THEISTIC ACTIVISM AND THE EUTHYPHRO DILEMMA

by

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DEDICATION

To my parents,
Leonard and Evelyn Baggett,
for their years of support and encouragement,
whose lives provided for me a model of practical theistic ethics.
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Introduction

The horrific images of September 11, 2001 remain vividly burned in the minds of everyone witness to the day's tragic events. Four airplanes hijacked, two of which were within minutes buried in the heart of New York's World Trade Center and a third into the United States Pentagon. Over three thousand innocents extinguished in a single day. Pascal's warning that evil is never done so zealously than when it is performed out of religious conviction struck a poignantly prophetic note, as investigations would soon reveal that the perpetrators of this terrorist plot on American soil were profoundly religious persons.

Incensed at America's support of Israel in its conflict with Palestinians, at America's sanctions against Iraq that have contributed to dismal living conditions within that country, and at America's occupation of lands perceived as the sacred ground of Islam, rigidly fundamentalist Muslims trained by a terrorist network loosely run by Osama bin Laden had perpetrated this violence as part of jihad. A holy war against Israel and the United States was touted by bin Laden, dissident Saudi Arabian son of a billionaire, as Allah's sovereign plan to purify Islam, rectify injustices, and defeat evil.

Such is only the latest spectre raised in the minds of many listeners when they hear talk of religious ethics. Inquisitions and holy wars, crusades and witch burnings, violent acts of terror and inhumane acts of cruelty, all justified in the name of God. So to affirm an intimate connection between God and morality is to tear open a monstrous can of worms, entailing the loss of moral autonomy and objectivity in the face of divine fiat, or at least faith in divine fiat. Little wonder that numerous contemporary secular and religious thinkers alike would prefer to put
ethics on a more solid footing not so susceptible to subjective visions and unverifiable claims of revelation.

Not everyone, however, who is sickened and appalled at (what has simply come to be known as) "9/11" shares such skepticism toward religious ethics. A radically different sort of vision of God and religious ethics is possible, bearing as little relation to Osama bin Laden as a loving father does to a pedophile. Rather than making the content of ethics wildly malleable for being a function of divine whim, it is a view of ethics according to which God exists as a plausible candidate, if not the best explanation, for morality's reality, prescriptive power, and stable objectivity. It is a view according to which God, if he exists, is not irrelevant to ethics, neither to moral rightness nor to moral goodness.

Admittedly, this is close to the heart of the way in which I have for nearly all my life thought of ethics, as intimately tied to the existence, nature, and commands of a loving God. The years I have spent studying philosophy have not lessened my confidence in the veridicality of this vision. On entering graduate school, I knew from day one that this would be the topic of my dissertation.

I knew that it was a topic on which important work needs to be done. For religious ethics has been confronted since nearly the inception of western philosophy with what many perceive to be an almost intractable objection. The Euthyphro Dilemma is often touted as posing an in-principle objection to religious ethics. It offers seemingly but two alternatives to religious ethicists, one of which entailing religion's irrelevance to morality, the other landing them in the thick of the worst sort of arbitrariness.

For quite some time, I have struggled with this challenge to theistic ethics and divine command theory. I was convinced that there was an answer to it, but unsure of what it was. This dissertation is my provisional attempt to answer this
challenge. To the extent it is successful, it will not have shown theistic ethics to be true, but simply that the Euthyphro Dilemma does not pose the in-principle objection to it that it is often thought to. Theistic ethics will have survived as at least a living possibility, at most as a compelling and philosophically plausible vision to which those thinking about ethics ought to seriously consider giving their allegiance. But pushing the latter case with any effectiveness requires more constructive work than what I do in this predominantly defensive dissertation.

Relative to my specific objectives, allow me to provide a cursory overview of the chapters to follow. Chapter 1 features a general introduction to the Euthyphro dialogue itself. An effort is made to underscore some of the interesting philosophical features of this dialogue leading up to the crucial passage and the Dilemma itself: Is something good or right because God commands it, or does God command it because it is good or right? Both horns of the Dilemma are then discussed, particularly that horn of the Dilemma not favored by the divine command theorist. Chapter 2 spells out the specific theological commitments operative here that serve as constraints on the particular divine command theory defended. It is heavy on biblical and philosophical theology for the purpose of clarifying exactly what operative conception of deity is assumed and what conception of ethics dominates the discussion. Chapter 3 spells out this dissertation's theory of the good and highlights the severe limitations of a definist analysis of theistic ethics. Chapter 4 explicates a divine command theory of the right, while delineating the range of questions that every version of DCT needs to answer. Chapter 5 deploys my analysis in answering arbitrariness and vacuity objections to divine command theory and theistic ethics.

In his 1983 inaugural address as the John A. O’Brien Professor of Philosophy at Notre Dame University, Alvin Plantinga delivered an address
entitled "Advice to Christian Philosophers," in which he encouraged them to allow their religious convictions to shape the work they do in philosophy. He counseled them to be unafraid to articulate and explore distinctively religious or even Christian conceptions in their work. Recognizing the vital role played by certain of those most deeply ingrained and cherished aspects of one's social context to the way one orders experience and perceives the world, Plantinga writes

Christian philosophers are the philosophers of the Christian community; and it is part of their task as Christian philosophers to serve the Christian community. But the Christian community has its own questions, its own concerns, its own topics for investigation, its own agenda and its own research program. Christian philosophers ought not merely take their inspiration from what's going on at Princeton or Berkeley or Harvard, attractive and scintillating as that may be; for perhaps those questions and topics are not the ones, or the only ones, they should be thinking about as the philosophers of the Christian community. There are other philosophical topics the Christian community must work at, and other topics the Christian community must work at philosophically. And obviously, Christian philosophers are the ones who must do the philosophical work involved. If they devote their best efforts to the topics fashionable to the non-Christian philosophical world, they will neglect a crucial and central part of their task as Christian philosophers. What is needed here is more independence, more autonomy with respect to the projects and concerns of the non-theistic philosophical world.... In ethics, for
example: perhaps the chief theoretical concern, from the theistic perspective, is the question of how are right and wrong, good and bad, duty, permission and obligation related to God and to his will and to his creative activity? This question doesn't arise, naturally enough, from a non-theistic perspective; and so, naturally enough, non-theist ethicists do not address it. But it is perhaps the most important question for a Christian ethicist to tackle (Plantinga 1984).

This dissertation is an intentional effort to heed Plantinga's advice. In exploring theistic activism, divine command theory, and the Euthyphro Dilemma, I will attempt to defend a theistic ethic. My goal will simply be to spell out a version of the theory in an arguably defensible form and respond intelligently to various criticisms that have been lodged against it. It will be argued that the case is yet to be made that the theory, when properly nuanced, faces intractable philosophical difficulties.
The Euthyphro Dilemma

The early Socratic dialogue *Euthyphro* is a marvelous piece of philosophy, offering a fruitful source of entertainment, intellectual challenge, literary richness, the Socratic method in action, and illuminating pedagogical content. Among the philosophical topics canvassed in a short span of pages include the relationship between morality and religion, the importance of clear analysis, and the most important differentiating feature within divine command theories. It anticipates and critiques a mercenary-type allegiance to powerful deities, distinguishes between morally omniscient and non-omniscient gods, provides a rudimentary argument for the autonomy of ethics, and features both an aversion to moral arbitrariness and a commitment to the need for objectivity in ethics, to name but a few of its salient features, guiding themes, and crucial insights. Perhaps most central of all, it contains what has become a classical puzzle for theistic ethicists: the traditional Euthyphro Dilemma. The Dilemma, reworded in contemporary and monotheistic terms, asks, "Is something moral because God commands it, or vice versa?" It thus offers two alternatives, each of which yields what to most appearances seem unpalatable consequences for theists inclined to identify the locus of moral authority with God's existence, love, nature, or volitions. The Euthyphro Dilemma is often cast as the definitive bane of theological ethics and the Achilles' Heel of divine command ethics.

This chapter will provide a broad and cursory overview of the dialogue, brief but adequate to set the context for an examination of the crucial passage containing the Dilemma itself. Each horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma (henceforth
will then be explicated and motivated. I will take up (1) the question of whether or not the two horns are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive, and then (2) explain and criticize various expressions of the purely nonvoluntarist horn of the ED (the horn that is thought to suggest morality's independence from God). Finally I (3) will draw a few lessons to be borne in mind as we turn to the following chapters of this dissertation and its resolution of the ED.

Overview of the Dialogue

Socrates and Euthyphro are the two characters of the dialogue and form a poignant contrast. Socrates has just learned of an indictment against him, while Euthyphro is lodging a charge of his own against his own father. They meet in the Hall of the King, 'king' here being an anachronistic title retained by the magistrate who has jurisdiction over crimes affecting the state religion.

This context is significant because it immediately introduces a religious element into a discussion of piety. According to Roslyn Weiss (1986, 438), ancient Athenians believed homicide creates a religious pollution, and it is for this reason that the case is being heard before the king rather than before the Archon within whose jurisdiction family matters fell. Religious themes pervade the dialogue from its earliest scene. Euthyphro is there at the Hall to indict his father for murder because of religious concerns, whereas Socrates is facing charges of corrupting the youth by inventing new gods and not believing in the old ones. Socrates calls Euthyphro a 'prophet', and additional contextual evidence soon makes clear that Euthyphro prides himself as something of a religious expert regaled with all the credentials of orthodoxy, fully acquainted with, and a firm believer in, the legends about the Greek pantheon of gods. Socrates later admits his own incredulity concerning some of these legends.
Socrates' shock at hearing of Euthyphro's intentions to sue his father accentuates the developing tension and contrast between the characters. To indict one's own father struck him, especially in ancient Greek culture, as a morally odious enterprise. Socrates was convinced that filial duties would preclude it, but Euthyphro defends what he is planning to do. His father, he points out, had cruelly mistreated an accused criminal, allowing him to die of neglect while the father awaited religious instructions for what to do with him. Peter Geach (1966, 370) is no doubt right in pointing out that in quite a number of civilized jurisdictions Euthyphro's father would be held guilty of a serious crime.

