kant and concludes that God is a necessary condition for the moral law. In the spirit of Kant, he

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priority, then the freedom to act is in God’s hands instead of the individual life and actions of a person. If it is completely God’s responsibility, Kantian moral philosophy cannot stand because it folds in on itself due to the major aspect of Kantian theory which is that reason provides the necessary tools to both identify the good and to follow it. Therefore, a reasonable solution must be found that releases the tension.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 31.

states, “The moral law, the inexorable fact of duty, requires us to assume the being of God, not as a speculative truth for explaining nature, but as a practical postulate necessitated by the moral reason.”<sup>193</sup> The idea of God, to use Sorley’s phrasing, does more than present a possible response to the complexities of nature. Although it serves this purpose, the idea of God is necessary to make sense of moral values.

Throughout Sorley’s writings, it is plain to see he leans heavily on Kant for inspiration and advances many parts of Kant’s theories. Although inspired by Kant, he wrestles with the “performative aspect of Kant’s moral theory.” In one such instance, he notes that Kant, “was not looking upon outward performance, but upon the inward law of goodness and the power it revealed in the mind which is conscious of it.”<sup>194</sup> He connects that Kant’s view of theism did more than provide practical reasoning for morals, it went deeper into the heart and mind of people.

Based on the idea that God is a necessary postulate for moral values, Sorley endeavors to expand Kant’s perspective to show how this impacts the lives of people. Sorley makes three observations from Kant’s conclusion of God as a necessary postulate: 1. Freedom of man; 2. Man’s immortality; and 3. The existence of the one perfect being or God.<sup>195</sup> First, it is necessary for humanity to be free and autonomous. What does the moral life look like if a person has no escape from impulse or desire that runs contrary to the moral law? Sorley explains, “Were man not free from the compulsion of impulse and desire he would be unable to take the law as the

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<sup>193</sup> William Sorley, *Moral Values and the Idea of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918), 333.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 336.

guide of his will.”<sup>196</sup> The moral law will have no effect if it is not allowed to affect the hearts and lives of people. Second, Sorley deduces that immortality must play a significant role. “The moral law demands perfect obedience from each individual,” he intimates, “and an infinite time is required in order that the individual character with its sensuous desires and inclinations may become fully subject to the categorical imperative: hence immortality is postulated.”<sup>197</sup> Since no one lives a perfect life—complete obedience to the moral law—in this life there must by inference be a time when it may be accomplished. Third, there must exist a perfect being. Sorley asserts this being must be God, because “without God our moral ideas would not be capable of realisation in the world. We ourselves are unable so to realise them—that is, to make the world-order a moral order—because the causal laws which constitute the world of experience are entirely outside of and indifferent to the ethical laws which make up morality.”<sup>198</sup> The moral order of the world makes the most sense when it is ordered by a morally perfect being that determines the parameters.

Sorley takes these points directly from Kant, but then contends with a major weakness he finds in Kant. He separates from Kant because Kant did not believe that morality proved God. This weakness is a result of Kant’s moral argument presenting a bifurcation between nature and morality. The Kantian persuasion is that God is a necessary postulate to bring harmony between the two. Sorley, however, contends that they are not two separate worlds, but rather one harmonious world with nature and morality being two different aspects found within it. This one world is, “The kind of world in which goodness can begin to grow and make progress towards

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 337.

perfection.”<sup>199</sup> He even says that an imperfect world fits well with the idea that moral beings are to grow. Since humans have free will, there will always exist aberrations from the good. A world without freedom has only marionettes, “They might dance through their span of existence to the amusement of a casual spectator. . . but their movements would be all predetermined by their Maker; they would have neither goodness nor the consciousness of good, nor any point of sympathy with the mind of a free spirit.”<sup>200</sup> Sorley simply shows it is consistent to have finite beings living in an imperfect world. This maintains the objectivity of morality, the high standard of living, and humanity’s finitude to live by it perfectly. This builds upon Hasting Rashdall’s moral argument to show that the moral law in the mind of humans requires the mind of God.<sup>201</sup>

In his conclusion Sorley returns to the emphasis on moral failure and imperfection of the world. He states that imperfection in the world forms an argument that points to theism. “An imperfect world’ he explains, “. . . was required for the making of moral beings; they had to be tried in, and habituated to, all kinds of circumstances, in order that they might grow into goodness.”<sup>202</sup> If humans were free and perfect from the beginning, then there would be no need to grow into goodness. However, humans live in such a place where they depend upon God. This aspect of Sorley’s stance is valuable for this current study. When humans are perfected by God,

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 347.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Sorley quotes Rashdall in the following excerpt, “An absolute Moral Law or moral ideal cannot exist *in* material things. And it does not exist in the mind of this or that individual. Only if we believe in the existence of a Mind for which the true moral ideal is already in some sense real, a Mind which is the source of whatever is true in our own moral judgments, can we rationally think of the moral ideal as no less real than the world itself. Only so can we believe in an absolute standard of right and wrong, which is as independent of this or that man’s actual ideas and actual desires as the facts of material nature. The belief in God, though not (like the belief in a real and an active self) a postulate of there being any such thing as Morality at all, is the logical presupposition of an ‘objective’ or absolute Morality. A moral ideal can exist nowhere and nohow but in a mind; an absolute moral ideal can exist only in a Mind from which all Reality is derived. Our moral ideal can only claim objective validity in so far as it can rationally be regarded as the revelation of a moral ideal eternally existing in the mind of God.” Ibid., 351.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 515.

then their direction is changed, and they utilize the imperfect nature of the world to grow in goodness. Sorley explains, “The completely moral man or morally perfect man is the man who would adopt this moral attitude in any possible circumstances.”<sup>203</sup> This individual would live in such a way that their mind is set on the infinite. By way of comparison, a Perfect or Infinite Mind is free because it has its own self-determination. Conversely, a finite mind, “limited in knowledge and power and distracted by desires other than the will to goodness, may yet have partial measure of that self-determination which is complete only in the infinite.”<sup>204</sup> Although humanity is finite, humans require and desire the infinite; therefore, humanity needs God to complete their purpose.

#### **A. E. Taylor (1869–1945)**

A. E. Taylor, as an apologist, is known for two significant works.<sup>205</sup> The first is a book called, *The Faith of a Moralist*. The original content of the book was part of a series of Gifford Lectures Taylor delivered between 1926–28. The second work is a small book called, *Does God Exist?* Taylor wrote this final book as WWII was beginning, which caused it to be released posthumously after the war. These two works expound upon Taylor’s philosophical foundations as they relate to theism. Although many of Taylor’s works have been overshadowed by his esteemed contemporary—C.S. Lewis—they nonetheless provide indisputable insight for the moral argument. Specifically, for this project, Taylor’s works will be analyzed to grasp how his conception of the good impacts human actions.

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 516.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 446.

<sup>205</sup> Taylor also had a vast knowledge of Plato. He wrote extensively on the topic of Plato and its influence on philosophy. His attention to Plato impacted his philosophical beliefs, as to be expected, which caused him to embrace Platonism. Specifically, his commentary on Plato’s *Timaeus* reveals his Platonic beliefs. These are foundational to his philosophy, but also his apologetic arguments as well.

Taylor possessed a special interest in moral philosophy. As a professor at St. Andrews University, he taught classes on moral philosophy, which then led to his opportunity to present at the Gifford Lectures. The focus of his lectures was to discuss the timeless question of morality's relationship with religion. To answer this inquiry, he asks three questions which serve as the outline of his work. First, what is the good for man? He poses the possibility that man's heart is in constant aspiration of an infinite good outside of the temporal order.<sup>206</sup> Second, if man has the desire for something eternal, what is man's response to the eternal? Taylor asks, "is it conceivable that it can be attained by a one-sided movement of endeavor on our part, or must we think of our own moral effort as a movement of response, elicited and sustained throughout by an antecedent outgoing movement from the side of the eternal?"<sup>207</sup> This leads to his third question about morality's autonomous nature. Does morality exist separate from religion, because of religion, or in conjunction with religion? The version of natural theology Taylor addresses concludes that morality makes the most sense when taken in conjunction with a personal, intelligent, and infinite being who upholds it.<sup>208</sup> This foundational concept is elucidated throughout his work.

Taylor begins with the supposition that objective morals and values exist.<sup>209</sup> The standard of morality cannot be derived from humans, because it is an anomaly to find very good deeds

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<sup>206</sup> A. E. Taylor, *The Faith of a Moralist: The Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of St. Andrews, 1926–1928*, Series 1: The Theological Implications of Morality (London: Macmillan and Co., 1930), 13.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>208</sup> This is one of the arguments Taylor makes in *Does God Exist?* He looks at a handful of theistic arguments, like the cosmological argument, and shows how theism has a response to the accusations raised by scientists and philosophers alike. A. E. Taylor, *Does God Exist?* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947).

<sup>209</sup> Taylor says that objective good is equivalent to saying that, "iron is hard, and lead is soft." These objective facts are the, "bones and marrow of life itself." Taylor, *The Faith of a Moralist: The Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of St. Andrews, 1926–1928*, 61.

and very good people. Simply because these cannot be found regularly does not negate their actuality. The reality that people fall short of the standard cannot be a counterfactual against the existence of the good. This is the case because the knowledge of the good runs hand-in-hand with the knowledge of God. This can be seen as humans strive for the good, and do not settle for what is simply “better.” Thus, Taylor utilizes this point to say, “What I ought to be, that I can be.”<sup>210</sup> This statement corresponds with the second major question of his work.

Taylor’s stance that humans can “be” what they ought to be is similar to Kant’s OIC dictum. Taylor finds fault in Kant’s formulation, in favor of his own, because he sees a defect. He contends that Kant focuses on the singular performance of what one should do versus what they should be or become.<sup>211</sup> He further explains that to focus on acts alone will not bring about the satisfaction of pursuing the ultimate good. The acquisition of something temporal does not elicit the same satisfaction one would expect if the good can be obtained completely on this side of eternity by doing acts. Taylor notes, “If the pursuit of temporal and secular good must inevitably fail to satisfy moral aspiration itself, we may fairly infer that there is a non-secular good to which moral endeavor is a growing response.”<sup>212</sup> This may be illustrated by looking at utilitarian rationale. A utilitarian can be considered good when he avoids some abuse (an action), but this is only in motion to what is better (seeing that there is always more to do); which goes to show that one has not obtained that which is fully good. Taylor says it this way,

The moral quest will be self-defeating unless there is an object to sustain it which embodies in itself good complete and whole, so that in having it we are possessing that which absolutely satisfies the heart's desire and can never be taken from us. The possession must be possession of a "thing infinite and eternal", and this points to the

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>211</sup> Taylor calls this, “*So-sein* of the *Seiendes*.”

<sup>212</sup> Taylor, *The Faith of a Moralist: The Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of St. Andrews, 1926–1928*, 93.

actuality of God, the absolute and final good, as indispensably necessary if the whole moral effort of mankind is not to be doomed *ab initio* to frustration.

This is the crux of Taylor's moral argument. Human actions must be seen in conjunction with the good that is God. The pursuit of good, along with the driving force and motivation for action, finds its fulfillment beyond this temporal world.

Taylor explains that humanity's failure to live according to the moral law results from sin or the personality of man disjoined from the eternal.<sup>213</sup> It may be that an atheist can do good by not stealing, lying, or killing; but the fulfillment of his personality will be lacking. He argues that many moralists try to focus on the good without ever dealing with evil. As one may have guessed, he believes that Plato and Kant do an adequate job of addressing this issue. "I do not think I shall be seriously misrepresenting the habitual outlook of most moralists," Taylor asserts, "by saying that they take it very much as an obvious and regrettable incident of human life that we so often do what we ought not to do, but as nothing more than a regrettable incident."<sup>214</sup> To focus too much on humanity's moral mistakes as something they can get over if they wish, without considering the devastating nature of sin, is to misunderstand the issue of sin. Morality is living in such a way that says that humans *can* make the good real, while also saying that if someone were to make the good completely real then humans would not have the incentive to

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<sup>213</sup> Taylor uses the term "personality" to refer to man's internal condition or will. He speaks of it in a number of different contexts, but many of his examples have to do with the change of will to follow God and his commandments. In one place he says, "The making of a personality, like that of an omelet, requires the breaking of eggs, and the first egg to be broken is a man's own heart." *Ibid.*, 147. In a footnote in response to Mill, he explains this process in Christian terms as, "Remorse, in our language, seems to mean exclusively dissatisfaction with one's own conduct, but it is a dissatisfaction which need have nothing to do with the moral quality of the conduct. Genuine contrition involves absolute and unqualified self-condemnation of one's conduct, and of one's personality, so far as expressed in that conduct, as evil or sinful. Hence its connection with the second stage of repentance confession. The essence of confession is that it is recognition that an act which is absolutely to be condemned is my personal responsible act, and that, in condemning the act, I am condemning myself, so far as the act expressed myself, as guilty and evil without excuse." *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>214</sup> Taylor, *The Faith of a Moralist: The Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of St. Andrews, 1926–1928*, 164.

keep doing good. “Morality is unremitting war against evil,” Taylor submits, “but where there is no evil there can be no war against evil. The good person, therefore, must will at once that evil shall exist, that it may be overcome, and also that it shall be overcome, that is that it shall not exist.”<sup>215</sup> The balance of wishing to do good, while still acknowledging the purpose of evil has been a point of contention in Christian dialogues for centuries. However, Taylor sees benefit in this *paradox* because it promotes the continual pursuit of the good even in light of the existence of evil.

One may say that Taylor, along with Kant, focuses too much on works. This will be dealt with further in chapter five, but it will suffice for the time being to note that Taylor is not advocating for a works-based salvation. He identifies that there is a struggle to navigate between the margin of humans doing all the work and God doing all the heavy lifting. One does not win heaven by being moral, but there is still the expectation for one to be moral because it fits within actualizing the good while on earth. If a person were to completely succeed in being good, or perfect, he would, “no longer be a man, but a god, and this complete transformation of humanity into deity. . . [is] impossible.”<sup>216</sup> In Taylor’s view, a proper construal of morality includes both *γένεσις* (becoming) and *ἐνέργεια* (working). This goes back to his view that the focus needs to be on “becoming” what one is expected to be. This does, also, include acting in such a way that brings about the good. “There is nothing in itself irrational in hoping for a stage in our existence in which finality may have been actually reached,” posits Taylor, “so far as development of personal character is concerned, and yet endless room left for the embodiment of the character so won in varied action. With the disappearance of growth, or becoming, of character we should not

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 389.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 404.

have lost our unique personality; we should have at last come into complete possession of it.”<sup>217</sup>

Taylor reinforces this Christian paradox by concluding that no one will reach eternal life by his own effort—it is the gift of God. However, one must fight for victory at times with unaided efforts, while also knowing that the battle has already been won.<sup>218</sup>

In summary of A. E. Taylor’s contribution to the discussion, one can see he maintained that objective morals and values exist. One can know these objective morals because of the desire each person has to pursue the ultimate good. This raises the bar for a moral life, but it also entails that a person does not actually live up to that standard. Taylor’s original purpose is to explain the connection between morality and religion. The connection between the two is that religion adequately describes why the bar is so high and why humans should strive to live for it while simultaneously knowing they will not accomplish it.

### **C. S. Lewis (1898–1963)**

Among the well-known moral philosophers stands out individuals like C. S. Lewis who is best known for his development of the moral argument in such works as *Mere Christianity*. Originally written as a series of radio talks, Lewis meticulously and practically shows the world of objective morality. He makes two main observations, “First, that human beings, all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and cannot really get rid

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 418–9.

<sup>218</sup> In a longer explication, Taylor says, “So long as we are within the bounds of the purely ethical, it may be said, the moral conflict must be thought of as one in which man fights for himself and must win any success he does win by his own unaided efforts. But according to any religion which is not a mere ‘Pharisaism,’ no one achieves ‘eternal life’ by his own effort; it is the ‘gift of God.’ How, then, can we speak of it, as we have just spoken, as the supersession of the moral struggle by a moral victory? I must not now anticipate the course of the reflections with which we shall be occupied later. So I will only add that the paradox, if it is a paradox, is inherent in the Christian religion itself. The fruits of the tree of life, and the hidden manna, are expressly spoken of as gifts, but they are gifts said to be reserved for victors. ‘I have overcome the world,’ said One; but it is said in order that each of us also may overcome. We are still the *ecclesia militans*, and our victory is still to be won.” Ibid., 434.

of it. Secondly, that they do not in fact behave that way.”<sup>219</sup> The former has been covered, the latter will receive special treatment in this section.

Why is it the case that people do not live according to the moral law? Lewis creates a simple and pragmatic case in the first book of *Mere Christianity* by describing why humans have such a pull toward living by a standard while simultaneously failing. His moral argument is only a slight variation from other apologists considered here. What Lewis provides is a different perspective, or rather advantage, due to his arrival at a more robust form of Christian theism. Essentially, Lewis creates a case for the moral law that makes the most sense when framed within a Christian theory of morality.

1. There is a universal moral law, which applies to all humans.
2. If there is a universal moral law, there must be a moral lawgiver.
3. The universal moral law requires a perfectly moral lawgiver.