Euthyphro may well be motivated by specifically religious considerations conditioned by his being a religious seer with Orphic tendencies. He would be anxious to rid himself, his father, and his family of the religious pollution that the homicide was thought to have produced, and to do so before his father's death. Euthyphro is likely deeply troubled by the taint thought to cling to the guilty party and his associates until it is removed by legal action. According to Robert Hoerber (1958, 97-98), Euthyphro believes that the law calls for the suit to be brought against wrongdoers instead of matters being left to their own arbitration. For according to Attic law, everyone was expected to bring prosecution in cases of death; and that context did not include all the moral, legal, and religious distinctions between intentional murder and accidental homicide that we take for granted today.

Intertwined with the religious theme is the concern for justice, both for Socrates' vindication (as Euthyphro seems clearly to be on Socrates' side, at least early on) and Euthyphro's indictment against his father. Socrates, perhaps disingenuously, concedes that Euthyphro must have a clear conception indeed of what justice and piety are for being so confident in accusing his own father like
this in court. For his part, Euthyphro quite agrees, standing ready to affirm his own knowledge of what justice involves, justice rooted in divine law, so Euthyphro thought. On his view, only fallible and vacillating human law would consider as morally relevant whether or not the murderer was a relative. Divine law is more universal than that, he insists, applying equally to all instances of injustice irrespective of the identity of the victim or the accused. Pollution spreads just the same whether the murderer is a foreigner or one's own father. So on Euthyphro's analysis, the concern for justice is tantamount to a concern for the divine law, and his tenacious determination to proceed with his cause remains resolute despite any resistance he had confronted.

Socrates importunes Euthyphro to explain what righteousness and sacrilege are with respect to murder and everything else, and to explain what piety and impiety's unchanging and essential characters are. Initially, Socrates might appear to be asking for nothing more than a workable criterion by which one can identify certain pious acts, so that Euthyphro's first effort at answering the query is unsurprising. Euthyphro replies that piety means doing as he himself is doing (or as Zeus and Cronos had also done, as legend had it): prosecuting the unjust individual who has committed murder or sacrilege, who happens to be his father. This answer of Euthyphro's is not entirely off track, for definition by example (definition by ostension) is often a useful way of clarifying a concept. Particularly when a concept's essential nature is difficult to identify or explicate, identification of relevant examples can help cultivate the habit of and develop proficiency in recognizing instances of the concept. Ludwig Wittgenstein accentuates this point by reminding us that formal definition is only one way of elucidating a concept and, indeed, that sets of examples can sometimes work just as well, if not better. Despite Socrates' needling of others for precise
explications of notoriously difficult concepts, Wittgenstein's corrective comports well with Socrates' own *modus operandi* of employing mundane examples from life to clarify, illustrate, or otherwise signify various notions or concepts.

If Socrates, however, is after a general criterion by which to determine whether any action is or is not pious, specific examples of piety will not suffice. Socrates clarifies his question by asking what is the characteristic of piety that makes pious actions pious. This clarification leads Euthyphro to offer his second formulation of a definition of piety: What is pleasing to the gods is pious, and what is not pleasing to the gods is impious (6E7-8). Socrates is much happier with this answer, for it has the right form for an answer this time, and he sets himself to the task of subjecting Euthyphro's definition to critical scrutiny.

Socrates begins by distinguishing between factual and normative matters, arguing that whereas clear decision-procedures can be found for adjudicating conflicts over matters of fact, pertaining to the way the world is, no such procedures apply for normative matters, pertaining to the way the world ought to be. Genuine disputes tend to arise over matters of the just and unjust, the good and bad, prescriptive rather than descriptive matters, normative ones before factual ones.

Euthyphro allows this point to go uncontested, but it is neither altogether clear that factual questions are always decisively answerable nor that issues of morality are not. Geach (1966, 373) uses the illustration of conflicting eyewitness accounts of an event to illustrate a situation in which no decision procedures are in place to resolve all factual matters, *contra* Socrates. Acrimonious battles can arise in the realm of factual disputes as well as normative ones.

Although moral questions sometimes contingently do in fact generate heated contention and lack of consensus, they often do not, save for the
relatively rare dilemma that involves conflicting rights or duties or the occasional incorrigibly controversial moral issue. The rich scope of moral consensus around the world and throughout history on a range of matters - from basic human rights to the minimal conditions for human flourishing - might lead us to expect that among, say, ideally rational, ethically imaginative, and epistemically privileged disputants, convergence of moral perspective might result. The presumption against the necessity of moral divergence is exactly what fuels so much moral dialogue and debate and often instills within moral disputants confidence that an eventual convergence may be reached, even within the confines of our deficiencies in rationality, creativity, and knowledge.

Irrespective of such reservations, suppose we grant Socrates’ points. His point that the most contentious battles are bound to take place over normative questions is no doubt right. Socrates deploys this insight against Euthyphro’s second definition. Euthyphro has already affirmed his faith in legends according to which the gods quarrel and battle; hence, are not such conflicts likely to involve questions of normativity and justice? If so, then appealing to the dictates of the gods and to the objects of their love is sure to be a peculiarly unreliable guide to the content of ethics. Their battles suggest they disagree about piety and that the objects of their affections diverge. What the gods love thus cannot provide a stable source of ethical content, if they do not all love the same thing.

Socrates’ concern here centers on the matter of arbitrariness. Rather than providing an objective standard, Euthyphro has introduced a relativistic component into ethics, according to which the moral status of an action or attitude can vary depending on which god’s predilections are accorded primacy at the moment. This recurring theme of the caprice of Euthyphro’s gods is thought by Weiss (1986, 437) to be the unifying thread of the dialogue.
dramatically, philosophically, and practically. In 9C4-5, Socrates frankly states that piety and impiety cannot be defined by appeal to the love of gods who could so disagree. For purposes of continued discussion, Socrates lets Euthyphro off on this point, but it is clear that he thinks the argument is already over.

Euthyphro’s third definition posits that what is pious is what is loved by all the gods, and what is impious is what is hated by all the gods. (The ethical status of any action towards which the gods feel ambivalent is left unanswered.) This proposal prompts Socrates to pose the famous Dilemma: Do the gods love piety because it is pious, or is it pious because they love it? After quickly finishing this overview of the dialogue, I will return to the Dilemma and explain the difficulties attending Euthyphro’s opting for either of its horns.

The remaining portion of the dialogue finds Socrates considering piety and justice, arguing that the latter is the broader category of which piety is just a subclass. Socrates invites Euthyphro to explain what part of justice piety is, to which Euthyphro responds by saying that piety is that part of justice pertaining to the careful attention that ought to be paid to the gods, and the remaining part of justice pertains to the careful attention that ought to be paid to men. This admission by Euthyphro drives a further wedge between justice and his gods, for now issues of piety or holiness are seen as but a part of the larger question of justice. As a result, how Euthyphro’s alleged expertise in piety remains relevant to his action against his father is altogether unclear.

What sort of attention needs to be paid to the gods? Attention is typically paid to something, Socrates underscores, to benefit or improve it, but certainly the gods are not to be improved by our attention. Euthyphro agrees, then clarifies by saying that the attention we pay to the gods is the same sort of attention slaves pay to their masters. It is a kind of service. To what principal end,
Socrates queries. Euthyphro then characterizes the relations between the gods and men as a kind of commerce or business transaction in which the gods confer blessings and men give them the worship and devotion they love. Socrates now asks once more whether or not piety means that which is loved by the gods. To which Euthyphro answers in the affirmative once more, reiterating his earlier point that Socrates considers already to have been refuted by his having coaxed Euthyphro's admission that the gods often disagree and by saddling Euthyphro with the ED, to which we will return momentarily.

The close of the dialogue fortifies the contrast between Socrates and Euthyphro. Euthyphro is not averse to construing religious practice as a kind of business transaction featuring capricious gods susceptible to men currying their favor. Socrates cannot countenance such a theology. Skeptical of such a mercenary understanding of religion, Socrates counts such a paradigm a woefully inadequate source of the moral objectivity he is seeking. What begins as Euthyphro's affirmation of morality's objectivity rooted in divine law ends up as an appeal to fickle personalities just as arbitrary as the vagaries of human institutions (institutions that are liable to mistake injustice for justice). In the Republic, Plato would make clear that of the three dangerous doctrines of (1) atheism, (2) deities unconcerned with human affairs, and (3) deities bribed by sacrifices, the last is the most pernicious (379A-383C). Whether Socrates would find a more adequate theology satisfactory is another question. But what is clear from this context is the inadequacy he saw in Euthyphro's theology, and thus the failure in Euthyphro's effort to root the objectivity of ethics in a theistic picture of reality.
The Pure Will Theory

Expressing the ED in monotheistic terms and replacing 'pious' with 'moral' and 'loved by the gods' with 'God commands it', the contemporary variant of the classic dilemma reads like this: Is something moral because God commands it, or does God command it because it is moral? To employ Michael Levin's terminology (1989), to embrace the former option and affirm that something is moral because God commands it will be called the "pure will" theory, or the "voluntarist horn" of the ED. To embrace the latter option and affirm instead that God's commands are conditioned by, rather than determinative of, morality will be called (following Michael Levin) the "guided will" view or nonvoluntarist horn. Antony Flew (1966, 109) writes that one good test of a person's aptitude for philosophy is whether or not he can grasp the ED's force and point. The ED has stood the test of millenia posing a stiff challenge to various versions of theistic ethics. For neither of its horns offers an attractive option for most theists.