The moral law is “hard as nails” and impartially applies to all humans regardless of opinions about its strenuous rules.<sup>220</sup> Various facts show this to be the case because humans respond to the moral law in positive or negative terms. Lewis admits, “None of us are really keeping the Law of Nature. . . I am only trying to call attention to a fact; the fact that this year, or this month, or, more likely, this very day, we have failed to practice ourselves the kind of behaviour we expect from other people.”<sup>221</sup> The feeling humans have of the inescapable power of the rule of law bearing down on their minds provides evidence for the proofs of the argument. The mere fact that humans feel so strongly about this point echoes back to the validity of moral realism.

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<sup>219</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*.

<sup>220</sup> Lewis, *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*, 34.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 17–18.

Humans have two things weighing on them, “You have the facts (how men do behave) and you also have something else (how they ought to behave).”<sup>222</sup> The feeling of oughtness is more than breaking a law, it is perceived as a violation against a person. This breach in a relationship typically produces feelings of guilt.

The feeling of guilt is a valuable sign pointing to God. This is one of the major strengths for Lewis’s moral argument. His argument, effectively construed, points to the Christian God for help. Consider the following point, “We know that if there does exist an absolute goodness it must hate most of what we do. . . . If the universe is not governed by an absolute goodness, then all our efforts are in the long run hopeless. But if it is, then we are making ourselves enemies to that goodness every day, and are not in the least likely to do any better tomorrow, and so our case is hopeless again.”<sup>223</sup> How does one remove themselves from the vicious cycle of hopelessness? Naturalistic explanations will say that the feeling of guilt or hopelessness is self-inflicted and illusory. A naturalist may insist that the solution for one’s feelings must come from within the person themselves. This runs contrary to how humans actually feel about their guilt when they violate a moral obligation. This point is effectively summed up in Lewis’s words:

My reason was that Christianity simply does not make sense until you have faced the sort of facts I have been describing. Christianity tells people to repent and promises them forgiveness. It therefore has nothing (as far as I know) to say to people who do not know they have done anything to repent of and who do not feel that they need any forgiveness. It is after you have realized that there is a real Moral Law, and a Power behind the law, and that you have broken that law and put yourself wrong with that Power— it is after all this, and not a moment sooner, that Christianity begins to talk. When you know you are sick, you will listen to the doctor. When you have realized that our position is nearly desperate you will begin to understand what the Christians are talking about. They offer

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 35.

an explanation of how we got into our present state of both hating goodness and loving it.<sup>224</sup>

Lewis brings to light that Christianity helps make sense of the predicament humans are in with the moral law. God is the powerful mind behind the law, but he is also personal when helping people accomplish the law. Christian teachings, “tell you how the demands of this law, which you and I cannot meet, have been met on our behalf, how God Himself becomes a man to save man from the disapproval of God.”<sup>225</sup> Lewis shows that God made humans with free will because it enables them to act upon the law. If free will is part of the equation, then it makes sense, from a standpoint of reward, that doing good will be rewarded when it is done freely; while on the other hand if evil is done then punishment will ensue. The freedom of choice, or autonomy, is a necessary requirement in the moral law. Autonomy affixes responsibility on individuals and requires them to make the proper steps to fix issues in their moral actions.

The steps humans make toward fixing the broken relationship begins with the concept of repentance. No one can take the next proper step forward until one changes their allegiance from evil to good. Lewis notes that repentance means,

Unlearning all the self-conceit and self-will that we have been training ourselves into for thousands of years. It means killing part of yourself, undergoing a kind of death. In fact, it needs a good man to repent. And here comes the catch. Only a bad person needs to repent: only a good person can repent perfectly. The worse you are the more you need it and the less you can do it. The only person who could do it perfectly would be a perfect person—and he would not need it.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 35–6.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 54.

The paradox elucidated by Lewis is part of the reoccurring vicious cycle in human experience that calls out for help. The moral law requires humans to act in a particular way, and it calls humans to seek the assistance needed to act in that way.

Lewis sees that some people want to call the Christian life an ideal. Some may say that, “The moral perfection is an ‘ideal’ in the sense that we cannot achieve it. In that sense every kind of perfection is, for us humans, an ideal; we cannot succeed in being perfect car drivers or perfect tennis players or in drawing perfectly straight lines. But there is another sense in which it is very misleading to call moral perfection an ideal.”<sup>227</sup> To call moral perfection an ideal is to say that it is preferential and differs between people. “Perfect behaviour may be as unattainable as perfect gear-changing when we drive; but it is a necessary ideal prescribed for all people by the very nature of the human machine just as perfect gear-changing is an ideal prescribed for all drivers by the very nature of cars.”<sup>228</sup> Lewis encourages people to talk about rules and obedience instead of ideals and idealism because that lowers the standard. We expect to make mistakes, and we plan to make mistakes. People may make goals to tell no lies instead of telling a few less. People say they are going to stop adultery instead of saying they will only do it seldom.

To drive the point to its culmination, Lewis provides an illustration of a fleet of ships. The fleet of ships must each individually stay on course so they do not run into each other, and the ships must be in good working order. This produces a threefold view of morality. First, humans must be concerned about working together. Second, humans are to handle their inside issues. Third, humans have to focus on their actual purpose as humans.<sup>229</sup> The moral law

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>229</sup> Lewis succinctly states: “Relations between man and man: things inside each man: and relations between man and the power that made him.” Ibid., 69.

provides the context for the what, how, and why for the reason humans feel compelled to pursue the ultimate good.

Lewis has served a vital role in moral apologetics since the inception of his radio talks. His influence has been magnanimous and continues to be just as relevant to the modern reader as it was during his own time. The timelessness of his works has little to do with his popularity. His advancements of the moral argument stand out differently from other writers, even his own contemporaries. The value of his works is that he advanced the moral argument in a direction toward the Christian God. His solution fits best within the framework of Christianity versus other options. Thus, this study has been examining the high standard for morality based on the objectiveness of morality while maintaining humanity's finitude to live perfectly.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this section has been to show examples of apologists who have made the connection between the moral facts established in chapter two and the need for a certain type of theism. Although it was not an exhaustive study, the authors selected were chosen based on the three criteria introduced at the beginning of this chapter. First, these authors maintained that moral facts are objective and knowable by humans. Second, they held that the standard for the moral law is very high based on the knowledge humans have of objective morals and the law itself. Third, humans do not live perfectly by the moral law because of their finite nature, which is impaired by their desire at times to not live for the good. These three facts were chosen to illustrate that a solution must be offered for humanity's failure to live by the moral law and to explain why people desire moral perfection. The next chapter will build a bridge between this discovery to Christian theism by way of navigating three interconnected forms of a Christian moral argument: Natural Law Theory, Divine Command Theory, and Virtue Ethics.

## Chapter 4: A Tripartite Argument for Christian Theism

### Introduction

How does one get from moral realism to Christian theism? To answer this question, it may be of some benefit to pursue what advantage a Christian hypothesis of morality offers. A few key characters were introduced in chapter three that set up a possible case for Christian theism. The task was accomplished by examining how they handled the relationship between objective moral facts, a high standard for morality, and humanity's finitude to live according to the moral law. This chapter and the next will endeavor to introduce the advantage of a Christian form of theism to determine if it can answer the major research questions of this project.

### The Christian Advantage

What advantage does Christian theism offer to the discussion of humanity's desire for moral perfection? In the previous chapter it was shown that humanity's desire and need for moral perfection results from a high standard of morality derived from objective moral facts and humanity's failure to live up to the moral law. If Christian theism offers no advantage or is not able to match the challenges presented by moral realism, then it will fail as a possible solution for the issue.

The infamous German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche is known for his rejection of Christian theism. Interestingly though, as Nietzsche grappled with finding moral value, given the onset of nihilism, he lists four advantages of a theistic Christian perspective against it:

1. It bestowed an intrinsic value upon humans, which contrasted with their apparent insignificance and subordination to chance in the eternal flux of becoming and perishing.

2. It served the purpose of God's advocates, inasmuch as it granted the world a certain perfection despite its sorrow and evil—it also granted the world that proverbial "freedom": evil seemed full of meaning.
3. It assumed that man could have a knowledge of absolute values, and thus granted him adequate perception for the most important things.
4. It prevented man from despising himself as man, from turning against life, and from being driven to despair by knowledge: it was a self-preservative measure.<sup>230</sup>

Nietzsche did not believe that Christianity was the likely best solution for the grounding of morality, but he proffers it as an “antidote” to both theoretical and practical nihilism.<sup>231</sup>

Nietzsche saw nihilism as an inevitable conclusion due to the erosion of truth and meaning in societies. This insuperable conclusion is obvious when God, a staple of truth and meaning, is dead. He saw the rushing torrent of nihilism leading to catastrophe in the twentieth century. Little did Nietzsche know what awaited humanity within the span of the next one hundred years after his death. The insight Nietzsche provided, although in some ways counterproductively to the task initiated here, is a requisite for this chapter. It may be of more benefit to frame his observation in a different light. Does theism, namely the kind found in Christianity, provide a proper counterfactual to naturalistic explanations for morality? Does the removal of God from the equation create a vacuum for the need of a proper grounding for morality? Can Christianity offer a solution for humanity’s need for perfection, given humanity’s failure to live by the moral law perfectly? These questions will direct this part of the study.

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<sup>230</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 9–10.

<sup>231</sup> Nietzsche’s preferred solution for moral values came in the form of the “the will to power.” He explains, “There is nothing to life that has value, except the degree of power—assuming that life itself is the will to power.” *Ibid.*, 37.

## A Tripartite Argument

What is the source of morality as it relates to theism? It has been shown that there is a strong case for objective morality and that humans interact within its boundaries; but how does theism explain moral facts, values, and obligations? The connection between theism and moral facts is typically viewed between three systems of ethics: Divine Command Theory (DCT), Natural Law (NL), and Virtue Ethics (VE). Each theory tries to answer two major questions: 1. What makes something good or bad; and 2. What makes something right or wrong? Each theory has its advantages and disadvantages while answering these questions. These theories will be examined to determine their viability for providing answers to the major questions of this chapter. The focal point of this chapter will be to show that Divine Command Theory, Natural Law, and Virtue Ethics, when combined, create the likely best explanation for moral facts.<sup>232</sup> The theorists who advocate for these systems, at least those represented here, root the moral law in the existence, nature, and commands of God founded upon natural law principles, and that point toward a virtue ethic. When placed together, they present a reasonable case for why Christianity presents the likely best solution for the issue of perfection elucidated throughout this work.

### Natural Law

Natural Law theories are some of the oldest and most utilized in ethical reasoning even outside of theism.<sup>233</sup> A natural law argument for morality posits that morality can be deduced by

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<sup>232</sup> This author is greatly indebted to work of C. Stephen Evans. He is the first author who has advocated for a tripartite argument. More will be said concerning his theory throughout this chapter.

<sup>233</sup> See J. Budziszewski, *What We Can't Not Know* (Dallas: Spence Publishing Company, 2003); J. Budziszewski, *The Line through the Heart: Natural Law as Fact, Theory, and Sign of Contradiction*. (Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2014); J. Budziszewski, *Written on the Heart: The Case for Natural Law* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997); John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, 2nd ed., Clarendon Law Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Robert P. George, *In Defense of Natural Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Germain Grisez, Joseph Boyle, and John Finnis, "Practical Principles, Moral Truth, and Ultimate Ends," *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 32, no. 1 (n.d.): 99–152; John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers,

natural facts or properties of persons or actions. In other words, one can know what ought to be done by understanding the obligations humans have to act by nature according to what it means to be human.<sup>234</sup> There are two varieties of natural law theories: Theistic and naturalistic. A naturalistic account of natural law asserts that humans have evolved into moral beings, and that humans are to act according to their human nature as it currently stands.<sup>235</sup> A Christian version of NL says that humans are created by a moral designer with a defined standard for morality. Features of this morality are derived from the structure of humans and can be known using reason. Thus, there is a written code within the fabric and structure of human nature which is placed there by a divine moral law giver.

It should not be surprising that many theists advocate for a natural law theory of ethics versus Divine Command Theory or Virtue Ethics. John Finnis, a notable proponent, observes:

It must never be overlooked that, for nearly two millennia, the theories of natural law have been expounded by theorists who, with few exceptions, believed that the uncaused cause has in fact revealed itself to be all that the foregoing analogue model of creative causality hypothesized, to be indeed supremely personal, and to be a lawgiver whose law for human persons should be obeyed out of gratitude, hope, fear, and/or love.<sup>236</sup>

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2005); Anthony J. Lisska, *Aquinas's Theory of Natural Law: An Analytic Reconstruction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010); Russell Hittinger, *The First Grace: Rediscovering the Natural Law in a Post-Christian World*, 2nd ed. (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2007); Russell Hittinger, *A Critique of the New Natural Law Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988). For an exhaustive list see J. V. Schall, "The Natural Law Bibliography," *The American Journal of Jurisprudence* 40, no. 1 (January 1, 1995): 157–198.

<sup>234</sup> Mark Murphy delineates two aspects of a natural law moral philosopher. 1. Hold that the fundamental reasons for action are certain basic goods whose status as goods is in some way explained by features of human nature. 2. Hold that there are substantive principles of reason that specify how it is appropriate to respond to these goods in cases in which more than one option has some practical appeal, that is, how it is reasonable to respond in cases where there is some reason to perform one action, some reason to perform another action, yet these actions are incompatible; the status of these second-order principles of practical reason is in some way explained by the nature of the first-order goods that fulfill us as humans. Mark C. Murphy, "Finnis on Nature, Reason, God," *Legal Theory* 13, no. 3–4 (December 2007): 189–90.

<sup>235</sup> This theory was rejected by showing that moral facts cannot be derived by naturalistic causes, because the moral world in which humans live possesses moral qualities that are non-natural.

<sup>236</sup> Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, 392.

The classical figurehead for NL is Thomas Aquinas introduced in chapter three. Aquinas, utilizing his four laws, concluded that the natural law results from God's eternal law placed in the creation of humans. His full ethical theory will not be rehashed here; however, two salient ideas resurface: 1. Natural law is given by God; and 2. Natural law is part of practical rationality. Aquinas's two points are the basic foundation for a theistic natural law theory.

One natural law advocate, J. Budziszewski, contends that natural law theories lead one to accept theism.<sup>237</sup> Others advocates, like John Finnis, may hold to theism, but they frequently detach their natural law theories from their theistic beliefs.<sup>238</sup> Since there is such a wide variety of NL theories, even within theism, how can one expect for this study to proceed? The goal will be to focus primarily on how NL responds to moral values and moral obligations. If humanity's desire for perfection results from a high standard of morality imposed on humans, then how do they relate to values and obligations? If humans possess within themselves everything needed to know what is good and evil, and right and wrong, then do they also have the full capability to what needs to be done? Once again, the issue arises over the fact that humans do not live up to the moral law, which then requires the active participation of the divine lawgiver to close the gap.

There is a danger in NL theories to focus too much on human capabilities. If the form of theism advanced is of a deistic formulation, then God is no longer needed after creating the

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<sup>237</sup> See J. Budziszewski, "Why the Natural Law Suggests a Divine Source," in *A Second Look at First Things* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2013), 169–89. His purpose is to show, "reality of the natural law gives good reason to believe in the reality of God, even apart from verbal revelation." Ibid., 169–70. He makes four arguments from natural law to the existence of God: 1. The Argument from Natural Law as Order; 2. The Argument from Natural Law as Law; 3. The Argument from Guilt and Forgiveness; and 4. The Argument from Desire for Final Justice. Ibid., 174–88.

<sup>238</sup> Although Finnis makes this claim, Mark Murphy says that Finnis' views on Natural Law cannot be separated from his theistic beliefs. For a full explanation see Murphy, "Finnis on Nature, Reason, God."

initial structure of human nature. It is an even bigger issue when the theory is divorced from a theistic belief wholesale, because humans are left with their own tools and resources to live morally with no divine assistance. This neither fits with the characteristics of moral obligations nor with Christian theistic teachings. A more robust view of NL entails a theistic explanation for human experiences of living a moral life that requires continual assistance by the divine moral lawgiver. This may be better explained by breaking down major components of the theory shared across its variations.

First, natural law theories focus on human nature. The focus is more than biological or physiological, although that is part of it. One would be hard pressed to conclude that an individual that is deformed or handicapped is missing out on human nature.<sup>239</sup> Human nature cannot depend upon whether a person has all ten fingers or toes. Whether a person is missing their thumbs or not does not impact value claims like love, justice, and guilt. When looking at human nature there are components that are meant to enable humans to survive and others that help humans thrive. Humans thrive or flourish when everything is working properly on an social, individual, and existential level (i.e., a fleet of ships). Understanding human nature helps determine what it means to be human.<sup>240</sup> Furthermore, it shows that humans have intrinsic worth that is recognizable by other humans. These things together make up the “human machine.”<sup>241</sup> A theistic version of natural law points to God as the creator of these natural facts about human worth, which allows the human machine to work properly on all levels.

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<sup>239</sup> This is different than the conversations people have in regard to personhood and abortion. Human nature is what makes humans distinct from lower forms. The personhood debate involves determining the rights and privileges of being a human under the basic rights outlined in the constitution—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

<sup>240</sup> By way of reiteration, this is where the rubber meets the road in the abortion debate.

<sup>241</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 69.