For the purpose of fleshing out the two alternatives a bit more, let us first consider in greater detail the pure will theory, according to which something is moral because God commands it. The term 'moral' is used here strategically, in order to hold in abeyance for the moment whether what is being discussed is the good or the right. Rooting moral goodness and badness in God's commands provides an axiological version of divine command theory (DCT), whereas rooting moral rightness and wrongness in his commands provides a deontic version of DCT. Deontic theories pertain to theories of the obligatory and permissible. If something is wrong not to do, then it is obligatory; if something is not wrong to do, then it is permissible. The most important deontic concern of this dissertation will be ethical obligation. It is of course possible for a DCT to be both deontic and axiological, and some weaker versions of DCT (certain strains of the
guided will theory) are neither. The discussion of the two horns of the ED at this juncture will remain noncommittal on this issue in order to retain a fair degree of neutrality and generality.

Had I formulated the ED in terms of God's will rather than his commands, the formulation would have been ambiguous in a second way. Reference to God's will can be interpreted either as a reference to God's commands or to God's nature. If the reference is to God's commands, the result is a divine command theory of some sort. If the reference is to God's nature, the result is a version of theistic ethics but not exactly divine command theory except in a rather broad sense. This distinction will prove as crucial as the good/right distinction.

According to the pure will theory - that something is moral because God commands it - God is in some sense, either in part or in whole, responsible for the contents of moral truth. One feature of such a view might be thought to be that it defines moral words simply in terms of God's commands and prohibitions. A funny fictional example of this sort of divine command theory (henceforth 'DCT') is modeled by Ned Flanders, Homer Simpson's incessantly cheerful, inordinately religious, winsomely sanctimonious neighbor in the animated television series The Simpsons. Gerald J. Erion and Joseph Zeccardi explain why:

In Springfield, Ned Flanders exemplifies one way (if not the only way) of understanding the influence of religion upon ethics. Ned seems to be what philosophers call a divine command theorist, since he thinks that morality is a simple function of God's divine command; to him, "morally right" means simply "commanded by God" and "morally wrong" means simply "forbidden by God." Consequently, Ned consults with Reverend Lovejoy or prays
directly to God himself to resolve the moral dilemmas he faces. For instance, he asks the Reverend's permission to play "capture the flag" with Rod and Todd on the sabbath in "King of the Hill"; Lovejoy responds, "Oh, just play the damn game, Ned." Ned also makes a special telephone call to the model train room in Reverend Lovejoy's basement as he [Ned] tries to decide whether to baptize his new foster children, Bart, Lisa, and Maggie, in "Home Sweet Home-Diddily-Dum-Doodily." (This call prompts Lovejoy to ask, "Ned, have you thought about one of the other major religions? They're all pretty much the same.") And when a hurricane destroys his family's home but leaves the rest of Springfield unscathed in "Hurricane Neddy," Ned tries to procure an explanation from God by confessing, "I've done everything the Bible says; even the stuff that contradicts the other stuff!" Thus, Ned apparently believes he can find solutions to his moral problems not by thinking for himself, but by consulting the appropriate divine command. His faith is as blind as it is complete, and he floats through his life on a moral cruise-control, with his ethical dilemmas effectively resolved (Irwin, Conard, and Skoble 2001, 54-55).

The intimation of this humorous example is that Flanders's approach is the only way or at least the most natural way we might posit a connection between God and ethics or religion and morality. Note that the version of theistic ethics depicted here is a pure will theory expressed in deontic terms. Flanders thinks the categories of moral rightness and wrongness, obligation and permissibility, are dependent on God's commands. The nature of this
dependence relation is also specified in terms of a definist or semantic
dependence relation. The words "morally right" are said to mean "commanded by
God," for example.

Theistic ethics is often wedded to quite specific formulations of this kind:
pure will theories expressed in terms of moral obligations and God's commands
tied together by a definist analysis. It should come as little surprise that accounts
manifesting this form are handily dismissed, for counterexamples and
unpalatable entailments almost immediately leap to mind.

In truth, however, theistic ethics can contain elements of nonvoluntarism
(the guided will theory), can encompass issues of the good and not just the right,
can involve an appeal not just to divine commands but also to his nature, and
can be expressed in nondefinist ways, where the concern is less what moral
terms mean than what is the nature of that to which they refer. In other words,
theistic ethics can be more concerned with the nature of rightness or the nature
of goodness than merely with what we mean by "right" or "good." Hearkening
back to such historical concerns about essences serves as a useful corrective to
the obsessively semantic and linguistic emphasis of twentieth-century analytic
philosophy.

With that said, it must be admitted that we can identify some strongly
voluntarist accounts of theistic ethics in the history of philosophy. Perhaps the
most important historical example of a pure will version of DCT in its boldest form
is found in William of Ockham, whose unadulterated version no doubt bolsters
the stereotype personified in Flanders. On Ockham's maximally voluntarist view,
God's sovereign choice fills in the content of morality. Not unlike Descartes's
affirmation of universal possibilism in mathematics based on divine decree (the
view that God, had he chosen to, could have made $2+2=5$, for otherwise his
sovereignty would be challenged), Ockham advances the moral analogue of such voluntarism. He feels that if God were to command, say, cruelty for cruelty's sake, or the gratuitous pummeling of innocent children, then such acts would be ipso facto morally appropriate, even obligatory. That Ockham personally feels that God would never do such a thing - though God could and that if he did morality would follow suit - does not detract from Ockham's view representing the quintessential expression of a strong voluntarism in ethics, a truly pure will theory of divine command ethics.

The entailment of universal moral possibilism by Ockham's voluntarism has led some commentators, Paul Helm (1981) for instance, to dub Ockham's version of DCT as a "straightforwardly analytic" approach. If, e.g., 'Any command of God is good' is construed analytically (a mere matter of definition), then universal moral possibilism results. So it is natural (even if not logically required) to see Ockham or other advocates of DCT with a view entailing universal possibilism as embracing a semantic sort of analysis, a stipulative analysis like Flanders's definist approach rooting the meanings of various moral terms in theological predicates like 'is commanded by God'. It is worth briefly noting, however, that the insistence that necessity is to be connected with analyticity (while non-analytic or synthetic facts are thought to be contingent) - which seems to be Helm's assumption - sounds over beholden to a Humean understanding of such matters that strikes most contemporary philosophers as antiquated for being insufficiently informed by recent advances in the philosophy of language, most especially by the direct reference theorists.

Ockham's unmodified assent to the pure will theory is not the only example of ethical voluntarism of this sort. Most professing proponents of DCT embrace elements of the pure will theory in one way or another, and
representatives could be adduced from late Medieval philosophy and theology, to Reformation and Puritan theology, to British modern philosophy and contemporary analytic philosophy. Of all philosophers, even Wittgenstein is quoted as having said the following to Friedrich Waismann in December 1930:

Schlick says that in theological ethics there are two interpretations of the Essence of the Good. On the shallow interpretation, the Good is good, in virtue of the fact that God wills it; on the deeper interpretation, God wills the good, because it is good. On my view, the first interpretation is the deeper: that is good which God commands. For this blocks off the road to any kind of explanation, 'Why it is good'; while the second interpretation is the shallow, rationalistic one, in that it behaves 'as though' that which is good could be given some further foundation (Janik 1973, 194).

Wittgenstein thinks that by affirming a command-centric, axiological voluntarism one gives up hope for an explanation of why something is good, as one ought to do anyway. (I follow Robert Adams in employing the locution ‘axiological’ to denote a theory of the good, in the sense of the morally excellent or intrinsic good.) For he is notorious for the view that questions concerning the source of goodness or happiness cannot be answered by appeal to the facts of the matter or how the world is. Variations on this theme run throughout his Notebooks 1914-1916 and Tractatus. However, given his morally reductionist theology and nontraditional usage of such words as ‘God’, he hardly qualifies as a traditional proponent of DCT. Considerably more traditional and orthodox statements favoring an ethics of divine commands can be brought forward from the writings of Augustine, Ambrose, Gregory the Great, the Pseudo-Cyprian, Isidore of Seville, Hugh of St. Victor, Anselm, and Barth, as the invaluable historical work of
Janine Idziak (1979) has shown - not to mention elements of divine command ethics in Hobbes, Locke, and such contemporary philosophers as Adams, Quinn, Swinburne, and others.

Various motivations fuel such commitments to DCT understood to some extent in voluntarist terms, motivations ranging from an affirmation of God's power to connections between divine commands and God's status as first and uncaused cause, to an unwillingness of Medieval theologians to take liberties in interpreting scriptures that depict seemingly immoral actions sanctioned by divine command, to analogical modes of reasoning taking legislative activity as paradigmatic. And there is a plethora of specifically exegetical and theological considerations that can be adduced in favor of a particular conception of God as creator and savior, some of which will be explored in the next chapter. At the least what is clear from an informed historical study of the philosophical, theological, and biblical reasons for a theory of divine command ethics is that there is not just one simple-minded basis for the appeal - 'might makes right' for instance - contrary to the contentions of DCT foes like Cudworth (see Idziak 1979) and Flew (1966).

To embrace the pure will hom of the ED is undoubtedly to face some serious challenges. Especially such strongly voluntarist accounts of DCT like Ockham's, for instance, raise serious arbitrariness complaints, reminiscent of Socrates' critique of Euthyphro's theology. A theistic ethic of this sort also seems antithetical to Socrates' aversion to moral authority per se and his unswerving commitment to the autonomy of ethics. If 'God is good' is analytically or necessarily true, the question also arises of how informative such an attribution could be, since it presumably obtains irrespective of content. Unlike the determinate content of 'All bachelors are unmarried' which renders the analytic
truth informative, it would seem that relativizing the content of morality to God's volitions makes morality lose its determinate content. The attribution thus appears tautological and uninformative. Further, if DCT is motivated by a simplistic conception that might makes right, worship of brute power as such, that would be one more reason to reject it. For such reasons as these, it should come as no surprise that the ED is often thought to pose a set of intractable challenges to a divine command conception of ethics.

In the face of such objections, this brief mention of the variety of voluntaristic theories and motivations to embrace them has been designed to soften the reader to its possibility, and to show a little of why theists have considered themselves to be entitled to tenacity on the issue. What seems indisputable is that DCT, currently out of fashion among most philosophers, nevertheless represents a tradition of moral inquiry that has rich internal resources, both systematic and historical, and as such ought to be regarded as a serious contender for the allegiance of anyone sympathetic to a theistically oriented morality. This is particularly evident if it can be shown that the problems often thought to pose insuperable challenges to DCT are not so intractable as they might at first seem. Philip Quinn (1990a), while admitting he is a partisan in the debate, is candid in his admission that, on his view, defenders rather than detractors of the theory have had the better of the argument since the dispute over DCT has resumed. He admits that secularists will not be convinced by DCT, but that they should at least acknowledge that there are intellectually vital and respectable traditions of moral inquiry other than the one to which they owe their allegiance. He suggests that discussion of DCT should make the position clear, defend it against its critics, show its problem-solving abilities, and demonstrate support of the argument by a variety of sources. He also reasonably and
judiciously suggests that such goals should have as their further aim allegiance by theists and respect by non-theists. Toward such realistic goals as these this dissertation aims.

An interesting question emerges at this juncture. Quinn thinks that defenders of DCT have had the upper hand against detractors, but also admits that the secularists will not be convinced. He aims simply at garnering respect for DCT among non-theists rather than allegiance. Why should not theists and non-theists alike agree on this issue? Especially if the defenders are winning, can the arguments they present and defend offer justification to them but not to the non-theists? How?

As Quinn himself admits, the lion's share of work done so far by defenders of DCT has been responding to criticisms rather than the constructive task of providing positive reasons to accept this theory. Defending a view against its objections is not persuading one's audience the theory is true. This dissertation will generally not argue that theists are justified in accepting DCT. A move in that direction is certainly the thrust behind much of the work, but my task is less ambitious: simply to argue for the possibility of DCT, to argue that the theory has yet to be shown impossible. Showing objections not to be intractable accomplishes this task. The ED is often thought to pose an in-principle objection to theistic ethics, such that something like DCT is \textit{a priori} ruled out of the game. It is no small achievement to show that this is a mistake. Justification and plausibility are harder to demonstrate, but the success of this project need not ride on establishing these epistemic virtues for DCT. Few non-theists, naturally enough, would be inclined to embrace a theory of morality predicated on the existence of a deity they do not believe is instantiated. (Although some do: they would be error theorists who, like J. L. Mackie, might say that ethics depends on
God but since there is no God there is no ethics.) If a non-theist is not convinced that theism is justified, he will generally not be convinced that something like DCT could be justified. However, unlike them, I myself am of the view that theism is justified and that it retains positive epistemic status, though arguments to this end will not be a major part of this dissertation.

The Guided Will Theory

Socrates admits to Euthyphro that for all he knows there may well be perfect co-extension — sharing of all and only the same members — between the objects of the gods' love and the class of pious actions, without such co-extension answering his search for piety's essence. He is thereby pointing to the possibility of a "guided will" theory of morality. According to this view, God commands an act because it is moral, not vice versa. Morality is objective on this account, consistent with Socrates' intention, yet the commands of God constitute a perfectly reliable measure of what is moral. The source's reliability is not a function of its primacy (like some expanding and contracting standard meter-bar in Paris) but because it is a completely accurate indicator of the content of morality. God is less an ethical thermostat establishing the conditions of the moral climate than a thermometer reliably gauging the moral situation.

Obvious advantages to this theory include the way it neatly circumvents such problems as arbitrariness, autonomy, and vacuity objections. Morality is entirely objective (and mind-independent) on this account, not subject to any fickle authority or capricious deity. It exists independently of God, in accord with the autonomy of ethics of which A. C. Ewing (1961) writes. On some theories of human autonomy — arguably Kant's, for instance — it is still an insult to human dignity and moral autonomy to be told what to do by God, even if it is not God
who originally decreed morality's content. Such an objection hardly seems
intractable, though. All the guided will theorist needs to do is specify a
substantive and defensible conception of human moral autonomy according to
which it is possible that heeding the advice of a morally omniscient and loving
being who has conveyed ethical injunctions to us can be considered a good and
occasionally sufficient reason to choose a particular course of action. The
conclusion of such an argument, at any rate, seems wholly intuitive. Finally, a
guided will theory solves vacuity objections by appeal to an independent and
objective ethical standard by which to assess the moral propriety of the character
and commands of God.

If God just registers the conditions of the moral climate, so to speak, and
then factually reports such conditions to us (perhaps via imperatives), he may be
the divine moral meteorologist, but he is hardly the one responsible for the
content of ethics. To think otherwise would be to confuse categories; we might as
well blame the weather radar for the thunderstorm that ruined our tennis match.
That the class of actions decreed by God perfectly corresponds with the class of
moral actions does nothing to show that either class is definable or analyzable in
terms of the other. Quine's famous counterexamples – creatures with a kidney
and those with a heart, for instance – need no repetition here. On the guided will
theory, God and morality are conceptually distinct, and morality is ontologically
independent of God.

One moral theorist's virtue is another's vice, though; for this ontological
independence feature of the guided will theory is just the reason many theists are
hesitant to affirm it. Theists convinced that God is sovereign, constrained by
nothing outside himself, and the ultimate reality, are naturally resistant to the
claim that moral propositions' truth value and ontological and modal status are in
no sense dependent on God and, indeed, stand as independent and external criteria by which to assess God. In an effort to ease such fears, Richard J. Mouw and Michael Levin are two philosophers who have tried constructing cases in favor of a guided will theory of morality that even an orthodox theist can love. They both wish to exploit the co-extension element of guided will theory, thereby bolstering the perception of the theory as an admittedly attenuated but nonetheless genuinely real kind of DCT.

In a 1970 article called "The Status of God's Moral Judgments," Mouw begins by flatly stating, and apparently agreeing with, the view that in the Euthyphro Plato provides an argument the general point of which has come to be widely accepted as a fatal criticism of any attempt to define 'right' or 'good' in terms of the will of God. Mouw cashes out the significance of Plato's point in the form of a variant of the open question argument: If the claim that something is right is taken to mean that it is willed by God, then it does not make significant sense to say that God wills something because it is right. "But since," Mouw adds, "the latter does make significant sense, the proposed definition fails" (61).

Mouw thinks the distinction between the source of morality and the justification of morality is an important one, and that God is more properly regarded as at most the source of our knowledge of certain moral propositions than as the ultimate ontological justification for their truth.

Using this critique of voluntarism as his springboard, Mouw goes on to provide a guided will account. Following Wallace Matson, he seems fond of the analogy of an expert math teacher on whom we can rely for correct answers to mathematical questions. Similarly, God can be taken to be the perfect moral teacher, on whom we can rely for certain answers to moral queries that arise. Through his commands God may convey moral truth to us that we would not
otherwise have been able to justify. This reliance on God's commands resonates with the sentiment echoed by Thomas Á Kempis that true perfection stands in a man offering all his heart wholly to God, not to himself or his own will, either in great things or small, in time or eternity, but abiding always unchanged and always yielding to God equal thanks for things pleasing and displeasing. Mouw rightly notes that such expressions echo in other Christian writers in other times and places like Catherine of Siena or John of Damascus or John Knox or Catherine Booth (Mouw 1970, 6). The whole of our human duty, says Ecclesiastes, can be summed up in these words: "Fear God and keep his commandments" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Mouw obviously enough takes such sentiments with the utmost seriousness.

In his book on divine command ethics twenty years later, Mouw seems only slightly less committed to the view that divine command theory is best captured by a guided will account. He makes the justification/source distinction in a new way, this time writing that "we can view God's commanding something as either a right-making or a right-indicating characteristic" (Mouw 1990, 28). This recurring distinction is equivalent to the contrast between a "pure will" versus "guided will" theory (or the voluntarist/non-voluntarist distinction). In his later work, Mouw admits that some attractive arguments in favor of a voluntarist version of DCT have been advanced, notably by Robert Adams. His admission stands somewhat at odds with what seems his earlier wholesale rejection of voluntarism on the basis of the ED. But this appearance may be deceiving. After all, his earlier critique of voluntarism was explicitly a critique of only a definist version of DCT. Even if that particular criticism goes through, it leaves untouched nondefinist analyses of DCT like Adams's later work.
Mouw notes that Adams makes his theory dependent on a God of a particular nature: a God who is just, cares about human flourishing, and wants us to experience abundant life. Mouw writes that such theological concessions point in the direction of a guided will theory. They seem to suggest that the will of God is at least being viewed as a right-indicating factor. A morally justified action will certainly be one that promotes justice, or that contributes to human flourishing. And since we believe that God is just, or that God aims at human flourishing, we can at least take God's commands as very reliable indicators that what is being commanded does indeed satisfy the requirements for moral justification (29).