Conversations usually turn to a discussion of teleology when establishing the perfect definition of a human. Teleological theories insist that everything has a *telos* or an end or goal. The *telos* of an eye is to see, a nose to smell, an acorn to grow; but what is the *telos* of a human? Is it to grow, reproduce, and flourish? Or is there something else that human nature is driven toward to find its completion? Finnis says there are seven basic goods all humans recognize and seek to uphold: life, knowledge, play, aesthetic experience, sociability, practical reasonableness, and religion.<sup>242</sup> He argues for these basic goods instead of a singular, ultimate good that is the human *telos*. If humans only strive for the perfection of human nature, then man should find his fulfillment in himself. However, this does not fit with human experience. Human experience says that the pursuit of the good is located beyond human nature and theism argues it is found in a personal being beyond the present world. This requires one to ask: are laws derived from human nature alone or do humans possess an inclination toward the good? How do humans know what human nature produces? Can human inclinations be trusted? This leads to the second component of a natural law theory.

The second major component of a natural law theory relates to how individuals know moral facts. In chapter two it was introduced that moral facts are knowable and discoverable. Theism contends that both general and special revelation are the two avenues for gaining moral knowledge. Facts known by general revelation are those things placed within creation itself that give knowledge of God, his nature, and his expectations. Facts known by special revelation are

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<sup>242</sup> Finnis adds marriage to these basic goods. See John Finnis, "Marriage: A Basic and Exigent Good," in *Human Rights and Common Good*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 317–32. He also says that these goods are objective and knowable by all humans. He states, "Principles of this sort would hold good, as principles, however extensively they were overlooked, misapplied, or defied in practical thinking, and however little they were recognized by those who reflectively theorize about human thinking. That is to say, they would 'hold good' just as the mathematical principles of accounting 'hold good' even when, as in the medieval banking community, they are unknown or misunderstood." Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, 24.

things that God chooses to reveal beyond general revelation. These may be further descriptions of aspects of his nature, will, commands, or instructions. Out of the two avenues, NL focuses extensively on general revelation. Claire Brown Peterson believes the connection between facts about what humans are and the value claims about how humans should behave is primary. “What humans are determines what they need to flourish,” Peterson asserts, “and needs have value implications.”<sup>243</sup> Value implications are not just individual fulfillment, they relate to humans on a cosmic level.<sup>244</sup> Things do not end here in theistic discussions. Once humans know that moral values exist, they must determine their relationship to them. This leads to the third component of a natural theory.

The third component of a natural law theory concerns obligations. If there is a law, it is binding on humans which results in obligations. Jeremy Waldron argues that natural law is like a law, but it is not a law itself.<sup>245</sup> Aquinas, on the other hand, calls it a law because it is derived from a loving God who seeks to care for his community of people.<sup>246</sup> Aquinas believed that the good—the character of God—is prior to the right. He took this stance for three reasons. First, the theory of the good is that it is relative to human desire. Second, good is that which is the perfection or completion of a thing. Third, the good comes from the form of things separate from what humans experience. It has been shown that moral obligations are more than self-imposed

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<sup>243</sup> Steve Wilkens, ed., *Christian Ethics: Four Views*, Spectrum Multiview Book (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 90.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>245</sup> Jeremy Waldron, “What Is Natural Law Like?,” in *Reason, Morality, and Law*, ed. John Keown and Robert P. George (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 73–89, accessed July 20, 2021, <https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199675500.001.0001/acprof-9780199675500-chapter-6>.

<sup>246</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I–II.90.2.

rules and more than “doing what humans do.” Moral obligations have characteristics that make sense if they are given by a divine, personal being.

If humans can know what they ought to do because it is derived from human nature, then why do humans not act according to their nature more than they do? There must exist something deeper within humans for them to understand moral obligations. Therefore, it may be possible to use natural law to determine what is metaphysically good, while looking to another solution for what is right. Even with this as an option, Natural law cannot stand alone on human nature simply because human nature looks for something beyond itself for its fulfillment.

What role does human conscience play in determining what is good and right? Finnis posits that moral obligations are a “demand of conscience.”<sup>247</sup> Conscience or intuition by itself cannot be the deciding factor, however. Even if it is argued that conscience is created by God, the supposition still has weaknesses.<sup>248</sup> Is the conscience rigid and infallible or is it subject to change? Aquinas did not take the conscious to be infallible, nor to say that it was a source of knowledge.<sup>249</sup> For him the conscience is the “application of knowledge to activity.”<sup>250</sup> The conscience is made or taught as one comes to know God’s will in its various forms. Therefore, God’s revealed will must be seen in both general and special revelation. Knowing God’s commands and purposes creates obligations for humans.

Throughout this section both advantages and disadvantages of natural law have been introduced. It has not been an exhaustive analysis of natural law because the task is to use it as a

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<sup>247</sup> Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, 297.

<sup>248</sup> The weaknesses of conscience or intuition are delineated in chapter two. Conscience does serve a role in identifying what is good, and it can point to the existence of God. However, as it will be illustrated through Aquinas, conscience is not enough alone.

<sup>249</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.79.13.

<sup>250</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, 1.

foundation for understanding the next section which focuses on Divine Command Theory. Minimally, the goal has been to introduce natural law in such a way that lays a foundation for understanding a multi-pronged approach for a theistic argument by showing the value of identifying aspects of the good derived from human nature. The major takeaway is that human nature does build a case for understanding values and obligations, but they do not stand strong by themselves without understanding God's commands.

### **Divine Command Theory**

A Divine Command Theory of ethics identifies things as good or bad based on God's commands. Things are wrong because God forbids them, or they are right because God commands them. Divine command theorists explain that moral obligations result directly from God's command for people to live moral lives. Most DCT focus on obligations versus value claims of good. Advocates of DCT share this foundational concept, but they also have distinctions among themselves (i.e., causal, identity, prescriptivists, etc.). Although there are distinctions between them, they collectively help create the case that moral obligations result from divine commands. Each author offers not only their own nuance to the divine command theory but also unique solutions for how to live a moral life.

John Hare begins his defense of divine command theory by explaining the ways God issues commands.<sup>251</sup> He suggests a proposal for divine command theory which does not include commands as an ingredient of the obligation.<sup>252</sup> He asserts that his proposal offers a better case in opposition to Philip Quinn, who posits a *causal form* (the commands *cause* the obligation); and

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<sup>251</sup> John Hare, *God's Command*, Oxford Studies in Theological Ethics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 309–14.

<sup>252</sup> Wilkens, *Christian Ethics*, 131.

against Robert Adams, who suggests that commands *constitute* obligations. Since obligations are neither caused nor constituted by God’s commands, Hare proposes obligations are *produced* by God.<sup>253</sup> The obligations being produced then become divine prescriptions.

Hare describes five types of divine prescription derived from William of Ockham’s list: precepts, prohibitions, permissions, counsels, and directly effective commands.<sup>254</sup> “They are issued with authority,” Hare explains, “and some kind of sanction is envisioned for non-compliance, ranging from blame to punishment.”<sup>255</sup> In part, a person is expected to conform to the moral law by obeying God’s specific commands—including moral obligations.

This invites the question: how can people know these commands are for them? Hare explains that God reveals his commands to people so they know what they may do. He shows God can reveal his commands in several ways. 1. Revelation—both general and special (i.e., Sacred Scriptures and the “inner testimony” of the Holy Spirit); and intermediate revelation—empirical and conceptual truths accessible to all human unless they are prevented; 2. Conscience or in his terms, “human capacity that serves as the vehicle for general revelation about obligation;”<sup>256</sup> 3. The work of the Holy Spirit or some other divine agency; 4. Through other people collectively, within one’s community and within the traditions of that community.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 128. William of Ockham named them in a Latin dactylic hexameter: *praecipit et prohibet, permittit, consulit, implet.*

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Hare notes that, “A worked-out theory of conscience would need to be specific whether it operates by some kind of divine illumination, or by our doing ethical thinking, or some combination of the two,” in Hare, *God and Morality*, 270.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 270–1.

This list poses an interesting combination of solutions, because they build upon components of a Natural Law Theory.

If Hare's view of divine command theory depends on God producing commands, humans must have some kind of ability to recognize these commands on a deeper level. This leads him to note four points about epistemology in his system. First, there must be a receptor for the "magnetic force" humans have toward what is good.<sup>258</sup> Second, Hare states, "there must be enough general revelation of what is good that we can say. . . that we have the background of many substantive beliefs about the good, independent of special revelation about God and God's goodness so that we can make the non-trivial judgment that God is good."<sup>259</sup> This leads to a qualifier that makes up Hare's third point. In the model Hare advances, he suggests that general revelation is "defective."<sup>260</sup> He argues that it is defective because it does not tell the whole "story of the good." This does not mean it is defective ontologically, but defective in the sense of being insufficient alone. Hare explains the defectiveness has to do with human inclinations that do not fill the gap and fail to do the legwork necessary to arrive at the good.<sup>261</sup> Fourth, humans must ask how much general revelation is enough for accountability. If general revelation is defective, in Hare's model, or incomplete, more information must be supplied to tell the whole story of the good—the incorporation of special revelation.

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<sup>258</sup> The intuitionists explain this magnetic force by describing two metal rings attracted to each other. For a fuller discussion of intuitionism see the works of Robert Audi and Jonathan Haidt mentioned below.

<sup>259</sup> Hare, *God and Morality*, 271.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Hare's use of "defective" to describe general revelation is based on his model of divine command theory and its interaction with inclinations. Since virtue ethicists like Aristotle and Richard Arendt arrive at similar conclusions, while the former does not have God at the center and the latter does, there must be something amiss in their use of inclinations. It may be more appropriate to describe general revelation as incomplete, as long as it fulfills the purpose for which it is designed.

Epistemically, divine command theory offers solutions for knowing God's commands as they relate to human life, but this theory also allows further interaction between God and people.

"A direct divine prescription," Hare explains,

Is one that is a gift, standardly received in prayer, but there is a spectrum here. A prescription can present itself immediately as an 'extraordinary' divine gift (perhaps there is an auditory sensation), or much more often it presents itself as an 'ordinary' part of our reflection that we then recognize as God speaking to us, rather than our simply working out what to do unaided.<sup>262</sup>

Richard Mouw opens up the possibility of God giving his command through more than one venue. Mouw classifies these venues as natural law, the magisterium of an ecclesiastical body, specific commands God might communicate to individuals in some way, "examining our natural inclinations," and listening to our conscience.<sup>263</sup> Both Robert Adams and Stephen Evans elaborate on Mouw's list of ways God reveals his commands.<sup>264</sup> One difference that Adams makes to this list is the addition of social interaction. The lists of ways God communicates may present issues for individuals on multiple levels, which will not be fleshed out in this study. Regardless of one's acceptance of these lists, there is a general consensus that the Scriptures give the best and most reliable guidance for understanding God's commands.

These forms of communication need further guidelines if they will fit into both an ethical theory and an orthodox form of teaching. Therefore, Hare presents a phenomenology for his prescriptions. Specifically, he has listed five ways to clarify this phenomenology: 1. It must be clear and distinctive; 2. It must possess an external origin; 3. It must be a voice that is familiar, but not one's own; 4. It must possess a sense of conviction or authority; 5. It must appear to

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<sup>262</sup> Hare, *God's Command*, 173.

<sup>263</sup> Richard J Mouw, *The God Who Commands* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 8.

<sup>264</sup> See Mouw's original list in Evans, *God and Moral Obligation*, 39–40; Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 263–4.

come from a loving and merciful source.<sup>265</sup> Although more can be said regarding his five points, they do provide a good foundational assessment. Hare's construal of the data is nested in his overarching view of divine command theory, which insists that God's commands can be recognized by humans via multiple faculties.

If people can recognize these commands as coming from God, then the next logical step is to perceive them as authoritative in someone's life. This is a vital component in the version of divine command theory Hare casts. God's commands are not arbitrary or vacuous because they are an extension of his nature. When God produces a command (in any of the forms detailed above) he is producing an obligation. One may raise the typical Euthyphro objections, but Hare dismisses them by working between both horns of the dilemma, and he essentially sees no real threat from it.<sup>266</sup> Hare's version explains that God asks humanity to do things that are an extension of His will and He would not ask people to do something they could not accomplish—at least without divine assistance that is available.

Divine command theory rightly explains the nature and purpose of the commands God has issued to humans. Regardless of whether someone knows the commands are coming from God or not, they still feel the pull of them. A divine command theory does not require an immediate link between moral commitments and religious commitments.<sup>267</sup> However, many of

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<sup>265</sup> Wilkens, *Christian Ethics*, 140–4.

<sup>266</sup> A full explanation of his argument in the midst of the Euthyphro is not possible in the scope of this research, but one may see his responses in the following works, *Ibid.*, 132–46; Hare, *God's Command*, 23–5. In the latter reference Hare says, “We know that God's commands are not arbitrary, because we know that what God commands is good, and the goodness is not produced by the command. This does not, however, make God's command redundant, because only those good things that are commanded are obligatory.” *Ibid.*

<sup>267</sup> Evans, *God and Moral Obligation*, 44. One should not conflate a divine command theory's view of religious commitments with the version brought up by Robert Audi. Audi says that religious acts can be known apart from God's commands, but when God commands what is already known then it constitutes a “strong divine commandability.” Audi, *Rationality and Religious Commitment*, 141.

God's commands are to create or cultivate virtues, which also have significant connections to religious duties. For these virtues to be established, one needs to make a connection using special revelation, especially as it relates to cultivating virtues as they relate to living a moral life. This allows the discussion to progress to Virtue Ethics.

### **Virtue Ethics**

A Christian virtue ethic is a tricky system to identify. The basic features of a virtue ethic begin with the three parts of any ethical decision. First, there is the action. Deontological ethics focuses on the rules and actions of morality. Think of Kant's ethical system and it will be more apparent what is involved in the action of an ethical decision. Second, there is the outcome of the action. Utilitarianism focuses on this component for its ethical theory. The focus on the outcome of an action is what determines whether the action is good or bad. Finally, the more overlooked component is the agent performing the action. This is where virtue ethics gets its starting point. Virtue ethics places "[t]he emphasis. . . on inner character and motivation. . . if we want to decide what is right or ethical, we need to appeal to facts about human character, human motivation, and human virtues and vices in order to ground or justify our conclusions."<sup>268</sup> Virtue ethics entails that "rules/principles and the general results of our actions are relevant to moral evaluation only to the extent that they illustrate or exemplify certain valued or disvalued inner/psychological dispositions."<sup>269</sup> Thus, it results in asking the question: how important is the character of the individual performing a moral action?

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<sup>268</sup> Hugh LaFollette and Ingmar Persson, *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 395.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 395.

Consider a man who does duties as one would expect: he gives to the poor, feeds the hungry, and keeps his promises. One may look at him and determine that he is good because he focuses on the correct actions and outcomes. However, what if this man also was bitter, angry, and vile in his inward being? Is it possible to do the right actions, but negate them all by being of the wrong mindset? What if it is said that the mindset of the individual determines the goodness of the action itself? Once again, imagine someone who gives money to another person. The action of giving money is amoral until it is determined that the man will use it later as blackmail or a bribe. But the man could be giving the money as a simple act of benevolence or a token of love. Aristotle intimates,

It is a hard thing to be good; for finding the middle or the mean in each case is a hard thing. . . any one can be angry—that is quite easy; any one can give money away or spend it; but to do these things to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right object, and in the right manner, is not what everybody can do, and is by no means easy; and that is the reason why right doing is rare and praiseworthy and noble.<sup>270</sup>

The importance of considering the person doing the action is valuable, and this seems to be a consistent consideration even within other ethical theories.

Another challenge to virtue ethics is determining whether or not virtues create moral obligations. Do virtues like kindness, loyalty, courage, or honesty create binding moral obligations? How can one determine when certain acts should or should not be done? Furthermore, how is it possible to know what is a virtue and what is a vice without some other determining or grounding factor? Aquinas helps expand on this matter, because he utilizes both natural law and virtue in his ethical theory. He makes the statement, “[I]t is evident that the proper effect of law is to lead its subjects to their proper virtue: and since virtue is ‘that which makes its subject good,’ it follows that the proper effect of law is to make those to whom it is

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<sup>270</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.9.

given, good, either simply or in some particular respect.”<sup>271</sup> Aquinas shows that virtue is an effect of living by law, because the law helps promote the correct kind of end for humans.

When framed in this perspective, virtues can be seen as created habits. Brad Kallenberg and Nikki Tousley posit that virtue ethics fits best with how humans function. Specifically, they defend four claims that explain what they call the “the irreducibly bodily nature” of virtue ethics: 1. The quality of any human person’s knowledge is a function of the quality of that person’s habits; 2. Forming habits is biological; 3. Humans form habits intentionally; and 4. Habit formation is opposed by entropy.<sup>272</sup> Their focus is on humans working to develop and achieve the proper virtues, and this is an actual possibility for humans to do.

A key aspect for understanding virtue ethics revolves around identifying the proper grounding for those virtues which set the moral standard to be followed. Typically, a virtue ethicist appeals to the example of moral exemplars like Jesus and other religious figures for a standard of morality. In Christianity, believers place Jesus as the moral exemplar *par excellence*. Second to Jesus are the examples of other believers who have paved the way for moral excellence based on their understanding of Jesus and his subsequent teachings as the ideal. Specifically, Christians venerate those individuals who display an abnormal or an unprecedented amount of moral character. These persons, sometimes named saints or heroes, are usually known for some deed of supererogation, or seen as possessing an uncanny amount of virtue. The reality is that these saints do not seem to be held as the standard, but are viewed as the exception. If they

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<sup>271</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I–II.92.1. The phrase “that which makes its subject good” is taken from Aristotle (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.6). Aquinas uses the quotation from Aristotle while talking about hope as a virtue (*ST*, II–II.17.1). Aquinas says that a good human act must correspond to a good human virtue. Actions and virtues are linked together, and one can know the goodness of a virtue if it attains to the ultimate good which is God.