In his earlier article, Mouw stresses not just that God is a pretty reliable guide, but that there is a necessary relation between, say, statements of divine disapproval and negative moral judgments. For on the assumptions that moral realism is true, that all ethical content is accessible to ideally rational and epistemically privileged agents, and that God is maximally morally enlightened and knowledgeable, it follows that faith in God's pronouncements could not be more solidly grounded. John Stuart Mill made a similar claim for utilitarian hedonism's potential relation to God:

We not uncommonly hear the doctrine of utility inveighed against as a godless doctrine. If it be necessary to say anything at all against so mere an assumption, we may say that the question depends upon what idea we have formed of the moral character of the Deity. If it be a true belief that God desires, above all things, the happiness of his creatures, and that this was his purpose in their creation, utility is not only not a godless doctrine, but more
profoundly religious than any other. If it be meant that utilitarianism does not recognize the revealed will of God as the supreme law of morals, I answer, that a utilitarian who believes in the perfect goodness and wisdom of God, necessarily believes that whatever God has thought fit to reveal on the subject of morals, must fulfill the requirements of utility in a supreme degree (Mill 1951, 26).

Insofar as Mouw's later work advocates a guided will theory to the exclusion of a voluntarist, non-definist one, doubts can be raised about his reasoning. For surely the appeal to the right view of God to make of DCT a defensible theory can be interpreted primarily as a way to avoid deficient conceptions of God which, when conjoined with a voluntarist account, produces unpalatable consequences. A version of DCT susceptible to intractable arbitrariness objections because of its operative conception of deity, for example, is eminently worthy of rejection. A careful analysis of deity consonant with the deliverances of both scripture and perfect being theology, however, is quite consistent with, indeed a prerequisite for, a workable version of DCT with strongly voluntarist dimensions. To jettison shallow theology is just the way to salvage voluntarist components of DCT, not evidence for guided will theory to the exclusion of the former.

Mouw's primary fear in engaging in anything speculative by way of connecting up God's will too closely with any specific account of the right-making is the nervousness he feels over a specific attempt to establish such a straightforward link. That specific effort is John Piper's Desiring God, in which he argues that he can be, without contradiction, a Christian hedonist. Mouw's criticisms of Piper are devastating, and need not be repeated here. But the point
Mouw takes from the discussion is that we ought to hesitate linking obedience of God's commands to any detailed account of moral justification. I can appreciate this point, while also underscoring that what we are able to infer from Piper's failure in this regard remains quite limited. Much more successful efforts to grasp just how God's will can function as the standard of right and wrong seem possible.

Despite Mouw's misgivings about voluntarism, he carves out a modicum of flexibility with which to view God's willing something as more than a right-indicating characteristic. At one point he writes the following:

> But in the final analysis it does not seem quite right to treat the connection between God's willing something and that something's being morally right in too loose a manner. God is, after all, perfect righteousness in the biblical scheme of things. It is difficult to put this matter concisely — but it does seem appropriate to think that in some mysterious sense the right indicating and the right making begin to merge as soon as we pause to reflect upon divine goodness (Mouw 1991, 30).

Personally I find this resigned concession of Mouw's, treated almost as an afterthought, to be one of the most illuminating points he makes. He admits the theist's intuition is that a guided will theory just seems inadequate when juxtaposed with an exalted view of deity. I quite agree. He also points to the need for a coming together of the voluntarist and nonvoluntarist, the pure and guided will theories, the right-making and right-indicating, another point on which this dissertation is intentionally predicated. A successful DCT needs to effect a principled synthesis of voluntarist and nonvoluntarist aspects.
Perhaps most prominently, the guided will horn of the ED is inadequately committed to the doctrinal view of God's complete self-sufficiency and moral autonomy. Nothing less than God's sovereignty, power, and autonomy seem to be at risk here. For if an independent morality conditions God's commands rather than vice versa, morality seems to take on an exalted status epistemically prior and ontologically independent of God. For a theist for whom it is God himself who is supposed to function as the regulative center and basic metaphysical principle of reality, the notion that morality in some important sense occupies an ontological status at least co-equal with God can seem nothing less than anathema.

Michael Levin argues, however, that confusion about the guided will theory's sense in which God is dependent on standards of value is what makes it seem as if it were calling God's omnipotence or self-sufficiency into question. He thinks once this confusion is cleared up, the guided will theory can appear quite palatable to the theist after all. After critiquing the pure will theory—especially by means of epistemic objections to it—Levin then offers his own guided will solution to the ED. There is something ironic, incidentally, about Levin's conviction that epistemological considerations help the cause of the guided will theory. The point in making the guided will theory look like a traditional DCT, as Levin attempts to do, is to make it seem justified to take God as a reliable source of moral truth. Such a procedure, however, just raises the same epistemic objection to DCT: How can we recognize a divine command as a divine command unless we already have our sense of what is moral? If we have such a sense, why do we need the divine command? DCT in its more traditional voluntarist forms could still hold true even if this epistemic objection were decisive. It would just happen to be a theory rendered powerless in the realm of
practical, though not theoretical, ethics. But the epistemic objection strikes at the heart of what the guided will theory is intended to accomplish, making Levin's strategic use of it all the more surprising and ineffective. So, though the guided will theory has obvious *prima facie* advantages over the more voluntarist versions of DCT with respect to arbitrariness and vacuity objections, it offers no advantages over DCT with respect to epistemic objections, only greater vulnerability.

Setting that issue aside, Levin takes a theologically troublesome dependence relation to involve God's being created, sustained, or changed by some substance. He then insists that this is not the way guided will theory or a purely involuntarist conception characterizes the relation between God and morality. He writes, "The only reason for including norms among the things in the world God must transcend is a conflation of the objectivity of value with the existence of values as objects.... Objectivity is one thing, objects another; truths outnumber substances" (1989, 90-91). He nominalistically asserts that affirming objective rights and wrongs or goods and evils carries no ontological implications at all; and since moral objectivity entails no ontology, God's ontological independence and supremacy are not threatened.

One objection Levin fair-mindedly considers is the seeming difficulty arising from an apparent causal dependence imposed on God by the guided will theory. Since Levin affirms objective value, saying that such value is not determined by God's will, it would seem that, on his view, God after all remains causally constrained to affirm value based on the intrinsic features of things independent of his will. How does Levin respond to this challenge?

He begins by noting that the portrayal of God as decision-maker in this way is objectionably anthropomorphic, and then moves on to suggest that, even
in such a scenario, God's independence is not violated. For what determines God to command X is not the rightness of X per se, but rather God's belief that X is right. Thus,

If the language of action-explanation is appropriate to God at all, God's commanding X is caused by his belief that X is to be done, not by X's obligatoriness. Inasmuch as God's commands depend on God's own judgment, God has not yet been shown to be causally dependent on anything beyond himself (1989, 92).

In this way Levin insists that the nonvoluntarist theory does not detract from God's moral independence.

The obvious criticism of Levin is this: Are not the intrinsic features of actions the prior reasons for God's beliefs about right and wrong (on Levin's theory and the assumption that the language of action-explanation is appropriate to God after all)? And if so, is not God's moral autonomy threatened after all? This is a question made all the more pressing by remembering that surely what is, say, laudable behavior is motivated not just by the belief that the action in question is right or praiseworthy but by the act's actually being right or praiseworthy. (Technically, the performance of an action that is right in the paradigmatic sense of obligatory is not praiseworthy if it is done out of obligation alone, contra Kant, although an act that one is obligated to do can be performed in a praiseworthy fashion if it is done because one wants to rather than because one has to.) If God honors a courageous act, it is certainly not his own belief that the act is courageous that he is honoring. Furthermore, on Levin's view, God believes some action is right because it is right and he is omniscient. So X's being right causes him to believe X, which causes him to command X, Levin should concede.
Perhaps sensing vulnerability, Levin offers a further response, suggesting that, to the extent God's autonomy can be said to be threatened here, God is equally dependent on everything outside himself for any knowledge whatsoever, such as his knowledge that a fire engine is red. Levin then anticipates the objection that whereas the color of the fire engine might be seen as an indirect function of God's own will (on the view that God created the world in the first place and perhaps continually sustains it), the same cannot be said of standards of value on the guided will theory. He insists by way of rejoinder that this objection would preclude anything like libertarian freedom, since what the objection denies is any and every independently existing fact or autonomous expression outside the realm of God's control.

It should be obvious that precious few orthodox theists find anything compelling in this point about libertarian freedom. Most fundamental, Levin does not seem to answer the challenge beyond suggesting that it carries with it an unpalatable consequence for most theists. The simple fact is, though, many theists would not at all agree in thinking of God's independence and sovereign control as precluding libertarian freedom, at least theists outside the realm of the strictest Calvinist paradigm. God can be all-powerful without being the one who makes every choice to be made. Contra William James, an Anselmian God need not equate with a Calvinist one. A libertarian who is a theist can still see her expressions of genuine freedom as sovereignly undergirded by the sustaining providence of God, who not only is believed to be the creator of the world, but also its continuous sustainer. Such expressions of freedom would still, then, in a broad but clearly defined sense, exist within the purview of God's will. Without God's permissive will and sustaining grace, such expressions of freedom would be impossible, such theists believe. As one example, Alvin Plantinga writes,
[God] may have certain aims and goals which can be attained only with the free and uncoerced cooperation of his creatures. But even here, every free action and hence every act of rebellion against him and his precepts is totally dependent on him. Our every act of rebellion has his sustaining activity as a necessary substratum; the rebel's very existence depends from moment to moment on God's affirming activity (1980, 2-3).

Here Plantinga echoes Augustine and many other orthodox theists. Similar reasoning applies to the color of the fire engine, something that is part of the world created and sustained by God's will. And likewise with the foundation of ethics existing as the expression of a loving God. What is affirmed by the theist is not that there is nothing outside the realm of God's control in any sense at all, as Levin claims, but that there is nothing outside the realm of God's sovereign control, ontological undergirding, or permissive will in every sense. No theist who considers God to be the bedrock of reality could rightly think otherwise.

Levin presupposes too thin a view of moral ontology and too intrusive a conception of divine sovereignty, predating his view on a conception of deity theologically dubious and distinctly less than Anselmian. Note that the objection to Levin does not preclude libertarian freedom, as Levin himself claims it does. It is not Levin's view that has in some way been vindicated; to the contrary, the various objections adduced against it seem decisive, while not at all implying anything unpalatable. The exclusively guided will or voluntarist horn of the ED fails to pose any real temptation for the traditional theist.
Exclusive and Exhaustive?

Having identified the two horns of the ED, it is clear that at least some expressions of each horn are mutually exclusive with certain expressions of the other. For instance, Ockham's analytic version of DCT is irreconcilable with, say, Mouw's early belief in the autonomy of ethics. Both theological subjectivism (pure will theory) and theological objectivism (guided will theory) in their purest forms appear to be inadequate as theories of religious morality, although for different reasons. Subjectivism allows no constraints on God's commands, and the resulting arbitrariness and vacuity objections seem unanswerable. If it is possible that God can issue evil commands, and his issuing them makes them good, then it is possible that evil can become good. But this is not possible, at least not on any robust moral realist view of the matter. No theory that countenances such a possibility is a plausible candidate for the right account of ethics. Pure objectivism, on the other hand, is theologically weak, not taking with sufficient seriousness the sovereignty and aseity (ontological independence) of God. It allows external constraints on God's behavior that impugn his status as ontologically prior to everything else.

Fortunately, the horns of the Dilemma are not mutually exclusive in their less than purest forms. It is possible to reconcile certain of their insights to build a better DCT. The questions of whether the horns are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive go hand-in-hand, for they both inquire into the adequacy of the ED as traditionally expressed. A few examples to demonstrate that the two horns are not jointly exhaustive and a third formulation is possible (that avoids the problems associated with the pure forms of each horn) will actually feature a sort of synthesis of the two horns. A synthesis of some such sort is just what is required.
The first example comes from Murray Macbeath (1982), who submits that the horns of the ED are not exhaustive given the logical possibility of this scenario that represents Macbeath's own view: God might choose actions because they maximize our happiness, which might be the reason why those commands are morally right, but God might not command them because they are right but because he loves us. Thus, both disjuncts of the ED would be false, and ought to be rejected anyway, Macbeath would say. The idea that morality depends on God's commands ought to be rejected, he thinks, because of the arbitrariness and vacuity objections, and the idea that God depends on morality should be rejected on theological grounds.

Part of the vacuity objection is that God cannot be counted as moral unless he is constrained by the moral law. But God is not so constrained on Macbeath's view; thus, can Macbeath answer the vacuity objection? In an effort to do so, he notes that the view that one must, to be moral, be motivated by respect for the moral law has a distinctly Kantian flavor. There is in Kant's own account of the relationship between God and the moral law, however, an insight that enables us to see how the Kantian challenge is to be avoided. Kant says that God has a holy will, and for him moral truths are not manifested in the form of imperatives, which are only relevant where there is a gap between the thought of an action's rightness and the doing of it. In God there is no such gap. God's concern, unlike that of humans, is naturally for the good of his creatures. The fact that God's actions have certain moral properties is not in itself relevant to his choices. Macbeath gives an example of an eagle's behavior: it acts as though it is following landing rules, but those rules are irrelevant to the eagle's behavior in an important sense. Besides, Kant has never lacked critics to urge that the moral ideal is not the obedient person who lives perfectly by the rule book, but the
virtuous person who does not need the rule book. This much of Macbeath seems right, and such insights can be incorporated into the right view of DCT.

The important point to note is that the attempt to construct a third alternative to the ED’s two horns is for the purpose of capturing the insights of each while avoiding their pitfalls. God’s sovereignty needs to be upheld, but morality cannot be arbitrary; morality needs to be objective, but God cannot be externally constrained; God’s behavior must be consonant with the dictates of morality without morality being co-equal with and independent from God. Much of what Macbeath suggests seems right, though his formulation is not quite the way this dissertation will put it. It is clear that the two horns of the Dilemma are not mutually exclusive in their less than pure forms, and examples like Macbeath’s effort at a third approach invariably incorporate elements of both. My approach, more straightforwardly, will be entirely explicable in terms of the standard horns of the ED, once certain requisite distinctions are made that are too often neglected.

Other blends and amalgams of the two horns could be cited, such as Richard Swinburne’s distinction, following Duns Scotus, between, on the one hand, contingent moral truths dependent for their content, existence, and prescriptive force on God’s active volitions, and, on the other, necessary moral truths existing ontologically independently of God and his creative activity. The view that necessary truths are independent of God, however, is theologically weak, and so, though I appreciate Swinburne’s effort to effect a rapprochement between objectivism and subjectivism, I find his particular solution inadequate.

At root the denial of a dependence relation (on God) of any truths of morality - contingent or necessary - strikes me as inadequately informed by an exalted conception of deity. This dissertation will therefore offer a different
synthesis of the two horns of the ED. It will embrace a voluntarist deontic theory (pertaining to the obligatory) and an involuntarist axiological theory (pertaining to the good). By rooting ultimate moral goodness in God’s nature and at least some moral obligations in God’s commands, I will be able to defend a robust version of DCT free of arbitrariness and vacuity objections that does not sacrifice classical theistic theology in the process.

So consider the following variant of the ED:

1. Either all of what is obligatory depends on God’s will or it does not.
2. If it does, then ‘right’ is arbitrary and vacuous.
3. If it does not, then part of ‘right’ is independent of God.
4. So, either ‘right’ is arbitrary and vacuous or part of ‘right’ is independent of God.

Swinburne’s solution would be unable to avoid this dilemma, for its rooting of necessary moral truths outside of God would make part of morality independent of God. My solution will fare better. Reference in (1) to God’s will is potentially ambiguous between God’s nature and commands. The view I will defend would affirm that all of what is obligatory depends ultimately on God’s nature, though not that all of what is obligatory depends on God’s commands. This is because I affirm that only a range of obligations come about as a result of God’s commands, typically commands that render something previously supererogatory (praiseworthy if we do it but not blameworthy if we do not) into something now obligatory. Other obligations might result simply from our having sufficiently grasped some intrinsic good at stake in a particular situation. Since all such intrinsic goods are rooted in God’s nature constitutive in some sense of the ultimate good, however, obligations that accrue from recognizing these goods alone remain dependent on God’s nature. So the idea that all of what is
obligatory depends on God's nature is ultimately true, but the idea they all depend on God's commands is false. Does it follow from the dependence of obligations on God's nature that 'right' is arbitrary and vacuous? No, because God's nature from which obligations finally spring is the good. Does it follow from the independence of some obligations from God's commands that part of 'right' is independent of God? No, because those obligations obtaining apart from God's commands spring from the ultimate good which is ontologically inseparable from and dependent on God's nature. Indeed, God's nature is the Good. My most charitable reading of this dilemma only allows the first of the three premises to be true.

**Thomism**

Efforts like Levin's to avoid unpalatable consequences of the guided will view are essentially nominalistic, denying any ontological grounding beneath morality. Levin's point is well taken in that what needs to be affirmed by way of the ontology of ethics need not be anything like Plato's Forms. I need not affirm moral ideas or archetypes or universals in Plato's sense, although my view remains an integration of classical theism and important aspects of Platonism. Rather, moral standards will be rooted in a dependence on God.

In contrast to nominalism, efforts to embrace a radically voluntarist account like Ockham's are possibilist accounts, denying the existence of any necessary moral truths. This dissertation opts for something closer to a third option, according to which God's sovereignty is preserved but nominalism is avoided. Moral realism will be affirmed in a quite strong sense, yet no moral constraints will be put on God entirely external to him. What is the third option?
Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (1988) contend that the central thesis of Aquinas's metaethics is that the terms 'being' and 'goodness' are the same in reference, differing only in sense. A thing is perfect of its kind to the extent to which it is fully realized or developed, the extent to which the potentialities definitive of its kind - its specifying potentialities - have been actualized. Each thing, on Aquinas's teleological view, aims above all at being as complete, whole, and free from defect as it can be, which is just that thing's being actual. In acting, that is, a thing aims at being, 'being' and 'goodness' having the same referent: the actualization of specifying potentialities.

The actualization of a thing's specifying potentialities to at least some extent is, on the one hand, its existence as such a thing; it is in this sense that the thing is said to have being. But, on the other hand, the actualization of a thing's specifying potentialities is, to the extent of the actualization, that thing's being whole, complete, free from defect - the state all things naturally aim at; it is in this sense that the thing is said to have goodness (Kretzmann and Stump 1988, 284).

'Being' and 'goodness', then, are coreferential terms, each picking out the same referent under two descriptions, despite their differing senses.

Since Aquinas takes God to be essentially and uniquely 'being itself', it is God alone who is essentially goodness itself. This then can make sense of the relationship between God and the standard by which he prescribes or judges, for the goodness for the sake of which and in accordance with which he wills whatever he wills regarding human morality is identical with his nature. Yet since it is God's very nature and no arbitrary decision of his that thus constitutes the standard of morality, only things consonant with God's nature could be morally...
good. "The theological interpretation of the central thesis of Aquinas's ethical theory thus provides the basis for an objective religious morality" (Kretzmann and Stump 1988, 307).