<sup>272</sup> Nikki Coffey Tousley and Brad Kallenberg, “Virtue Ethics,” *Religious Studies Faculty Publications*, no. 59 (2011): 10–29, [http://ecommons.udayton.edu/rel\\_fac\\_pub/59](http://ecommons.udayton.edu/rel_fac_pub/59).

were the standard then more people would strive to identify with them, become saints themselves, or no longer venerate such individuals. If sainthood is considered an anomaly, then should Christians even strive for this level of perfection? Virtue calls for people to look to heroes, saints, and exemplars, but can saints be held as the standard for morality, and do they set the bar too high for perfection?

Kant says that making the example of people the standard for morality is “fatal to morality.”<sup>273</sup> He continues to say that even Jesus must, “be compared with our ideal of moral perfection before we can recognize Him as such.”<sup>274</sup> A pure virtue ethicist will find issue with Kant’s observation. Linda Zagzebski, a virtue ethicist, purports, “The Incarnation and death of Christ make possible a higher level of perfection than was possible for Adam and Eve before the Fall. The Christian story combines the depths and the heights that humanity can reach with and without grace. So, the imitation of Christ is not only an ethic meant to overcome the effects of the Fall; it is an ethic of perfection. . . .”<sup>275</sup> Zagzebski’s explains that the incarnation sets the standard for a moral exemplar and grounds the metaphysics of morals in God, the Creator. This creates an aspect of the motivation factor offered by virtue ethics. If Jesus is the *moral exemplar*, he sets the standard for a moral life. Ideally, one should live to emulate Jesus in all aspects of life—namely, regarding morals. Kallenberg says that a Christian virtue ethic, “analyzes moral situations relative to the *fit* of its action as measured against the character of Christ revealed in the Gospel narratives. For virtues ethics the metric is not so much effectiveness as faithfulness to

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<sup>273</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 25.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 231.

the gospel.”<sup>276</sup> Therefore, a Christian virtue ethic utilizes eternal moral truths exemplified in Jesus to gauge and evaluate actions, agents, and outcomes of an ethical decision.

The goal of this section has been to show that the virtues of an agent is of utmost value when considering the ethicality of a decision. Virtue ethics calls individuals to a standard of morality already identified, lived out, and exemplified in the person of Jesus and other specially identified individuals. The latter alone does not constitute a standard for the good, but shows that the good has application and value in the lives of humans. As an ethical system, virtue ethics does not give the best account for moral realism, as delineated earlier, because it needs to be coupled with a system like natural law theory and divine command theory. The most salient aspect of it as a system is that it aids an individual in getting to the application of moral truths and allowing them to shape someone’s life.

### **A Multi-Pronged Approach**

The crux of this section has been to introduce the three main ethical theories found in Christianity and set up how they work together to create a fuller explanation for understanding a solution for man’s desire for perfection. These systems have been presented as explanations for why Christianity has a response to the metaphysical questions about morality. This has been accomplished by melding together these theories into one multi-pronged approach.

Stephen Evans does a masterful job setting up a new perspective on divine command theory. The approach he takes is the inspiration for this chapter. His version of DCT shores up moral obligations by utilizing natural law and virtue ethics for an explanation and application of the good. Evans connects the three in saying, “One might say that a DCT rests *on* a natural law

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<sup>276</sup> Wilkens, *Christian Ethics*, 35.

theory (or something similar that can play the role that natural law theory plays) and points towards a virtue theory.”<sup>277</sup> The connection Evans makes between these three systems employs advantages from all three while avoiding many of their weaknesses. This assumption maintains that divine command theory presupposes a natural law or other theory of the good. Divine command theory requires some understanding of a normative principle or principles universal in all human persons (i.e., their created capacities). Since God created humans with these *universals*, he also can direct humans toward a different character. “God through his commands,” Evans explains, “wants to help his human creatures transform their characters to make it possible for them to know God truly and relate to God properly.”<sup>278</sup> One may miss the value in Evans’s statement by focusing too much on the relationship between commands and transformation. How does a command cause transformation?<sup>279</sup> The answer can be found if a divine command theory rests on a natural law theory and points towards a virtue theory. This is the trajectory Evans is mapping out, which will be supplemented in the next chapter. Human capacity alone cannot get people where they need to be; there must be drastic changes taking place and a high expectation for living. These changes can be delineated into three points that constitute moral transformation:

1. Becoming a new person;
2. Making God the object of love;
- and 3. conforming to the terms of

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<sup>277</sup> Evans, *God and Moral Obligation*, 54. He also sets up his proposition in the following way, “If A is consistent with B, and A entails C, then B must also be consistent with C. Hence if a natural law ethic is consistent with DCT, and a natural law ethic logically requires a virtue ethic, then it must be the case that a DCT is also consistent with a virtue ethic.” *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>278</sup> Evans, *God and Moral Obligation*, 65.

<sup>279</sup> Evans is not espousing a form of legalism. Erwin Lutzer addresses the claim that following the law results in legalism. He states, “Law is not wrong in itself. The purpose of the law is to define right and wrong. Legalism is an abuse of the law. It results when law is used to minimize obligation by those who do not go beyond its external requirements, and when it is used as a means of self-righteousness by those who think they can obtain salvation by it.” Again he states, “Christ’s solution to legalism was to insist that external obedience to the moral law must be united with the proper inner attitude.” Erwin W. Lutzer, *The Morality Gap: An Evangelical Response to Situation Ethics*, Moody Evangelical Focus (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 41.

the agreement (i.e., covenant). This is why Evans's approach is unique; he uses natural law for an account of the good and Divine Command Theory for an account of the right. This pairing of theories helps point toward a virtue ethic for an account of following the good.

### Conclusion

The central concern of this chapter has been to determine if Christianity can offer a solution for the challenges produced by moral realism and its subsequent impact on human lives. The proposed solution has been to show that the three main versions of Christian ethics can provide a working solution, especially if they are taken together. The result has been that Christianity calls for a transformation in the moral life and character of a person. The desire humans have to live a perfect life results from the high demand of morality given by God, who is the creator and arbiter of the moral law. Christianity explains that God's standard for morality is expected of humans, but there is also the case that humans do not live by it perfectly. The Christian God calls humans to a standard and tells them he will provide the necessary tools for the transformation needed in action, mind, and life.

## Chapter 5: Unity with Christ

### Introduction

It was proposed at the end of chapter four that Christianity has a solution for humanity's desire and failure to live a perfect life. Christianity offers a solution by explaining how the desire humans feel to live a moral life is due to created human nature, God's prescribed commands, and the desire to live a moral life conformed to Christ's image. The succinct solution is moral transformation or in Christian doctrine—unity with Christ. Unity with Christ satisfies humanity's desire for perfection by perfecting people in Christ by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and offering hope for a future perfection beyond what is experienced in this life.

For Christianity to be a viable solution it must offer an advantage for human flourishing that fits reality. Blaise Pascal weighs that human happiness must fit within the boundaries of a God who is able to bring about good. This solution “must give us an explanation of our opposition to God and to our own good. . . .” Pascal then posits, “It must teach us the remedies for these infirmities, and the means of obtaining these remedies. Let us therefore examine all the religions of the world, and see if there be any other than the Christian which is sufficient for this purpose.”<sup>280</sup> In step with Pascal's observation, Christianity stands out uniquely from other worldviews. Nuances of this point can be found throughout this work, but it is the purpose of this chapter to bring them to the forefront as it creates an argument for the necessity of God and his assistance.

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<sup>280</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*. (New York: Philosophical Library, 2016), 123–24, accessed August 27, 2021, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1158431>. A limitation of this project is that other religions cannot be properly addressed. A few comments will be considered in chapter six, but one may wish to consult other works that can give a fair assessment to other religions as they relate to morality. See William J. Wainwright, *Religion and Morality*, Ashgate philosophy of religion series (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2005).

## Unity with Christ & Moral Transformation

A central tenet in Christian doctrine is the teaching of “unity with Christ.” The crux of the gospel message is that Jesus came in the form of man to save humanity from sin. The saving act was accomplished through Jesus’ death on the cross, burial in the tomb, and subsequent resurrection from the dead. John Murray notes, “Union with Christ is union with him in the efficacy of his death and in the virtue of his resurrection. . . .”<sup>281</sup> One way to determine the internal validity or soundness of the gospel message depends upon whether Jesus accomplished what he said he would do and what was spoken about him.<sup>282</sup> If the sacrifice of Jesus cannot respond adequately to the disparity humans face from the inability to live a moral life, then it is invalid.

Christianity uses several related words to explain what Jesus did for humanity (along with the work of God and the Holy Spirit): justification, atonement, and sanctification. Constantine Campbell defines union with Christ as containing the terms: union, participation, identification, and incorporation, which can be found within justification, atonement, and sanctification.<sup>283</sup> Each term has a significant theological teaching behind it, which makes them all part of the gospel’s salvific message. For example, the connection between justification and sanctification concerns one’s standing with God and one’s life and heart in response to the

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<sup>281</sup> John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 35.

<sup>282</sup> Gary Habermas formulates an argument to prove this point in his book Gary R. Habermas, *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Pub, 2003). His argument focuses on using the historical evidence for Jesus and his resurrection to validate Jesus’ claims about himself and his deity.

<sup>283</sup> Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 292. He explains that these four terms all happen at one time in salvation. He notes, “A believer is united to Christ at the moment of coming to faith; their union is established by the indwelling of the Spirit. The person united to Christ therefore enters into participation with Christ in his death, resurrection, ascension, and glorification. As a participant in Christ’s death and resurrection, the believer dies to the world and is identified with the realm of Christ. As a member of the realm of Christ, the believer is incorporated into his body, since union with Christ entails union with his members.” Ibid.

gospel. “Union with Christ,” Robert Latham explains, “is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation.”<sup>284</sup> Union with Christ is the key moment when the solution for humanity’s broken relationship with God is fixed or when one comes into “fellowship” with God through Jesus and sealed by the Holy Spirit.<sup>285</sup>

The fact stands true that humans fail to live according to the moral law. God has also revealed his will to humanity (through general or special revelation) for them to know what to do. Even though humans fail to live for God, God is patient toward those failings and offers grace. Baggett and Baggett state a form of the moral argument based on the performative aspect of morality and morality’s relationship to grace. They say, “if classical theism and historical Christian teaching provide the best explanation both of the diagnosis of the moral maladies of people and the prescription for its healing, then this aspect of morality provides us at least some good reason to infer its truth.”<sup>286</sup> If God did not intend for humans to live moral lives and expect them to live in that way, then his command “to be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt 5:48) would be vacuous. Lewis said that Jesus’ call to be perfect is not “idealistic gas,” but a genuine call to be something God expects humans to be.<sup>287</sup> “What is drawing us and our desires,” Hare intimates, “is God, what is constraining us is God’s command, and what is coordinating the various ends of the members of the kingdom of ends is God’s impartial benevolence.”<sup>288</sup> Moral transformation is a necessity for human life, but it is also a logical and

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<sup>284</sup> Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 118.

<sup>285</sup> John Murray, “Sanctification,” in *Basics of the Faith: An Evangelical Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 175.

<sup>286</sup> Baggett and Baggett, *The Morals of the Story*, 189.

<sup>287</sup> Lewis, *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*, 163.

<sup>288</sup> Hare, *God and Morality*, 250.

valid conclusion of divine command theory, natural law, and virtue ethics. Without God's explicit commands calling humans to be something new, they would be left to their own devices, but that is not God's plan. God offers an ontological change to individuals. Within this change can be found the needed tools to continue according to God's prescribed plan for humanity.

Moral transformation can take on a wide range of definitions and applications in moral theories. Recall the three necessary points for moral transformation: 1. Become a new person; 2. Make God the object of love; and 3. Conform to the terms of the agreement. Divine command theory, combined with other ethical systems, gets a person to the beginning of these points but does not take one all the way through the gate. For moral transformation to take place, there must be both divine interaction and human response.

If viewed apologetically, the argument flows in the following way. God is the likely best explanation for why objective morals exist. Morals are commanded by God and necessarily require him.<sup>289</sup> If morals are produced by God, he must also implement some way to enforce them and hold people accountable to them. There is no example of a perfect human (except Jesus) who has not violated one of God's standards for morality. For a person to conform to God's teachings and obey him, there must be a transformation from the old person into the new one (there has to be a standard for a new one as well). During this transformation, an individual makes God the object of his or her love and agrees to the terms of the agreement between the

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<sup>289</sup> Two important aspects are highlighted in this comment. First, a command requires the originator of the command. To insist that a command exists without any connection to a lawgiver becomes illogical. Therefore, when stating that God commands morality, one is indicating that he has the authority and ability to command, but also enforce his commands. Second, it may be the case that God can make arbitrary commands simply because he has the power and authority. However, it has been shown that God's commands are an extension of his nature. When it is said that morals necessarily require God, this also includes they are dependent upon him. It is not simply because he commanded them, but that they get their very nature and fabric from God. Morality is an extension of God's nature. It is not that God command what is already good, but those things that are good necessarily come from his nature, which is why he commands them.

two. The combination of natural law theory, divine command theory, and virtue ethics provides breath for understanding the multifaceted nature of the solution, which reinforces how the good and the right are intertwined with God and his plans for humanity's perfection.

So far in what is being advanced, moral transformation involves both divine interaction and human response. Divine interaction can take on several different forms, outlined earlier; but each iteration shares a common principle—God offers the assistance needed for moral transformation. Second, one is held accountable for how he or she responds to that divine interaction. Each person will be held culpable for whether they accept the offered assistance or not. For a person to know what he or she is to do, the divine creator must, in accordance with his nature, provide the means necessary to meet his expectations or else people would not be expected to do what they cannot do. The Apostle Peter explains that “[God’s] divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness. . .” (2 Peter 1:3). If God’s plan is to provide humans with the ability to become partakers of the divine nature, it is not without his aide. God’s divine power, which has been clearly displayed since creation (Rom. 1:20), was at work when God raised Jesus from the dead (Eph. 1:19). The same enlightening Spirit is also at work in believers (2 Pet 1:3–4; Eph 1:11–14; Phil 2:13). Therefore, moral transformation is a response to divine commands, in alignment with natural law, and motivated by virtues.

The combination of the moral and ethical systems mentioned throughout creates a multipronged approach for resolving the tension created between people’s inability to live morally and God’s call to live according to his expectations. All three views point toward moral transformation that involves God’s interaction and human response. Orthodox Christianity believes that unity with Christ is the best solution to bridge this gap. To understand the

implications and viability of unity with Christ, it will be of great value to chain together a few major Christian doctrines that interconnect to make the case.

### The Problem of Sin

If objective morality sets a standard for living, what offers the likely best explanation for why people do not live that way? Christianity teaches that people have a sin problem. “Sin,” Millard Erickson explains, “is any lack of conformity, active or passive, to the moral law of God.”<sup>290</sup> If the moral law is identifiable in multiple ways, then there are equally as many ways to go against the moral law. Therefore, “if humans are corrupt or rebellious, and thus either unable or unwilling to do what is right, a more radical transformation of the person will be needed.”<sup>291</sup> One cannot expect compliance to the moral law without drastic transformation. Oswald Allis describes the problem believers face when they wrestle with the point that, “Man was created by God and in the image of God; and the duty which God requires of man is ‘obedience to his revealed will.’”<sup>292</sup> He explains that believers have struggled with the challenge of obedience since “. . .the Gospel does not abrogate the moral law as a standard of life and conduct but raises it to a higher level both by example and precept. . . .”<sup>293</sup> The struggle individuals feel as they wrestle with the desire for perfection takes on an added weight when there is a clear example and command to be something new.

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<sup>290</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 596.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 581.

<sup>292</sup> Oswald T. Allis, “The Covenant of Works,” in *Basics of the Faith: An Evangelical Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 80.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

One may object at this point by saying this study is advocating for a version of “perfectionism.” Moral perfectionism in philosophy can be found among the writings of such individuals as Aristotle, the Stoics, Maimonides, Aquinas, Malebranche, Spinoza, Leibniz, von Humboldt, J. S. Mill, F. H. Bradley, T. H. Green, Nietzsche, and Marx.<sup>294</sup> The basic premise of perfectionism is “that what is good, ultimately, is the development of human nature.”<sup>295</sup> David O. Brink contends that perfectionism is a neglected aspect of moral and political philosophy, and one that needs to be revisited. He argues that there are two major camps in perfectionist ideals: biological and normative. Those who look to biological explanations for perfectionism appeal to human nature along with its functions and essence. On the other hand, the normative view “grounds perfectionist ideals in a normative conception of human nature, understood in terms of moral personality or agency.”<sup>296</sup> Regardless of which camp one takes, there is a missing component. Human nature must be grounded in something beyond itself, and the ideals of human nature require a higher standard outside of its own system. When this higher standard is established, then there is also an explanation for why people fail to live by that standard. Allis intimates that, “[Perfectionism] is biblical and sound when it recognizes and stresses the demands of Scripture for perfect obedience to the will of God. . . .”<sup>297</sup> The unbiblical and

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<sup>294</sup> This list is taken from David O. Brink in his article *Normative Perfectionism and the Kantian Tradition*. He explains that these individuals have all written on some aspect of perfectionism, but he finds considerable value in Aristotle, Mill and Green. David O. Brink, “Normative Perfectionism and the Kantian Tradition,” *Philosophers’ Imprint* 19, no. 45 (October 2019): 1–2.

<sup>295</sup> Hurka, *Perfectionism*, 3.

<sup>296</sup> Brink, “Normative Perfectionism and the Kantian Tradition,” 27.

<sup>297</sup> Allis, “The Covenant of Works,” 82. Murray makes a similar observation by saying, “Perfectionists are right when they insist that this victory is not achieved by us nor by working or striving or laboring; they are correct in maintaining that it is a momentary act realized by faith.” Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 100. He qualifies his observation by recognizing three mistakes perfectionists make: 1. They fail to recognize victory over sin is available to everyone who is born again; 2. They insist that victory is a blessing separate from justification; 3. Their view does not match the biblical data. *Ibid.*

unsound aspect surfaces, Allis notes, when the standard for obedience is lowered or man's struggle with sin is minimized.

If the argument elucidated throughout this work remains sound, then it may be concluded that the foundational problem with humanity is the denial of God's moral standard. This fundamental problem is shared between all humans. There is no one who lives a perfect life, but there is still a universal expectation that humans ought to behave a certain way. The desire to live in a particular way is derived from understanding God and his relationship to creation, namely his relationship to humans. Cornelius Plantinga Jr. says that sin may be properly defined as "culpable shalom-breaking."<sup>298</sup> Essentially, his argument is that sin is a disruption of "how things ought to be." The culpable disturbance of shalom, "suggests that sin is unoriginal, that it disrupts something good and harmonious, that (like a housebreaker) it is an intruder. . . ."<sup>299</sup> The problem is that finite humans do not possess within themselves all the tools necessary to complete a perfect life although it may be desired. Herein lies the thrust of this section of the study. Humans can find solace when they become united with Christ, since he closes the moral gap by offering moral transformation and the assistance needed to live the life God expects. The moral law makes one become dependent upon God for the source of morals, but also desirous of him to help reach the standard for morality.

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<sup>298</sup> Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 14.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, 16. Plantinga's impetus for his book is to enliven a misplaced awareness of the severity of sin. He illustrates humanity's "slippage in our consciousness of sin" by saying that "self-deception about our sin is a narcotic, a tranquilizing and disorienting suppression of our spiritual central nervous system. What's devastating about it is that when we lack an ear for wrong notes in our lives, we cannot play right ones or even recognize them in the performances of others. Eventually we make ourselves religiously so unmusical that we miss both the exposition and the recapitulation of the main themes God plays in human life. The music of creation and the still greater music of grace white right through our skulls, causing no catch of breath and leaving no residue." *Ibid.*, xiii.

Theological lines have been drawn over the exact impact sin has had on humans. The varying thoughts are vast and all-encompassing. A few preliminary delimitations need to be placed on this aspect of the current study, given these thoughts. First, it is this author's supposition that the ability for rational thought and free will are intact even though sin is present. Whether one believes these to be in place due to God's prevenient grace or remain even after the Fall does not adversely affect the current study.<sup>300</sup> If it is impossible for humans to employ reason to draw necessary conclusions, then the abductive approach utilized throughout this project will be rendered unsuccessful. However, it is the case that humans display a staggering amount of evidence to show that rational thought and free will are not impaired but remain intact. A second delimitation is that this research cannot cover all the nuances of the doctrine of sin. This study shows that unity with Christ is the solution needed to fix the problem of sin. The first delimiter rules out certain versions of original sin, while maintaining a shared conclusion between varying and even disagreeing forms of sin. The common thread throughout teachings about sin is that humans cannot perfect themselves.

The importance of these two delimiters may be weighed when asking the question: does humanity have free will and ability to choose between doing good and evil? This highly contested question has generated a lot of theological debates. However, if viewed apologetically,

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<sup>300</sup> The difference between these two positions should not be overlooked. Placing these views alongside each other may be seen as an oversimplification, but the common principle is the one explained in this section.

one may get to an answer quicker than examining the history of the doctrine.<sup>301</sup> Alvin Plantinga does a superb job intimating a concise argument for free will in relation to evil.<sup>302</sup> His defense is:

A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all. Now God can create free creatures, but He can't cause or determine them to do only what is right. For if He does so, then they aren't significantly free after all; they do not do what is right freely. To create creatures capable of moral good, therefore, He must create creatures capable of moral evil; and He can't give these creatures the freedom to perform evil; and at the same time prevent them from doing so. As it turned out, sadly enough, some of the free creatures God created went wrong in the exercise of their freedom; this is the source of moral evil. The fact that free creatures sometimes go wrong, however, counts neither against God's omnipotence nor against His goodness; for He could have forestalled the occurrence of moral evil only by removing the possibility of moral good.<sup>303</sup>

Plantinga sets up the position that free moral agents can actively choose between good and evil.

Those who wish to use this as an indictment against God will undoubtedly have to address

Plantinga's free will argument as it relates to God's nature. The reason evil exists in the world is

because God allows free choice, this results in humans differing from automata. If people can

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<sup>301</sup> This is not to say the conversation about free will is trivial and easy to address either theologically or apologetically. Rather, if viewed purely from a moral apologetics side, an answer may be reached much quicker due to the philosophical arguments that are interrelated to how apologetics are being done in general. For a comparison of apologetic methods and their various approaches see Cowan and Craig, *Five Views on Apologetics*.

<sup>302</sup> Plantinga's free will defense falls into a separate category from a theodicy. The purpose of a theodicy is to handle the question concerning the existence of evil balanced with the existence of an omni-benevolent God. The question of evil is not within the purview of this study. Although there is a connection between sin and evil, the purpose of this study is to examine the performative aspect of what is good and right. For a discussion on this point see Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011). Plantinga's freewill defense is used here to focus on the function of freewill in regard to choosing between actions.

<sup>303</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 30. In his defense, Plantinga addresses an argument constructed by J. L. Mackie who contends, "If God has made men such that in their free choices they sometimes prefer what is good and sometimes what is evil, why could he not have made men such that they always freely choose the good? If there is no logical impossibility in a man's freely choosing the good on one, or on several, occasions, there cannot be a logical impossibility in his freely choosing the good on every occasion. God was not, then, faced with a choice between making innocent automata and making beings who, in acting freely, would sometimes go wrong: there was open to him the obviously better possibility of making beings who would act freely but always go right. Clearly, his failure to avail himself of this possibility is inconsistent with his being both omnipotent and wholly good." J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind* 64, no. 254 (April 1955): 209.

choose evil, then they can also choose good. However, the issue is that no matter the amount of good chosen by an individual it does not correct the wrong done.

One can see the pertinence of this discussion when considering the two horns of the Euthyphro dilemma. Some individuals swing to the voluntarist horn of the dilemma and run into philosophical issues.<sup>304</sup> These issues are explained by Baggett and Walls and will be stated here for consideration. The first major issue with voluntarism is compatibilism. Compatibilism insists there is no issue in affirming determinism and free will. Baggett and Walls find an issue with compatibilism by stating, “to put it simply, moral duties make little sense given compatibilism. Duties tell us what we ought to do, and *ought* implies *can*. But if we are fully determined to will and to act as we do by causes outside our control, it is doubtful that there is any meaningful sense in which we can do otherwise.”<sup>305</sup> The objection to compatibilism can be broken down into five secondary objections:

1. The obligation objection- This objection raises questions addressed in the “Ought Knot” section earlier. Therefore, if humans are totally determined to will an act, then there leaves no room for them to do otherwise.
2. The culpability objection- This objection highlights the inconsistency with saying that if God determines a person to will an act, then he would hold them culpable for doing the act he determined them to do.
3. The bad god objection- This objection rejects the view of a God who could have saved everyone by violating their free will, but sends them to Hell, nonetheless.

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<sup>304</sup> These five objections are taken from Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 65–81. “All five sub-objections taken together constitute a major philosophical objection to Calvinistic compatibilism, an objection that ranges over metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics.” *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>305</sup> Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 69.

4. The love objection- This objection focuses on the necessity of love to have an element of volition. Some views of compatibilism leave no room for genuine love because the volitional nature of love is removed when lives are determined.
5. Virtue objection- This objection finds issue with what is taught about virtues and those taught by virtue ethicists. Some individuals start with virtue and work backwards versus taking a view that thoughts lead to actions that shape character.

The second major objection against voluntarists is their use of euphemisms, or softening their language, instead of calling something what it is. For example, a voluntarist may say that God extends a genuine offer to humans for them to accept him. Ironically, it is not a genuine offer if it is already determined. The third objection is the acceptance of an extreme voluntarism in the Euthyphro. If a voluntarist concedes that nothing is higher than God's will, then they must agree that God could command anything—like rape—and it would be morally acceptable. The fourth objection is the “terrible tenet.” This objection rejects the belief that the unconditional reprobate has no hope and is consigned to Hell without a chance. Finally, the fifth objection is based on a semantic phenomenon. Some individuals face a wide range of semantic problems when trying to balance doctrines by using different terms. They twist the concept of love by saying God loves the unconditional reprobate the same way he loves the elect. This does not match the understanding of the word nor does the word “love” fit the doctrine they espouse.

These five philosophical objections against voluntarism, when paired with Plantinga's defense, create a reasonable case that free will is an integral part of human nature. The concept of free will is vitally essential for explaining why it is possible for humans to live a moral life and why they fail to accomplish it. Without free will, as some may espouse, people have no

choice to follow the good and reject the bad. However, the view advanced here is that free will does exist and is a requirement for moral transformation.

What remains concerning the effects of sin on humans? Minimally, humans have violated the basic moral law of a perfect, divine creator. Any transgression of the moral law renders one guilty and deserving of punishment. Blaise Pascal intimates,

For in fact, if man had never been corrupt, he would enjoy in his innocence both truth and happiness with assurance; and if man had always been corrupt, he would have no idea of truth or bliss. But, wretched as we are, and more so than if there were no greatness in our condition, we have an idea of happiness, and cannot reach it. We perceive an image of truth, and possess only a lie. Incapable of absolute ignorance and of certain knowledge, we have thus been manifestly in a degree of perfection from which we have unhappily fallen.<sup>306</sup>

To grasp concept of perfection lost, sin and its remedy will be examined by looking at how sin is perceived by natural law, divine command, and virtue ethics.

### **Natural Law and the Broken Image**

A natural law theory of the good proposes that man can know what is good based on the created aspect of human nature. Therefore, a component of sin can be understood as going against the prescribed model for human nature. In Stanley Hauerwas' imagery, sin is going against the grain of the universe.<sup>307</sup> Claire Brown Peterson succinctly makes two claims touted by natural law ethics: 1. The possibility of ethics is rooted in human nature; and 2. The very content of ethics is rooted in human nature.<sup>308</sup> Peterson's point places a lot of emphasis on human nature, as can be expected, by claiming that what can be known about ethics are a

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<sup>306</sup> Pascal, *Pensées.*, 127.

<sup>307</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013).

<sup>308</sup> Wilkens, *Christian Ethics*, 89.

derivation of human nature. J. Budziszewski, a natural law lawyer, comments on knowable moral facts. He states, “They are the universal common sense of the human race, as well as the foundation of its uncommon sense.”<sup>309</sup> He further explains the problem of human nature as it relates to sin. His illustration is illuminating,

The Fall does not deprive us of our nature—a broken foot still has the nature of a foot—but our nature is not in its intended condition. For natural law, this is no insignificant consideration. If we had never seen healthy feet, it might have taken us a long time to discover that broken feet were broken. . . . In the meantime we might have taken their broken condition as normative. Even if we grasped that something was wrong with our feet, we might have misunderstood what it was. We might have thought that feet are bad by nature, or that they are good but corrupted by shoes. Apart from revelation we make the same mistakes about human nature.<sup>310</sup>

Budziszewski introduces that special revelation is essential for expanding an individual’s understanding of the purpose of humanity. He shows that attention needs to be placed on the fact that human nature needs revelation to clarify or fill in the gaps for what natural law cannot cover by itself.

Natural law uses general revelation as an initial step to get to God’s will, but it must be supplemented with special revelation. Bruce Birch attempts to show the power of special revelation is not in detailed lists of commands and guidelines, but a narrative story detailing one’s reaction to the character and nature of God. Birch writes along with several other authors in a compendium that focuses on the *imitatio Dei/Christi*. Their view characterizes special revelation as more descriptive than prescriptive. They contend, “The *imitatio Dei/Christi* does not imply that we simply try to do what God or Jesus have done. . . . But through the testimony of Israel and the early church in the witness of biblical texts, we can enter into the reality of God

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<sup>309</sup> Budziszewski, *What We Can’t Not Know*, 15.

<sup>310</sup> Budziszewski, *The Line through the Heart*, 51.

and Christ in ways that shape and form our character as moral agents and communities.”<sup>311</sup> The crux of their points comes in saying, “The ethical course of action may depend on its effect on others rather than its adherence to some divine absolute.”<sup>312</sup> They later state that the Bible “is both formative and normative; it shapes the people of God and functions as a resource in discerning how to live faithfully before God.”<sup>313</sup> Their point is that “doing the right thing” concerns aligning man’s nature with God’s intended purpose for it. If the image of God is present in humans, then the task is to live by that intended purpose.

From a Christian perspective the explanation of human nature given by God is what’s called the *imago Dei*. In theological discussions much ink has been spilled over the exact meaning of the *imago Dei*.<sup>314</sup> Predominately four main options are proffered as viable options for understanding its meaning and purpose.

The first theory focuses on the structure of man. The structural model believes that man is created with some kind of ability or capacity that is akin to God’s own nature. Normally, defenders of this view believe the *imago Dei* to be humanity’s capacity for rational thought. Humanity’s ability to form rational thoughts makes them unique from the rest of the created world. This uniqueness is also found in God, who is the ultimate rational being and infinite mind.

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<sup>311</sup> Bruce C. Birch et al., *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life: A New Conversation*, 3rd ed. (Fortress Press, 2018), 31.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 32. There is certainly a danger with this type of ethical thinking. To be too concerned about human interaction without a proper perspective on God’s commands leads to an ethical system founded outside of God’s commands. This is why all three ethical systems must be considered together.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>314</sup> J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005); Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*, 2. ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013); Stanley J Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001); Dominic Robinson, *Understanding the “Imago Dei”: The Thought of Barth, von Balthasar and Moltmann* (Farnham, England: Asgate, 2010).

The emphasis in this model is on who a person *is*. Proponents of the structural or substantive model agree on the locus of the image. “It is located within humans as a resident quality or capacity. . . .” Millard Erickson notes, “Although conferred by God, the image resides in humans whether or not they recognize God’s existence and his work.”<sup>315</sup> If one thinks the image of God is lost or at a minimum marred, then they would conclude that due to the fall there are some noetic effects of sin. However, based on the previous discussion of sin, the noetic effects of sin do not adversely affect one’s reasoning abilities. That is to say that one can still use reason to draw proper conclusions about God.<sup>316</sup>

Second, is the functional model. This model does not focus on humanity’s capacity, but their role within the created order. The emphasis in this model is on what people are able to *do*. “The human person,” Cortez explains, “‘reflects’ the divine reality by serving as God’s representative rulers in the created realm.”<sup>317</sup> As representatives, humans are to be “little Gods” in the world. In some respect, people can look at humanity and know there is a creator. This relates to the natural law argument for morality. However, the implications run deeper. Humans can fail to act in God’s image due to the pervasiveness of sin. Essentially, sin is the rejection of the task instilled within each human to be active representatives of God on this earth.

Third, is the relational model. In this model humans are viewed in relation to themselves, humanity, and the divine. “This is not an entity that a human possesses,” Erickson posits, “so

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<sup>315</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 523.

<sup>316</sup> From an apologetic standpoint, this would be the rejection of Presuppositionalism. Presuppositionalism focuses on the use of *a priori* reasoning to confirm Christianity. According to presuppositionalists, faith must be given to understand evidential facts. Essentially, one’s reasoning abilities are governed by faith, and if God is the provider of faith, then he is the presupposition needed for any rational argument. For a treatment and response to Presuppositionalism see Cowan and Craig, *Five Views on Apologetics*.

<sup>317</sup> Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Guides for the perplexed (London: T&T Clark International, 2010), 21.

much as the experience that is present when a relationship is active.”<sup>318</sup> Since God is a triune God, he possesses within himself relational components. Thus, humanity is also relational to itself and other humans but more important to God. Sin within this model focuses on the broken relationship humans have with God due to their rejection of their connection to Him.

Finally, there is the functional-relational model. The combination of both functionality and relationality seeks to amalgamate the benefits and applications of each view to create a fuller model for the *imago Dei*. With any coalesced model, there is the picking and choosing of what fits best with one’s own perspective. However, with the functional-relational model one can see the benefit of what humans *are* and how they are connected *to* God. This model sees sin as a violation against God’s intended purpose for man and his connection to the divine.

Why focus on the *imago Dei* in discussions of natural law? This brief analysis of the variegated perspectives of the *imago Dei* illustrates the complexities involved in understanding natural law and its approach to humanity’s need for assistance. John Hammett identifies at least two biblical parameters about the *imago Dei*. He shows that the image of God is (1) unspecified throughout Scripture and (2) remains even after the fall of man.<sup>319</sup> These biblical parameters in Andrew Davison’s observation show that, “God’s power and craftsmanship do not simply confer the designation—the label ‘image of God’—upon some already existing thing; it confers the

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<sup>318</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 527.