Kretzmann and Stump embrace Thomism - that set of philosophical and theological commitments among the intellectual descendants of St. Thomas Aquinas - which endorses the doctrine of divine simplicity, the idea that God has no parts but is rather equivalent to his properties. In Does God Have a Nature?, Plantinga expresses some of his grave doubts about such a view. Several Thomists, notably Stump, have responded. I do not mean either to resolve or even enter this debate here, but I do wish to affirm at least something in the neighborhood of divine simplicity with respect to the issue of moral goodness. This is the third option after nominalism and possibilism. This dissertation will be based on the view that God is the ultimate Good. Various arguments in favor of such a view will be presented in chapter 3, but mention is made of it now to highlight an important comparison between this dissertation's theistic activism and this central equation of God and Goodness in standard Thomistic thought. As God's commands fall within the purview of my voluntarist account that is delimited to the realm of the deontic, it is important to see that my emphasis on DCT is not properly applicable to the realm of the Good at all. Rather, following Robert Adams, my overall account begins with the Good, and my emphasis on the relevance of divine commands to obligation only comes afterward.

This similarity between Thomism and my view of theistic ethics involving a variant of DCT is significant because Thomism and DCT are more often contrasted than compared. A Thomistic emphasis on natural law is not uncommonly taken to be a serious rival for theists' allegiance when it comes to understanding the relation between God and ethics. What intensified the contrast
between Thomism and DCT, most likely, was the historical battle that raged between radical Ockhamist voluntarists on one side and Thomistic natural law theorists on the other who root moral truth in God’s Being and rationality. This battle came to a head around the time of the Reformation, when the worry among the Reformers was that reliance on God might be too easily dropped from the equation once the gap is thought to close between what God commands and what human beings would decide to do on their own on the basis of their own natural desires.

Alasdair MacIntyre has argued that Luther, for one, saw only a natural antagonism between what we want and what God commands us to perform. Luther thought that to do what is right is to obey the arbitrary commands of God, which are the deliverances of neither reason nor natural will. Perhaps influenced by Jacques Maritain, MacIntyre gives an unflattering account of the role of the Reformation in undoing the three main elements of the Aristotelian-Thomist scheme: “the conception of untutored human nature, the conception of the precepts of rational ethics and the conception of human-nature-as-it-could-be-if-it-realized-its-telos” (MacIntyre 1984, 52-53). Richard Mouw’s insightful defense of the Reformers against such charges is well worth reading in what may be the most valuable chapter of his book on divine command theory. Mouw gives an alternate reading of Reformation history, quite different from MacIntyre’s story according to which the Reformation is heavily responsible for the emergence of radical individualism and for many of the misguided moral categories of modernity. Mouw’s account is worth repeating at some length:

Suppose we tell the story in a different way. This narrative also begins with the medieval conception of selfhood. Roman Catholic thinkers had posited a very close connection between the
deliverances of divine revelation and the discoveries of natural reason, between the inscripturated Law of God and natural law. Thus the clear-thinking person, following reason where it leads, would discover many of the same things which the pious believer would accept by relying wholly on biblical revelation. Much credit, then, was given to the "natural mind."

On this version of the story, the Reformers saw the dangers of this unwarranted optimism about the capabilities of unregenerate reason. They sensed the coming onslaught against revelation from those who would attempt to grant complete autonomy to the natural mind - "today not a few appear," Calvin lamented in the Institutes, "who deny that God exists." The Reformers sensed that the medieval church had prepared the way for a cultural capitulation to secularism by granting legitimacy to natural reason, functioning apart from the acceptance of divine revelation. So they sought to join the issue at the most crucial point: the choice must be made between reason operating independently of revealed truth and reason captivated and transformed by divine grace.

And - to continue this version of the narrative - the Reformers were correct in their fears. Secular thinkers, as inheritors of the medieval period's optimism about the ability of unaided human reason, forsook what they saw as the Thomist's unnecessary adherence to the revelational complement. In doing so, of course, they "practicalized" human reason, narrowing the scope of what it is that the natural mind can discover. Where the
medieval thinkers supplemented reason with revelation, the secular thinkers supplemented it with "custom" or untutored human benevolence or noumenal postulates. But for all of that they perpetuated a medieval-type trust in the abilities of the natural mind to function apart from revelational guidance. Thus Kant is Thomas-without-God (Mouw 1990, 66-67).

I am inclined to see Mouw's account of the role of Reformation thought toward divine commands as closer to the truth than that of MacIntyre's. A story of some such shape will be assumed here as the more accurate depiction of the role of Reformation thought and divine command theory properly understood.

Thus, this dissertation resonates with what the Thomists have to say about the good. But it simultaneously co-opts a more Protestant attitude, if you will, toward the vital role of divine commands in a full-fledged moral theory. Mine is an account that allows for the possibility that some of God's commands might reveal to us moral truths that reason alone, unaided by revelation, would fail to do so. As Quinn writes,

Humans in their present condition are fallen and, if left to themselves, incapable of flourishing in this life. Such human flourishing as is possible must take place against a background of ceaseless struggle to overcome interior evil. It can never be a wholly human achievement, something people make for themselves if they are lucky. It must always be at least in part a divine gift. Nor is reason itself exempt from the infirmities of the present human condition; it too is fallen and enfeebled. A traditional Christian is therefore likely to regard as naïve any
confidence in the ability of unaided human practical reason to rule
well in the most important matters in our lives (Quinn 1998, 281).

This synthesis of elements of Thomism and DCT, if successful, would render versions of natural law morality and DCT as nearly a continuous whole. Mar and Hanink (1987, 254) similarly conclude, "The best expression of divine command morality and the best expression of natural law ethics do, we think, form a structural unity." When we remember that Aquinas himself counted obedience to divine commands the highest virtue, the hope of a successful union of DCT and key themes of Thomism should come as little surprise. This dissertation will attempt to present a version of DCT that both Thomists and non-Thomists alike can appreciate.
II

The God of Anselm

Before laying out a version of divine command theory (DCT) to be defended against various objections, it is important to be clear about what theology such a theory will presuppose. Specifically, what operative conception of deity will function within the theory? As we have seen, this question of theology is no small matter. Arguably Socrates' most important complaint against Euthyphro - rendering the Euthyphro Dilemma (ED) in that context practically superfluous - has to do with Euthyphro's belief in quarreling and contentious gods who lack moral omniscience and who cannot agree on basic matters of piety and justice (except that wrongdoing deserves punishment). Levin's basic problem is that his notion of divinity lacks a sense of sovereignty because of Levin's misconstrual of what sovereignty entails. Questions of arbitrariness and vacuity are also directly related to the nature of the God a feasible DCT espouses. So it is of much importance that before moving on we pause to consider what is meant specifically in this discussion by 'God', and what sorts of descriptions properly apply to such a being instantiating this designation. Occasion will then also be taken to specify primarily one central implication of this theology in terms of the human condition, an implication that will set the stage, and provide some general guidelines to serve as constraints for the next chapter's task of supernaturalizing moral ontology.
The Logic of Divine Discourse

Few topics could be more heady than an exploration of the nature of deity, the process of naming the unspeakable whirlwind and explicating what is often thought to be the unfathomable mystery that is God. Indeed, exacerbating the difficulty of such a task are challenges to such speculative metaphysics per se, the limits of language, disanalogies between God and man, deficiencies in human reason, the mystery and transcendence of God, the invariable shortcomings of the categories we use to conceptualize God, and theological reservations in characterizing God too precisely. Nonetheless, a dissertation presuming to speak meaningfully about divine command theory had better be able to spell out in some detail what operative conception of deity is guiding the discussion, what competent usage of such language as 'God' involves, and what essential properties of God are presupposed.

It might be thought odd to delve into this theological topic before offering any epistemological considerations in favor of believing in God in the first place, and no doubt there is something to be said for this in terms of logical progression. But for now Plantinga's advice will be heeded. For arguments for and against God's existence have been offered for some time now, and it is unlikely that anything radically different along such lines could be presented here. It is often the case that philosophical discussions rest content with the minimalist question pertaining to God's bare existence, when to committed believers in God such an approach seems existentially and epistemically thin at best. To them this is not unlike confining ethics to talk of heart-wrenching and genuinely baffling moral dilemmas while leaving those clearest acts of selfless beneficence out of the picture altogether, as if a perusal of the periphery yields more insight than an
examination of the core. To understand Christian ethics one must get beyond the mere 'believe-that' locution where God is concerned and arrive at the 'believe-in' locution. One must strive for knowledge de re and not merely knowledge de dicto, not mere propositional knowledge or justified belief that God exists but a personal acquaintance with the God who does exist, on a theistic understanding of reality.¹

A sort of epistemological argument can also be adduced in favor of doing this theology first and citing evidential considerations later. The argument can be posed rhetorically like this: How is God to be recognized unless a relatively clear idea of his nature is first apprehended? Without such an idea, what meaning is to be attached to the question of whether or not God exists? Presumably it is helpful to know what it is we are discussing before the question of its instantiation is explored. Besides, a compelling version of DCT may function as part of the evidential case for theism.