<sup>319</sup> John S. Hammett, “Human Nature,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2007), 654. Also see Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9. There are generally about six accepted conclusions that can be surmised about the image of God: 1. The image of God is universal within the human race; 2. The image of God has not been lost as a result of sin or specifically the fall; 3. There is no indication that the image is present in one person to a great degree than in another; 4. The image is not correlated with any variable; 5. The image is something in the very nature of humans, in the way in which they were made. 6. The image refers to the elements in the human makeup that enable the fulfillment of human destiny. This list is taken from Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 532.

image of God, as a living reality in the depths of the creature, by calling it out of nothing.”<sup>320</sup>

Davison sees a tight connection between natural law and virtue ethics because humans understand a thing by knowing it at its best or most excellent.<sup>321</sup> Natural law focuses on “good-as-beneficial” and virtue sees “good-as-excellent.”<sup>322</sup> Natural law theorists emphasize what a person can do, since he or she is sufficient to some degree on their own to come to conclusions. This is exactly the thrust needed when considering moral transformation, but it needs culling in some of its views. Natural law gives weight to humanity’s potentiality to live morally and the necessity of revelation (both general and special).<sup>323</sup> If God created humans “very good” (Gen. 1:31), then he had an original intent for humans to recognize this goodness; but also realize that one has failed to live according to God’s expectations he created for them.

Unity with Christ within a natural law theory can zero in on Jesus’ response to the image of God. A defining characteristic of Jesus is that he is the exact imprint (charaktēr) and image (eikōn) of God.<sup>324</sup> Thus, when one becomes united with Christ in his death, burial, and

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<sup>320</sup> Andrew Davison, *Participation in God: A Study in Christian Doctrine and Metaphysics*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 107–8, accessed September 17, 2021, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/9781108629287/type/book>.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, 352.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>323</sup> The connection made here between divine command theory and natural law may be seen as overly simplified. At many points these two theories contradict each other. To assume these two theories fit together with no issues is to dismiss some major distinctions between them. However, based on Evans’s guidance there is a place for natural law with divine command theory. Evans explains his connection between them by stating, “If, however, we add to the natural law ethic an account of moral obligations as generated by God’s commands, things are entirely different. . . . I believe a natural law ethic that makes no use of divine authority will have difficulty making sense of the special character of moral duties. Nor is there, as far as I can see, any good reason why a theistic natural law theorist should neglect this important resource.” Evans, *God and Moral Obligation*, 73–4.

<sup>324</sup> See Hebrews 1:3 and Colossians 1:15 respectively. While commenting on these texts and other *imago Dei* texts in the New Testament, Stanley Grenz says, “It is not surprising, therefore, that the *imago Dei* texts in the NT elevate Jesus as the one who makes manifest the reality of God.” Stanley J Grenz, “Jesus as the Imago Dei: Image-of-God Christology and the Non-Linear Linear,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 4 (December 2004): 619. Therefore, when someone sees Jesus, they see the full and complete image, glory, and

resurrection (Col. 2:12; Rom. 6:1–5), they, “. . . put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (Col. 3:9–10). Essentially, the process puts things back into balance and reunites man back into a relationship with God. In this unifying moment, a believer becomes “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4), thus being transformed into something new along with indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

### **Divine Command Theory and Disobedience**

It has been shown that a Divine Command Theory of morals focuses on the good and right in relation to God’s commands and his nature. God’s commands create moral obligations since a good, perfect, and loving God commands morality. Therefore, sin comes into the mix when individuals transgress or violate God’s explicit commands. Violating God’s commands not only goes against what God has dictated, but more importantly it goes against his nature. Since God’s goodness and his commands are one in the same and intertwined, a rejection of his commands is a rejection of the good.<sup>325</sup>

Divine Command Theory is not to be seen in conflict with Natural Law. When paired together, Natural Law lays a foundation for Divine Command Theory. Accepting the premises of the Natural Law argument for morality points to the necessity of God’s commands. Lydia Schumacher advocates for an understanding of Divine Command Theory that cogently pairs with Natural Law. “God himself ordained the natural law in accordance with his eternal law,” she proposes, “which ultimately orders all things towards him as the highest good. In this account,

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radiance of God. This is pivotal for understanding the Christological implications of Jesus and his ability to balance the image of God within man.

<sup>325</sup> This rejection is profoundly illustrated by the first sin with Adam and Eve (Gen. 3).

consequently, God could never command us to do wrong or to hate him, let alone to perform seemingly arbitrary acts, the personal value of which is unclear.”<sup>326</sup> Natural law is consistent with directing one’s “orientation” toward the good which is God. When one understands the natural law in this respect, then it is understandable to see that what God commands fits with one’s well-being, while also providing the option to obey or disobey.<sup>327</sup> Natural law frames an aspect of sin as disobedience from God’s prescribed order; Divine Command Theory conceives of sin as disobeying God’s commands which extend from his nature.

God’s commands, which are inseparable from his nature, establish the parameters for his expectation for his creation. The impetus behind a rejection of these is a lack of love for God the perfect creator. If it is the case that humans have violated God’s commands, there must also be a solution to resolve the violation. Simply because a person does good, does not fix the wrong done. This is where unity with Christ offers a solution.

The challenging question to consider is: Are God’s commands unconditionally binding on humans? One may ask, “Does God issue his commands knowing human abilities, created at the beginning, and sees no defect or anything preventing humans from accomplishing his commands?” When considering the doctrine of sin and its relationship to human actions, it’s worth considering a leading example in Christian theological history from Pelagius and Augustine. The Augustinian-Pelagian divide is a classic figurehead example of the battle between human actions and the impact of sin. The debate between these two perspectives will serve as a paradigm for considering God’s commands and the human response to them.

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<sup>326</sup> Lydia Schumacher, “Divine Command Theory in Early Franciscan Thought: A Response to the Autonomy Objection,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 29, no. 4 (2016): 475. The “eternal law” is a reference to Aquinas’ four aspects of law. The eternal law precedes and confines natural law, human law, and divine law.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*

Pelagius is described as an individual with a high sense of morality. He was “concerned for right conduct and shocked by what he considered demoralizingly pessimistic views of what could be expected of human nature.”<sup>328</sup> He believed that “human perfection is possible; therefore, it is obligatory.”<sup>329</sup> Augustine, on the other hand, believed one could not choose good nor reason properly without the initial aid from God’s Spirit.<sup>330</sup>

The debate between Pelagius and Augustine centralizes on whether man, created and endowed by God, has everything needed to live a moral life.<sup>331</sup> Christopher Hall describes Pelagius’ belief that, “In creating us, God has provided all that human beings need to live a moral life of obedience: a soul, mind, will and body.”<sup>332</sup> He continues, “We have a mind that can comprehend God’s commandments, a will that can freely choose to obey them and a body through which the divine life can be lived.”<sup>333</sup> The struggle some have with this stance is that it downplays the negative effects of sin. The delimiters on sin noted above, maintain that humanity’s reasoning abilities and free will to choose are present to some degree. The contention

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<sup>328</sup> J. N. D Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 357.

<sup>329</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Church History*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 280. Alister McGrath concludes, “Pelagianism thus seems at times to amount to a rather rigid form of moral authoritarianism—an insistence that humanity is under obligation to be sinless, and an absolute reject of any excuse for failure.” Alister E. McGrath, *Heresy: A History of Defending the Truth* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2009), 166–7.

<sup>330</sup> Augustine appeared to have an overly pessimistic view of human nature even with Adam and Eve before the Fall. Hall wrestles with Augustine’s view on this matter by asking two salient questions. “Why would sinless, created human nature still need such external aid. . . .” and why should a “sinless, free will. . . ever turn away from God in disobedience?” Christopher A. Hall, *Learning Theology with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 139.

<sup>331</sup> The main accusations against Pelagius are distilled down to: 1. Adam was created mortal, and would have died, even if he had not sinned; 2. Adam’s fall injured himself alone, not the human race; 3. Children come into the world in the same condition in which Adam was before the fall; 4. The human race neither dies in consequence of Adam’s fall, nor rises again in consequence of Christ’s resurrection; 5. Unbaptized children, as well as others, are saved; 6. The law, as well as the gospel, leads to the kingdom of heaven; and 7. Even before Christ there were sinless men.

<sup>332</sup> Hall, *Learning Theology with the Church Fathers*, 136.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

is in determining whether this puts too much emphasis on human abilities while potentially playing off the severity of sin. “A man’s free-will,” Augustine explains, “avails for nothing except to sin, if he knows not the way of truth; and even after his duty and his proper aim shall begin to become known to him, unless he also take delight in and feel a love for it, he neither does his duty, nor sets about it, nor lives rightly.”<sup>334</sup> A person’s desire must be for God’s commands, and his delight must be in the law of God. If a person’s will is only bent in on itself, then can a person even choose to follow God’s commands or not?

Pelagius noted three elements of a moral action: 1. Humans must be able to perform the action (*posse*); 2. Humans must be willing to desire to do the action (*velle*); 3. The action must actually be performed (*esse*).<sup>335</sup> Pelagius, “recognizes that God has endowed human beings with the capacity (*possibilitas*) or ability (*posse*) for doing good, and in this sense this capacity or ability is a grace, but he asserts that the desire for (*velle*) and realization of (*esse*) the good lies within human power apart from divine grace.”<sup>336</sup> Grace in this respect is found in the fact that humans are created in a particular way, and do not need an initial catalyst to choose what is good other than revelation. Conversely, Hall shows that Augustine believed, “We know the right, affirm the right, but desire or will to do the very thing we know to be wrong.”<sup>337</sup> Therefore, the desire or the will to do the good and the right is skewed and needs divine assistance. Kant’s revolution of the will is a proper fit to the assistance needed. Without moral transformation, one’s desires are directed at the wrong end, thus a change is needed.

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<sup>334</sup> Augustine, *On the Spirit and the Letter*, 5.

<sup>335</sup> Hall, *Learning Theology with the Church Fathers*, 134–5.

<sup>336</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Grace and the Human Condition*, vol. 15, *Message of the Fathers of the Church* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1988), 235.

<sup>337</sup> Hall, *Learning Theology with the Church Fathers*, 137.

Augustine's contentions with Pelagianism can be seen in his rejection of those, "who suppose that without God's help, the mere power of the human will in itself, can either perfect righteousness, or advance steadily towards it. . . ." <sup>338</sup> Augustine rejects not only the category of "puffing one's capacity," but also the belief that one can accomplish righteousness by mere effort. He further explains those individuals who hold to this thought, when pressed, cannot get away from their needing God's assistance. In a longer excerpt Augustine explains,

But they [Pelagians] allege that such attainments are not made without God's help on this account, namely, because God both created man with the free choice of his will, and, by giving him commandments, teaches him, Himself, how man ought to live; and indeed assists him, in that He takes away his ignorance by instructing him in the knowledge of what he ought to avoid and to desire in his actions: and thus, by means of the free-will naturally implanted within him, he enters on the way which is pointed out to him, and by persevering in a just and pious course of life, deserves to attain to the blessedness of eternal life. <sup>339</sup>

One may see in this description an extreme view of perfectionism, which credits the individual with the ability to close the moral gap. However, this gap cannot be closed without divine assistance, which requires unity with Christ since a transgression of God's commands has been performed and needs a solution.

Two instances of the same problem are raised here. First, is the discussion of whether grace or divine aide is needed before one can choose what is good. Second, is the point that the good cannot be pursued perfectly unless one is granted divine assistance. When addressing the former, it is imperative to confront the philosophical issues elucidated at the beginning of this chapter. Minimally, one must accept there is a degree of freedom, ability, and capacity to

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<sup>338</sup> Augustine, *On the Spirit and the Letter*, 4. It is of value to note that Augustine had interactions with Pelagius and also with *Pelagianism*. The distinction between Pelagius and Pelagianism is that individuals used Pelagius' teachings as a platform and created other beliefs beyond his initial points. Therefore, one should employ caution when using Pelagianism and Pelagius interchangeably.

<sup>339</sup> Augustine, *On the Spirit and the Letter*, 4.

recognize objectively defined morals which lead one to a moral lawgiver. Those who advocate for other forms of assistance will at least have to navigate the philosophical complexities, and then balance the performative aspects of their views. The second problem concerns the divine assistance offered through unity with Christ. If the assistance offered through unity with Christ is only epistemological, then all one must do is change their focus about morals. If that be the case, then it was unnecessary to have Jesus come to the earth to be a sacrifice. Undoubtedly, the sacrifice paid the price for sin, but it also opened the doors for a complete transformation.<sup>340</sup> The divine assistance offered through unity with Christ is both epistemological and ontological. That is to say that one's entire being is changed or transformed in some capacity. Hare comments,

Because God is our creator, when we wrong each other and the natural world we also wrong God. He cannot forgive us without requiring repentance and apology, because to do this would be to condone our wrongdoing. God has. . . no duty to require reparation and penance from us. It is none the less good that he do so, because it takes seriously the wrong that we do. But we do not have the means to make reparation and penance. We could only offer to God things we did not owe him already, and we do not have such things. God therefore, like a good parent, gives us the means by which we can make amends.<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> A limitation of this study is that it cannot dig deeper into the topic of atonement. It will suffice here to mention that the atonement theory advocated underneath these views is a version of penal substitutionary atonement. For a more detailed discussion of penal substitutionary atonement and moral theories see Hare, *The Moral Gap*, 233–59. Hare's full stance is shared here for clarity, "Being incorporated into this new life does not mean that the believer ceases to experience the pull of the old one. There is likely to be a tension within her experience; for 'if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.' There is therefore a combination, hard to understand, of the conviction that she is a new creature, no longer a slave to sin, with the recognition that her life continues to manifest the old patterns of repeated failure. In fact, it can be observed in the lives of the saints that their sense of their own sin gets stronger as they seem, to the outward observer, to be progressing in godliness. The oddness of this is that, as Paul says, 'All of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death.' Our old self 'was crucified with him, so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin'. We saw this tension already recognized in Kant, who distinguished between the revolution of the will (as seen by God) and the gradual reform experienced by us. Reform is compatible with the continued experience of temptation and defeat. It is important to stress this because otherwise the doctrine of our incorporation sounds self-congratulatory. What has changed after incorporation is the availability of the new life; there may still be a gap between what we ought to do and what we do." *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>341</sup> Hare, *The Moral Gap*, 243–44.

Hare's demonstration for the need of atonement is important to grasp, but it is invaluable when considering how it relates to unity with Christ. A price is not only paid for the wrong done, but its efficacy can be found only in a proper unity with the one who provides the means necessary to correct the wrong.

The Apostle Paul helps explain these epistemological and ontological changes throughout his letters. In no less than twenty-seven instances Paul tells the Ephesians that being "in Christ" offers: spiritual blessings (1:3), redemption (1:7), unity (1:10), inheritance (1:11), and the Holy Spirit (1:13, 14). Paul reminds the Ephesians that when they heard about Jesus they also learned, "to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:20–24). Paul also iterates the same message to the Colossians, "Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator" (Col 3:9–10). The decisive moment when these things became a reality to the Colossians is found a few verses back in Colossians 2:11–14. A careful examination of the passage will reveal their unity with Christ began when they replicated the death (2:11), burial (2:12), and resurrection of Christ (2:13–14). Among other references, the same language is found in Romans 6:3–6, which speaks of the efficacy of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection to free individuals from sin. This unity is possible due to the work of the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead also dwells in the Christian (Rom 8:11), and provides the tools necessary to live a holy, sanctified life (Rom 8:13–14). Therefore, one speaks of the Christian life as lived in step with the Spirit. The Spirit who unites us with Christ, indwells each Christian and calls out to the Father when even human words fail (Rom 8:12–17,

26–30; Gal 4:6–7). Thus, the sanctified life a Christian lives is in step with God’s own Spirit (1 Cor. 2:11–16).

What is the advantage of focusing on a divine command theory of morality in relation to unity with Christ as discussed in this section? A divine command theory of morality calls humans to a standard of living derived from God’s ontology. God asks humans to meet his standard, but with the expectation they must be granted further assistance to meet his requirements. God’s commands are not simply arbitrary rules, but an extension of his nature. Therefore, when humans disobey his commands, they are going against his ontology (i.e., God as *the good*). To meet God’s standard, one needs God’s assistance. A complete reliance on individual effort would result in some variation of “puffing one’s capacity” akin to some portions of Pelagianism. However, one cannot participate in “the divine nature” unless one is united with that nature through the proper prescribed means.<sup>342</sup>

### **Virtue Ethics and the Lack of Growth**

The argument has been made that a divine command theory of morals cogently pairs with a natural law theory of morality. These two theories have been examined in light of their ability to respond to the problem of sin and to establish the validity of unity with Christ. The case has been made that natural law lays a foundation for becoming a new creation, while divine command theory provides complimentary support for responding to the transgression of God’s commands. These two theories point toward a virtue ethic, which identifies an aspect of sin as

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<sup>342</sup> Once again, Hare fitly reiterates this point, “If we assume that there is a God who is not merely human moral perfection, but a divine person intervening in human history, we can think of him as enabling us to accomplish a change of heart. What I have suggested is that he does so by incorporating us into a new kind of life, which we did not have the capacity to live before his intervention. This was the function of God’s assistance in the three-part structure of morality. . . the being who can live a holy life intervenes to make possible the improvement: of our capacities so that we can live the kind of life he wants us to live.” *Ibid.*, 270.

failure to know God intimately and a lack of spiritual growth. Stephen Evans once again is helpful in showing how a divine command theory can pair with certain versions of virtue ethics.<sup>343</sup> “Many of God’s commands” Evans intimates, “are commands to acquire or cultivate particular virtues.”<sup>344</sup> If part of the obligations humans experience is to grow and cultivate virtues; then proper consideration needs to be given to how this is accomplished and how unity with Christ helps.

One may recall that virtues in a classical Greek tradition are to be practiced habitually until the excellencies of character are formed. A Christian conception of moral virtues builds upon this foundation and expresses that humans should actively pursue virtues that display a transformed life in God. Many virtue ethicists reject a purely deontological system of ethics in favor of focusing more on “who should I be” instead of “what should I do.”<sup>345</sup> Stanley Hauerwas argues that examining God’s story helps Christians because, “We know who we are only when we can place ourselves—locate our stories—within God's story.”<sup>346</sup> Within this model sin becomes, “not some universal tendency of humankind to be inhumane or immoral, though sin may involve inhumanity and immorality. We are not sinful because we participate in some

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<sup>343</sup> The two types of virtue ethics (generally speaking) that cannot fit with a divine command theory, “would either have to deny the importance of moral duties, as prescribing or forbidding types of actions, altogether, or else show that our moral duties can be derived from and explained by virtue theory.” Evans, *God and Moral Obligation*, 76.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., 80. Evans picks the example of Romans 12:2 which calls people to renew their minds. This is not a “specific act-type” duty that can be accomplished in a singular instance. Rather, it is a called to be transformed into a different person all together.

<sup>345</sup> Evans says that Michael Slote and Linda Zagzebski make the virtuous agent into the “truth maker” of normative truth. Ibid., 79. The two books Evans references are Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*; Michael Slote, *Morals from Motives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>346</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 27, accessed November 12, 2021, <http://www.myilibrary.com?id=906738>. One of the issues with Hauerwas and other virtue ethicists is that they abandon all together universal moral duties in favor of more relative, situational ones. This is to be rejected in step with the argument made in chapter two.

general human condition, but because we deceive ourselves about the nature of reality and so would crucify the very one who calls us to God's kingdom."<sup>347</sup> Thus, a person who neither knows God nor grows in godly character is not following God's prescribed order for his creation.

Some critics of this ideology find fault with a "form of human excellence that presumes high-level reasoning, imagination, and willpower."<sup>348</sup> This has caused consternation with those in the Reformed tradition because too much emphasis is placed on the human capacity to do the good.<sup>349</sup> However, one must consider that unity with Christ is the pivot point for the discussion. Once a person is united with Christ, they are to pursue a life characterized by the fruit of the Holy Spirit which is part of a virtuous life (Gal 5:16–26). Even though divine assistance is given, there is still the need to pursue spiritual growth instead of reaching total perfection in righteousness.<sup>350</sup> Even if one could, in theory, live a perfect life, the probability of such an act is not plausible. The probability of living a perfect life by avoiding every sin is infinitely small.

Consider the following point,

Suppose there's a .5 probability that you will resist each sin you encounter in your lifetime. This would entail a .25 probability that you will resist the first two, a .125 probability you'll resist the first three, and so on. Imagine the probability of resisting every temptation over the course of a seventy-year life. It becomes a statistical unlikelihood so great that it defies description. Christians believe that only one man ever did it, or ever truly could, even if each sin is in principle such that it can be resisted by God's enabling grace.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>348</sup> Kirk J. Nolan, *Reformed Virtue after Barth: Developing Moral Virtue Ethics in the Reformed Tradition*, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 3.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> The apostle Peter makes this point in his letter by encouraging his readers to, ". . .make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:5–8).

<sup>351</sup> Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 71, n. 12.

Reality teaches that humanity struggles daily with living a completely moral life even after conversion. This does not negate Christian teachings about the objectivity of morals but reinforces the thought that growth and transformation lead to perfection in eternity (1 Pet 1:8–9).

When Christians speak of living a moral life it is typically referring to the doctrine of sanctification. “Sanctify,” as used throughout the Bible, means to set apart or to make holy. In New Testament doctrine, sanctification results from Jesus’ sacrifice (Heb 10:10) and Jesus himself is humanity’s sanctification (1 Cor 1:30; 1 Thess 4:3; John 17:17). In step with many other teachings, there are multiple variations of the doctrine of sanctification.<sup>352</sup> Due to the nature of this study, a full analysis of the differing views of sanctification will not be explicated here. However, it will suffice to draw a few conclusions about sanctification based on aspects shared between the various views.

Sanctification, defined by Erickson, “is a process by which one’s moral condition is brought into conformity with one’s legal status before God. It is a continuation of what was begun in regeneration, when a newness of life was conferred upon and instilled within the believer.”<sup>353</sup> By this definition, sanctification is the term given for continual growth in a justified life. Therefore, even by diverse standards, sanctification will possess five aspects: 1. Sanctification has both a positional and an experiential aspect; 2. Sanctification is the inseparable twin to justification; 3. Sanctification is the manifestation of regeneration; 4. Sanctification is compatible with full assurance of salvation; and 5. Sanctification is the focal point of the “now—not yet” reality of salvation.<sup>354</sup> Taken together, the picture of sanctification found in the New

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<sup>352</sup> For a comparative dialogue between the various views of sanctification see Gundry, *Five Views on Sanctification*.

<sup>353</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 980.

<sup>354</sup> These five points are taken from Daniel L. Akin, David P. Nelson, and Peter R. Schemm, eds., *A Theology for the Church* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2007), 758. Of course one may raise objections at any

Testament is that unity with Christ changes the individual and sets them on a path toward salvation (2 Peter 1:3–9), which causes the individual to pursue a life “led by the Spirit” (Gal 5:18).

In practical terms, one may say that in sanctification, “we have an active part in it, it means we must work out our new identity daily, learning new habits, adopting new disciplines, practicing the steps that will enable us to become the persons God intended us to be, manifesting his image in the world.”<sup>355</sup> This statement fits nicely with virtue discussed at the beginning of this section. If unity with Christ does not provide a foundation for growth and movement toward what is good, then it fails to meet the standard elucidated throughout this work. “Sanctification is seen, therefore, in a comprehension of the ordered structure of the world and the ordering of human action with it, as the grasp of a moral law, which norms action fittingly to the world.”<sup>356</sup> Through Jesus’ sacrifice, humans have justification and atonement; but they also have sanctification that sets them apart as holy for God’s work (Eph 2:10). Even the misguided Corinthians are called saints by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:2. There Paul writes, “to the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.” Even though the Corinthian church was imperfect, they were called “saints” and charged to live as a holy people along with everyone who has been united with Christ.<sup>357</sup>

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one of these points, but they appear to offer a somewhat middle of the road perspective that allows for further discussion and consideration.

<sup>355</sup> Kelly M. Kapic, ed., *Sanctification: Explorations in Theology and Practice* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2014), 30.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>357</sup> See 1 Peter 2:9

Another challenge under the heading of virtue ethics is in relation to supererogation. Is there a limit or an expectation for how much good a Christian is to perform after conversion? Although a misnomer, often people refer to a person who is morally good and worthy as possible as a *moral saint*.<sup>358</sup> Susan Wolf has written an essay titled *Moral Saints* which has left a significant impact on the discussion of supererogation and saints. She takes the view that a saint (whether a Loving Saint or a Rational Saint) is untenable and is an anomaly.<sup>359</sup> Essentially, she dismisses the validity of a saint and determines that the life of a saint is not worth pursuing and is even counterproductive to its own standards.<sup>360</sup> Her complaint is that it may not always be “better to be morally better.”<sup>361</sup> Robert Adams addresses the topic from another standpoint. Adams insists that sainthood is best understood from within the bounds of Christianity because it offers the fullest picture and explanation for why being a saint is a real goal.

In Adams’ defense of the good, he focuses on how discussions of the good are usually in negative terms: “God is not. . .” or “God would not. . .” Some speak of saints in the same manner. When spoken negatively, some say a saint would never do such and such a thing. Adams says, “We often think of the saint in essentially negative terms, as someone who never, or almost never, does a no-no; or in terms of universal quantifications, as a person all, or almost all,

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<sup>358</sup> To call some people “saints” and to venerate them runs counter to biblical teachings. Yes, there may be individuals who stand out uniquely as examples, but in no way should they be placed on a level higher than other individuals. The topic of *saint* as discussed in this section is used paradigmatically to discuss the possibility of living a life of such moral fortitude that one seems to be without fault. Susan Wolf, “Moral Saints,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 79, no. 8 (August 1982): 419.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, 435–6.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, 419. In her opening line she makes the attention-grabbing statement, “I don’t know whether there are any moral saints. But if there are, I am glad that neither I nor those about whom I care most are among them.” *Ibid.*

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

of whose actions meet a high moral and religious standard.”<sup>362</sup> However, if a saint is viewed as someone who continually progresses in virtue, then they fit into a qualitative versus quantitative open-endedness of virtue. Qualitative open-endedness makes sense of the virtuous acts of the saints who appear to be “transcending the morally ordinary in a positive direction.”<sup>363</sup> One key to understanding virtue ethics, and the moral law defended in this work, is a combination of what is right and good. An exclusive focus on deontological perfection, would say that perfection is the fulfilment of obligation.<sup>364</sup> The type of morality explained here is based on rules and teleology. If the good, which is God, is an ultimate *telos*, then humans must strive for living like God. Since it is impossible to become God, one must understand the limit. However, God calls humans to a higher standard of living derived from his goodness. Aristotle in Nicomachean ethics, along with his discussion of virtues, says that the good is limited. Conversely, if we take goodness to be equivalent to the infinite, as Adams advocates, then there is no limit to virtue. Therefore, if one were to reach the limit, they would be God.

Adams further posits, “Since ‘ought’ implies ‘can,’ it may be argued, it must be possible to do *everything* one is morally obliged to do; and when one does that, and is disposed to do it, there is no way to go farther in virtue, if virtue consists wholly in moral dutifulness.”<sup>365</sup> Upon comparison between a deontological and consequentialist system, one will find that utilitarianism has no way to limit how much good one should do. If the goal of a consequentialist is to do more good than harm, how can they justify not giving all their money to help feed the poor? A

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<sup>362</sup> Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 53.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, 55, n. 13.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*

utilitarian may have to advocate for something that is more extreme than anyone is willing to admit or to do. On the other hand, a Christian teaching like, “love your neighbor as yourself” has limitless possibilities too. The difference here is there is a qualitative open-endedness, which allows individuals to continue to strive in this category knowing that perfection is not possible but a goal, nonetheless. “For one cannot live morally without intending to do so, and one cannot exactly intend to do what one believes is totally impossible.”<sup>366</sup> This is a useful insight into what virtue’s relationship is with a perfect life.

Joseph Kupfer assesses both Adams and Wolf’s view of moral saints and seeks to find a balance between them. He insists that “saints have a real or perceived relationship with God.”<sup>367</sup> What would be a person’s motivation for living such a life of dedication and service unless they believed they were doing it for God? He further explains that sainthood makes sense within a Christian paradigm because, “belief in God and one’s relationship to Him are especially conducive to sainthood.”<sup>368</sup> Kupfer’s task is not to focus so much on the individuals who are considered saints, but to show the significance of an ethic that allows for moral progress that is open and directed toward God. In a summative note, Kupfer explains,

The individual who has faith in a perfect being may be less apt to strive for perfection than a secular agent. The very perfection of God serves as a curb on perfectionist aspirations that might be entertained by the religious person. She would accept her human limitations and be grateful for whatever strengths she may possess, realizing that to seek perfection could well be prideful.<sup>369</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> Ibid., 378.

<sup>367</sup> Joseph Kupfer, “Sainthood and the Good Life,” *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 51, no. 2 (June 2017): 276.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 277.

Kupfer's stance is that one needs to possess the right motivation in living a moral life. This once again reinforces one of the many "paradoxes" found in Christianity. The balance in action and attitude is what makes up a Christian virtue ethic. To focus too much on perfection can be unproductive but understanding the desire for perfection found within all humans points to a perfect God. When a Christian is united with Christ and indwelt by the Spirit, they are set apart to pursue the good and to do the right.

### The God of All Perfection

It was argued at the beginning of this chapter that God is the likely best solution to address humanity's desire for perfection by offering a remedy or solution for humanity's failure to live a perfect life. It was discovered that the problem of sin is the issue at hand, and Christian theism offers a unique solution for the problem. The solution elucidated throughout this work is that a person needs to be united with Christ to receive the prescribed remedy for the problem of perfection. The prescribed remedy is not disjointed from human experience or knowledge; but it is itself part of the created reality of a divine moral lawgiver.

The Christian God is most frequently referred to by his divine nature or qualities (Rom 1:20). Specifically, God is ascribed qualities like omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, and omnibenevolence.<sup>370</sup> Establishing an argument for God's divine qualities is central to many

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<sup>370</sup> These qualities are derived from several different apologetic arguments, but one may be the most familiar with the apologetic argument dubbed *the ontological argument*. This type of argument is attributed to Anselm of Canterbury. The basic premise of his formulation is: God is a being than which no greater can be conceived. The entirety of Anselm's argument is as follows: "Thus even the fool is convinced that something than which nothing greater can be conceived is in the understanding, since when he hears this, he understands it; and whatever is understood is in the understanding. And certainly that than which a greater cannot be conceived cannot be in the understanding alone. For if it is even in the understanding alone, it can be conceived to exist in reality also, which is greater. Thus if that than which a greater cannot be conceived is in the understanding alone, then that than which a greater cannot be conceived is itself that than which a greater can be conceived. But surely this cannot be. Thus without doubt something than which a greater cannot be conceived exists, both in the understanding and in reality." Anselm, *Proslogion*, II.

apologetic arguments, but it can be seen in moral arguments. “If the moral argument works,” posit Baggett and Walls, “it may well offer evidence not just that God exists and is good, but that God necessarily exists and is perfectly good—stronger claims that move the operative conception of Deity into closer proximity with the God of Anselm.”<sup>371</sup> Moral arguments can lead individuals to a specific type of God that other arguments cannot produce until later in their construction. The moral argument advanced in this work has been directed toward an all good and perfect being who created humans with the desire to pursue what is good and perfect.

Passmore postulates three modes of human perfection. The first is technical perfection. Technical perfection concerns how one performs a specialized task to its full efficiency. Second is obedientiary perfection. According to obedientiary perfection, one must complete a task by obeying the commands of a superior authority like God. Third is teleological perfection. Teleological perfection “consists in attaining to that end in which it is one’s nature to find final satisfaction.”<sup>372</sup> If the argument from humanity’s desire for perfection creates an apologetic argument for God, it is based on all three conceptions of perfection. Humanity’s obligation to perform certain tasks or to obey particular commands is requisite to the created order, but it is humanity’s desire to reach final satisfaction that can be fulfilled only in a good and perfect being. Hare connects perfection to human living by showing that “Perfection is the principle of human motivation.” It is related to human motivation because “pleasure is the apprehension of perfection, and the degree of pleasure we feel is proportional to the degree of perfection we intuit.”<sup>373</sup> If God possesses the qualities one would expect from an ultimate, personal being then

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<sup>371</sup> Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 52.

<sup>372</sup> Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man*, 14.

<sup>373</sup> Hare, *God and Morality*, 130.

his design, commands, and plan for humanity are intricately correlated to his nature. Therefore, when God sets perfection as a goal, it is not an arbitrary or a vacuous goal; but rather a standard derived from his own ontology. Thus, what God has set before humanity is infinite (Matt 5:48), which means “absolute perfection must be forever beyond, not only any human, but any finite, being; it is a Divine ideal forever shining before us, calling us upward, and making endless progression possible.”<sup>374</sup>

Although infinite perfection seems so far out of reach, it is the very thing that draws humans to desire a relationship with God. Once a person realizes that the only fulfillment for the desire for perfection is God, then a door is opened to receive his assistance or “positive increase in power” according to Kant.<sup>375</sup> Hare provides a delightful, but lengthy, illustration to drive home this point:

A person who is only moderately good at the piano may be invited to play duets with an expert. He may find that he is able to play much better than he ever thought he could, because she draws abilities out of him by her own excellence. In part, he simply imitates her, perhaps her phrasing of key motifs in the piece. In part, though he will never play like her, he pushes through with bravura the passages that his fingers cannot in fact articulate. In part, his own unique musical taste shines through, even though imperfectly, and even this difference between them is stimulated in response to her playing. In part, he wants to impress her, and not to make a complete fool of himself. This motivates him independently of the music itself, so that his playing is never completely transparent but

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<sup>374</sup> W. L. Walker, “Perfect, Perfection,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr et al., vol. 4 (Chicago, IL: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915), 2321.

<sup>375</sup> Kant uses the phrase “positive increase in power” to mean “Whatever a man’s moral condition is or will be, whether good or bad, that must be something that he has brought on himself or is now bringing on himself. It must be an effect of his free choice, for otherwise he wouldn’t be accountable for it and therefore he wouldn’t be morally good or bad. When it is said that ‘Man is created good’, this can only mean that he is created for good, and his original predisposition is good; but whether he is already actually good or bad depends entirely on his free choice of whether to admit into his maxim the incentives that this predisposition to good carries with it. Even if some supernatural cooperation was needed for him to become good (or better)—some positive assistance or reducing of obstacles—his own free will must come into play in two ways: he must first make himself worthy to receive this help, and then he must accept it (which is no small matter), i.e. he must admit this positive increase of power into his maxim. If he weren’t involved in this way he wouldn’t be responsible for his goodness and wouldn’t be known as a good man.” Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Bare Reason*, 22–3.

always mixed with concern for himself. Finally (though the analogy creaks here) she may communicate energy to him by a kind of osmosis or contagion.<sup>376</sup>

Hare's illustration is illuminating and one that speaks to the core of the message elucidated throughout this work. The greater picture at work is that a perfect God is willing enough to set a standard and to provide the means necessary, in whatever form that may be, to lead individuals into a more intimate relationship with him that will continue into eternity.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to examine and analyze the doctrine of unity with Christ to see if it adequately responds to the problem of sin present with humans. This was accomplished by introducing the doctrine then analyzing how it fits with the three Christian systems of ethics. First, it was shown that a natural law theory treats sin as an aberration of God's intended plan for man. Man was created in the image of God and needs to be recreated into the image of Christ. Second, divine command theory explains God's commands for people, and demonstrates why humans are to respond obediently to them. Third, virtue ethics provides a platform to understand God's intent for growth after being united with Christ. These three systems cogently work together to explain man's problem with sin and how unity with Christ effectively responds to the issue. Man's desire for perfection has a solution and fulfillment in Christian theism that points to Jesus as the way to a properly construed perfection.

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<sup>376</sup> Hare, *God and Morality*, 258–9.

## Chapter 6

*“. . .human responsibility is a fact, and a very solemn fact. Man’s responsibility to his Maker is, indeed, the fundamental fact of his life, and it can never be taken too seriously. God made us responsible moral agents, and he will not treat us as anything less. His Word addresses each of us individually, and each of us is responsible for the way in which he responds—for his attention or inattention, his belief or unbelief, his obedience or disobedience. We cannot evade responsibility for our reaction to God’s revelation. We live under his law. We must answer to him for our lives.”<sup>377</sup>*

*J. I. Packer*

### Summary of Arguments

The goal of this project has been to create and develop a new apologetic argument based on humanity’s need to strive for moral perfection. This has been accomplished by examining the theoretical foundations for morality and their response to the problem of moral perfection. It was demonstrated that theistic moral realism provides the likely best solution for the existence of objective morality. These objective morals also create moral obligations to which all humans are accountable. The pressure humans feel to live by these standards is also in conflict with how humans actually behave. If all humans can recognize these obligations, then one may ask, why are there no perfect humans? This led to evaluating different moral philosophers who have pointed the way to Christian theism as a solution to the desire of moral perfection and the failure to accomplish it unaided. It was shown that Christian theism offers a multi-pronged moral argument created from a divine command theory founded on a natural law theory that points toward a virtue ethic. This multi-pronged approach fits cohesively with the Christian doctrine of unity with Christ. Without the unity with Christ, there would be no remedy for humanity’s desire for perfection and no solution for the moral failures of all humans.

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<sup>377</sup> J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 30.

## Potential Objections

The first objection that may be raised against this study may be from those who wish to find a comparable solution outside of Christian theism. Evolutionary theories were considered in chapter two, but other worldviews outside of Christian theism and naturalism were not addressed. Therefore, can an objection be raised from another worldview—like pantheism—that offers a comparable solution for man’s desire for perfection? A major distinction between pantheists and theists is that a pantheist rejects a “personal” God with personal characteristics.”<sup>378</sup> At first glance Pantheistic beliefs may appear to be similar to theism based on the belief of: moral realism, moral and value judgments, and non-naturalistic moral beliefs.<sup>379</sup> Even though some versions of pantheism may share similar components with theism, this does not mean they offer a comparable solution to the issue elucidated throughout this work. Pantheism falls short of a viable solution due to its rejection of a personal God. Michael Levine says that “personality and consciousness are not required.”<sup>380</sup> A rejection of a personal God rejects God taking on flesh personally to fix the problem of sin (which has been explained above). A secondary rejection espoused by pantheists is there is no need to establish a right relationship with God (i.e., for salvation).<sup>381</sup> If humans objectively feel the weight of sin, there must also be a personal solution to the sin problem. There can be no moral transformation without the problem of objective guilt being handled. The death, burial, and resurrection are not to be separated from their purpose. The Gospel message is that Jesus came to fix the sin problem.

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<sup>378</sup> Michael P. Levine, *Pantheism: A Non-Theistic Concept of Deity* (London: Routledge, 1994), 2.

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*, 219–21.

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, 342.

Pantheism must handle the apologetic evidence for the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ which establishes an ethic.<sup>382</sup> If the resurrection happened, then the Gospel message is validated, which delineates the necessity of salvation. Thus, Pantheism cannot serve as a plausible solution for addressing humanity's desire for and failure to reach perfection.

The second objection to this study may come from individuals who wish to confront the performative aspect of morality presented throughout this project. In modern atheism several proponents have risen to prominence in popularity due to their approach for defending naturalism. Four specific individuals have garnered attention. These new age atheists (called "the four horsemen") each make a similar response to Christianity's truth claims about morality by criticizing Christianity's ability to have people live by a moral standard. Although each has their own approach to the topic, three will be considered here.<sup>383</sup>

Sam Harris in his book, *The End of Faith*, argues that Christianity has caused a devastating amount of harm to society by its absurd standards. When speaking of morality, Harris contends,

Saving a drowning child is no more a moral duty than understanding a syllogism is a logical one. We simply do not need religious ideas to motivate us to live ethical lives. Once we begin thinking seriously about happiness and suffering, we find that our religious traditions are not more reliable on questions of ethics than they have been on scientific questions generally.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>382</sup> Habermas, *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope*, 137–45.

<sup>383</sup> The three mentioned below were chosen because of their persistent attacks against the performative aspect of Christianity. Daniel Dennett, although important, differs in his approach and stands out uniquely. For a special treatment of some of his views see Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, 98–112.

<sup>384</sup> Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2005), 172.

Can happiness and suffering, as Harris asserts, offer the best motivation for living an ethical life?<sup>385</sup> The insistence that a good ethical decision is one that maximizes the most good and limits the most harm is foundational for a utilitarian system. Harris' argument for saving a drowning child is paradigmatic for anyone advocating for utilitarianism. They insist there is no need to identify morals as objective because their objectivity does not necessitate proper motivation. One may ask, does one really need a religious argument to save a drowning child?

A multi-pronged theistic moral argument explains that the pull people feel to save life is innate and intrinsic to human nature. Naturalism posits that scientific insights are what give breadth to how humans understand happiness and pain. This form of naturalism, espoused by Harris, is a pragmatic ethic. As humans learn and understand new scientific discoveries, old hypotheses are replaced. If morality is based on scientific discoveries, then ethical issues like abortion are equivalent to deciding whether it is wrong to cause rabbits pain. Therefore, one may say, something is "right or wrong in our beliefs about them."<sup>386</sup> At the conclusion of Harris' book he makes the following statement,

A kernel of truth lurks at the heart of religion, because spiritual experience, ethical behavior, and strong communities are essential for human happiness. And yet our religious traditions are intellectually defunct and politically ruinous. While spiritual experience is clearly a natural propensity of the human mind, we need not believe anything on insufficient evidence to actualize it. Clearly, it must be possible to bring reason, spirituality, and ethics together in our thinking about the world. This would be the beginning of a rational approach to our deepest personal concerns. It would also be the end of faith.<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> "We experience happiness and suffering ourselves; we encounter others in the world and recognize that they experience happiness and suffering as well; we soon discover that 'love' is largely a matter of wishing that others experience happiness rather than suffering; and most of us come to feel that love is more conducive to happiness, both our own and that of others, than hate. . . . "The fact that we want the people we love to be happy, and are made happy by love in turn, is an empirical observation." Ibid., 186-7.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid., 221.

For Harris, there is no need for religious faith, because science and reason create a fuller case for the motivation to live ethically. Pragmatists, like Harris, believe that all one must do is change their rational approach. This change would say that the pains of child labor are received much differently in a normal healthy birth versus if they were inflicted by a mad scientist for torture. If one solely focuses on pain and happiness as the determiners of right and wrong, then could it be said that a mad scientist is right if he has more happiness than his victim has pain in torture? The absurdity of such a belief is irrational. There must some grounding for morality that makes the most sense to all aspects of human nature.

The second horseman is an openly critical opponent to Christianity—Christopher Hitchens. Hitchens, a popular and controversial author, brandished his polemical sword against Christianity in his well-known book, *God is Not Great*. Throughout his book he affirms that Christianity has consistently done no more good than other ethical systems. “We do not believe in heaven or hell,” Hitchens argues, “yet no statistic will ever find that without these blandishments and threats we [atheists] commit more crimes of greed or violence than the faithful.”<sup>388</sup> The case Hitchens makes is akin to C.S. Lewis’ point quoted earlier. Lewis creates a positive case for Christianity by saying, “Fine feelings, new insights, greater interest in ‘religion’ mean nothing unless they make our actual behavior better. . . .”<sup>389</sup> Hitchens, on the other hand, is making a negative case for atheism by pointing out that individuals in Christianity live lives contrarily to its principles. Therefore, can Christianity be considered wrong because there are

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<sup>388</sup> Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York, NY: Twelve, 2009), 5. James Spiegel addresses this kind of response in his book, *The Making of an Atheist*. In his work, he examines how an atheist’s stance on morality has negative impacts in their lives. In fact, many who claim to be “good” fail in many categories that result in damaging lifestyles. James S. Spiegel, *The Making of an Atheist: How Immorality Leads to Unbelief* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2010).

<sup>389</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 207.

those who do not wholly live by its standards? Furthermore, does Christianity offer a better performative case for the good and the right than a secular theory?

How does a secularist, like Hitchens, address the intricacies of living a moral life perfectly or not? Hitchens states,

We speculate that it is at least possible that, once people accepted the fact of their short and struggling lives, they might behave better toward each other and not worse. We believe with certainty that an ethical life can be lived without religion. And we know for a fact that the corollary holds true—that religion has caused innumerable people not just to conduct themselves no better than others, but to award themselves permission to behave in ways that would make a brothel-keeper or an ethnic cleanser raise an eyebrow.<sup>390</sup>

Is it true that Christianity has caused people to be immoral and to accept immorality as the norm? To substantiate his point, he attempts to show those individuals touted as examples of good faith throughout the Bible were not worthy to be used as moral examples. He goes as far to say that Christianity's "moral exemplar" Jesus, was not one to follow, because he did not even follow his standard of morality. By contrast, Hitchens says, "American freethinkers and agnostics and atheists come out the best" for who is more moral.<sup>391</sup>

In a final complaint against Christianity, Hitchens says people are asked to follow impossible tasks. He identifies two extreme teachings impossible to do perfectly: 1. The prohibition not even to think about evil (2 Cor. 10:5); and 2. To love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:31). The first task, along with similar prohibitions, is what he deems as "impossible restraints on human initiative."<sup>392</sup> For him, there are only two plausible ways to do such a task,

The first is by a continual scourging and mortification of the flesh, accompanied by incessant wrestling with "impure" thoughts which become actual as soon as they are named, or even imagined. From this come hysterical confessions of guilt, false promises

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<sup>390</sup> Hitchens, *God Is Not Great*, 6.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, 212–3.

of improvement, and loud, violent denunciations of other backsliders and sinners: a spiritual police state. The second solution is organized hypocrisy, where forbidden foods are rebaptized as something else. . . .<sup>393</sup>

Hitchens enunciates the issue at hand. These seemingly stringent prohibitions make sense within a Christian framework that places a high priority on morality, but provides the help necessary to accomplish it. Interestingly, from a humanist perspective, there is a limitation on man's ability to accomplish moral feats. Either one must dismiss the moral standard, as Hitchens has done, or else offer some other comparable solution for morality. Hitchens comments that the golden rule is a,

Sober and rational precept, which one can teach to any child with its innate sense of fairness. . . [and] is well within the compass of any atheist and does not require masochism and hysteria, or sadism and hysteria, when it is breached. It is gradually learned, as part of the painfully slow evolution of the species, and once grasped is never forgotten. Ordinary conscience will do, without any heavenly wrath behind it.<sup>394</sup>

Like Harris, Hitchens believes the motivation to live a moral life can be established away from Christianity. A difference here is that he also believes one can discover the right motivation by intuition and conscience.

The third voice among the Four Horsemen is Richard Dawkins. Dawkins, like the others, begins his section on morality with pointing out the inconsistencies with Christians and their moral standards. The thrust of his chapter posits that "the selfish gene" is what prompts morality. This means that not the species or the individual is selfish, but rather there is something innate that drives one toward selfishness. Dawkins leans a lot on Darwinism for his case. He explains that "The logic of Darwinism concludes that the unit in the hierarchy of life which survives and

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<sup>393</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid., 213–4.

passes through the filter of natural selection will tend to be selfish.”<sup>395</sup> Darwin’s survival of the fittest sets up the case for pursuing happiness and the avoidance of pain are both to be for self-interest. He further states, “There are circumstances. . . in which genes ensure their own selfish survival by influencing organisms to behave altruistically.”<sup>396</sup> He gives two examples of this: kinship and reciprocation. These two points serve as “twin pillars of altruism in a Darwinian world, but there are secondary structures which rest atop those main pillars.”<sup>397</sup>

Although kinship and reciprocity are valid reasons for cases of altruism, they are not the only reasons. Dawkins himself acknowledges this and responds to the Good Samaritan motif as a counter example to his case. He dismisses the Good Samaritan by saying, “Could it be our Good Samaritan urges are misfirings [sic], analogous to the misfiring of a reed warbler’s parental instincts when it works itself to the bone for a young cuckoo?”<sup>398</sup> If cases like the Good Samaritan were rare occurrences, then his case can be understood; however, Christianity not only assumes this will happen but expects it to be the case. That others recognize this and teach it to be a standard for morality show it is more than a “misfiring.”

Dawkins continues to explain that, “For me, this demonstrated that our morals, whether we are religious or not, come from another source; and that other source, whatever it is, is available to all of us, regardless of religion or lack of it.”<sup>399</sup> Here Dawkins says that religious

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<sup>395</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 1st Mariner Books ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 2008), 246.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*, 249. “First, there is the special case of genetic kinship. Second, there is reciprocation: the repayment of favours given, and the giving of favours in ‘anticipation’ of payback. Following on from this there is, third, the Darwinian benefit of acquiring a reputation for generosity and kindness. And fourth, if Zahavi is right, there is the particular additional benefit of conspicuous generosity as a way of buying unfakably authentic advertising.” *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

people do not think in a biblical way anymore. They have sought some other explanation for their own book of religion. “A wolf, no matter how big and bad, cannot be evil. In distinction, a wolf in sheep's clothing is pure evil. Therein lies the problem. The Bible is sold and bought as a guide to how people should live their lives.”<sup>400</sup> Dawkins overstates his case and enacts an oversimplification. He touts, “From the present point of view, the interesting thing is that most people come to the same decisions when faced with these dilemmas, and their agreement over the decisions themselves is stronger than their ability to articulate their reasons.”<sup>401</sup> To assume that people come to the same conclusion regardless of religious conviction is interesting. This is exactly what is being advanced in moral apologetics. Arguments are made to show that morals are universally recognizable to all individuals with properly working reasoning faculties. On the other hand, his dismissal of religion as a part of the process is what needs addressing. His attempt to divorce religious teachings (he focuses on Christianity, not other world religions) is impossible. This is where one must create a robust view of morality from a theistic standpoint. Depending on whether morality is defended in a Divine Command Theory, Natural Law, or Virtue ethics (or a combination of all three) is vitally important for how one answers Dawkins’ point.

#### Areas of Further Research

There are two potential areas of further research not covered in this project. First, more research can be done in the field of psychology and its response to Christianity’s high standard for morality. Specifically, how do psychologists and counselors handle the mental health of an

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<sup>400</sup> John Hartung, “Love Thy Neighbor: The Evolution of In-Group Morality,” *Skeptic* 3, no. 4 (1995): 86–99.

<sup>401</sup> Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 255.

individual who feels as if they can never meet God’s standard for morality even with God’s assistance? For a primer on the subject consider the article by Robin Heise and Jean Steitz titled, *Religious Perfectionism verse Spiritual Growth*. Other pertinent questions will follow from this starting point. Such questions as: Does Christianity put too much emotional strain on individuals that results in unhealthy physiological and mental states? How can Christians do a better job ministering to people, given God’s standard for morality and man’s failure to live by it?

A second place for further research is an examination of Francis Schaeffer’s observation that the perfectibility of man has potentially been instrumental in the crash of evangelicalism. He references this topic in his book *The Great Evangelical Disaster*. His point is that too much emphasis on man’s abilities has caused an erosion in evangelical teachings. Robert Dworkin highlights this same issue by stating, “Mainstream American Christianity has absorbed expressive individualist ideals and, by doing so, provides almost an exact replica of the Pelagian heresy attacked by Augustine fifteen centuries ago.”<sup>402</sup> In a similar vein, McGrath says, “Pelagianism continues to have a deep influence on Western culture, even if its name means little to most. It articulates one of the most natural of human thoughts—that we are capable of taking control of ourselves and transforming ourselves into what we would have ourselves be.”<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> Ronald William Dworkin, *The Rise of the Imperial Self: America’s Culture Wars in Augustinian Perspective* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996), 40.

<sup>403</sup> McGrath, *Heresy*, 170.

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