By way of quickly responding to a few of the aforementioned challenges to an explication of deity, though, let us begin by considering theologian Karl Barth's challenge to such rational efforts to understand God. On Barth's view, to try understanding God is impossible and improper: impossible in virtue of God's utter transcendence and otherness, improper because to understand God is to try to control God. Barth thought that we control what we apprehend. As G. Stanley Kane points out, though, the latter point seems simply confused (Kane

¹ I do not deny that 'believe-in' is in part founded in 'belief-that'. 'Believe-in' means something close to 'trust-in', and at least rational trust in a person presupposes rational belief that the person you believe in has certain properties and traits of character. However, on the gap between believing that and trusting in, see Plantinga's WCB, especially chapters 8 and 9. True Christian trust in God, at least, is more than just propositional belief that God exists, or even that a God of a certain kind exists. It also involves a healing of the will and affections of the effects of sin, a personal appropriation and inward embracing of God's scheme of salvation. The Bible says that the demons
1975, 57). For the claim that knowledge of X brings with it mastery of X is puzzling. By no means does it strike a dispassionate reader as a conceptual truth, nor is it empirically verifiable, for counterexamples abound. Knowledge may be a necessary condition for, say, deliberately exercising some measure of control or influence over something, but it is hardly sufficient. God’s being beyond man’s power to influence or control hardly shows it is impossible to have any knowledge of him.

Affirming God’s utter transcendence might seem like a good way to safeguard faith, but in fact it is an effective way of rendering religious discourse about God simply obscure and incoherent. Take the law of noncontradiction, for example, and ask if it applies to God. Imagine someone, in an effort to affirm a maximally potent sense of divine sovereignty, denying that God is in any sense constrained by such a principle of logic – as Paul Tillich in fact says. In his effort to protect religious discourse, he has thereby ruined its ability to make sense or be informative. When God becomes wholly other, then there is nothing at all that can be said of him any more, except just that! At that point he is entirely beyond our ken, inscrutable to human understanding. Religious language employing terms like ‘God’ can still be used, but it is ineffectual in terms of conveying any propositional or linguistic content. What begins as an effort to retain religious language and an exalted conception of deity reduces religious discourse and belief to incoherence. Some religious theologies embrace such incoherence, but that will most assuredly not be the operative theology here. Room may be left for mystery, but patent contradiction will not be countenanced. Loving God with all of one’s mind will not allow it.

themselves believe that God exists; clearly, belief that God exists is not sufficient for true trust in God’s provisions.
It should be relatively clear what is going on, and also how to avoid Barth’s mistake. Limitations in human reason and categories can be readily affirmed when it comes to understanding the divine, without such limitations entailing that one can understand nothing of God. To affirm a substantive sense of God’s transcendence, all that is required is to affirm that we do not or cannot understand everything about God, not that we cannot understand anything at all. God’s not standing wholly beyond our ken gives us hope that religious discourse and conceptualization about him can retain their meaning, can convey propositional content, can make sense and be informative, and can perhaps even exploit analogies or other creative language forms in order to glimpse insights into God’s nature. Yet God in various ways continues to exceed our categories, retains mysterious aspects not readily within our intellectual grasp, and thereby remains substantively transcendent in this partial sense. This reminds us that analogical language used to describe him, similarities between man and deity, and human means by which we strive to understand him remain in the final analysis potentially limited and ever open to revision and correction.

This theologically balanced understanding of the logic of divine discourse enables us to see both the insight and pitfall in Mill’s insistence that God’s morality be the same as ours:

In everyday life I know what to call right or wrong, because I can plainly see its rightness or wrongness. Now if a god requires that I ordinarily call wrong in human behavior I must call right because he does it; or that what I ordinarily call right I must call wrong because he so calls it, even though I do not see the point of it; and if by refusing to do so, he can sentence me to hell, to hell I will gladly go (Taylor 1957).
The insight is that, ethically speaking, to see God as wholly other than human beings is to render religious moral discourse incoherent and entirely inscrutable. Moral terms would be applied to deity and moral properties ascribed that bear no resemblance to the way such terms and properties are construed in the human context, rendering such attributions cognitively empty. The pitfall, though, is thinking that Mill's point entails more than it does. What is implied by the insight is not that morality is ontologically distinct from God — though that is epistemologically possible enough — but rather simply that rationally meaningful religious discourse requires that God not be wholly morally transcendent. The same point from a theistic perspective — according to which God made man and not vice versa — is that man's rationality and other epistemic apparatus cannot be wholly misguided, but rather to some significant degree effective at grasping genuine theological and moral insights.

It is no coincidence that Barth is a firm believer in the radically corrupting influence of mankind's "fall from grace," which left man's rationality in utter ruin and disrepair, on a traditionally Augustinian/Calvinistic interpretation of this point of Christian doctrine. With mankind afflicted with such depraved reason, warped rationality, and corrupted minds, it is little wonder that Barth retains such little confidence in man's ability to apprehend the nature of God. Unfortunately for such a view, it leaves no room for apologetics of any kind, nor for any genuinely Christian philosophy. No rational discussion of theistic ethics is possible on such an account, for instance, for if God's goodness is so beyond man's ability to grasp, then Mill's insight entails that discourse on such goodness immediately turns incoherent.
The logic of meaningful religious discourse might be thought to require a rejection of unqualified total depravity, the ‘T’ in Calvin’s TULIP.\(^2\) However, this is mistaken. A way to retain a commitment to total depravity without appropriating the rest of Calvinism is the doctrine of “prevenient grace,” popularized by John Wesley. This is the grace of God that comes before redemption, the grace by which God draws people to himself. Without denying the corrupting influence of the fall, this grace grants to human beings, the redeemed and unredeemed alike, a dispensation of restored capacity for rational functioning, a process completed further along the salvation process through redemption and sanctification. This theological maneuver restores coherence to religious ethical discourse, makes possible Christian philosophy, incorporates Mill’s insight while avoiding its potential pitfall, and affirms the traditionally orthodox Christian tenet of the fall of man and its corrupting influence, though not in Barth’s unqualified sense. This dissertation is predicated on something like Wesley’s preemptive solution to Barthian irrationalism.

Much of this dissertation resonates with a specifically Wesleyan-Arminian theological orientation, which contrasts in certain ways with Mouw’s effort in *The God Who Commands*. “Christian morality comes in various textures,” he writes. “We cannot get too far into the mapping out of a conception of moral value and the human good without paying attention to these specific textures. I have chosen to examine in some detail the moral perspective of classical Calvinism,

\(^2\) The acrostic ‘TULIP’ encapsulates Calvinist theology as defined by the Five Points of the Synod of Dort and elaborated in the Westminster Confession of Faith. The letters represent, in order, total depravity as a result of mankind’s fall from grace, unconditional election (or particular predestination), limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance (or final perseverance of the saints, i.e., unconditional eternal security). This dissertation is instead shaped by an Arminian theology affirming total depravity, conditional election rather than unconditional, universal atonement rather than limited atonement, prevenient rather than irresistible grace, and conditional perseverance.
which makes it possible for me to consider an actual theological embodiment of divine command morality” (Mouw 1991, 3). This dissertation is admittedly more general in scope, less consistently aligned to any particular theological persuasion. In part the motivation for this more generalist approach is strategically intended to appeal to a broader audience that comprises, say, Thomists and non-Thomists alike, as already noted. To the extent that underlying theological motivations operate, however, this dissertation is decidedly Wesleyan-Arminian in orientation and at some distance from high Calvinism.

This departure from a consistently Calvinist paradigm helps make sense of this dissertation’s assignment of primacy to God’s nature rather than his will. Wesley once waded into the old medieval Euthyphro-inspired debate between the intellectualists and voluntarists about which is prior, God’s will or his nature. The voluntarists affirmed that an act is good because God wills it, whereas the intellectualists said God wills something because it is good. Wesley pointed out what he saw as the futility of the debate:

It seems, then, that the whole difficulty arises from considering God’s will as distinct from God: otherwise it vanishes away. For none can doubt but God is the cause of the law of God. But the will of God is God Himself. It is God considered as willing thus or thus. Consequently, to say that the will of God, or that God Himself, is the cause of the law, is one and the same thing (Wesley 1961, 2:50).

This is obviously too brief a treatment of the topic – some key assumptions here need to be unpacked – but as this dissertation progresses it should become clear
why Wesley's view is essentially right. Treating God's willings as too distinct from or antecedent to his nature leads to an indefensible voluntarism. Nonetheless, the traditional way of putting the matter serves "to highlight a significant theological perspective when the question of God's love is cast in these terms," as Dunning writes, and, as he adds, "Is love a manifestation of [God's] nature or [God's] will? The Calvinist sees it to be an expression of his will; Wesleyan theology, a manifestation of his nature" (Dunning 1988, 196). Dunning adds:

The position that love is an expression of God's will comports well with the teaching of particular predestination. It can affirm without qualms as literally true such declarations as "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Rom. 9:13, KJV). No theological problem is posed, because God can freely extend His love to, or withhold it from, anyone He chooses.

The Wesleyan holds that God's love is a manifestation of His nature, and consequently it is universal rather than selective. He extends His "arm" in mercy and reconciliation to all without discrimination. None is excluded, for this would involve a violation of God's own nature. God, being who He is, "loves each one of us as if there were only one of us to love" (Augustine). It is this aspect of the doctrine of God that provides the theological grounding for the Wesleyan doctrine of prevenient grace. That this love is "holy love" guards this fundamental truth against a perversion into actual rather than potential universalism (Dunning 1988, 196-97).

In fairness to Mouw, he probably avoids some of the more unpalatable consequences of high Calvinism, but perhaps at the expense of a rich enough
voluntarism he seems inordinately reticent to adopt. It is this dissertation's contention that a better, more theologically defensible and balanced DCT than Mouw's is available by rejecting more Calvinism (though not all of it – Wesley once said he himself was but a "hair's breadth" from Calvinism) and adopting more voluntarism (though not an absolute voluntarism).

Let us suppose, contra theological irrationalism, that one can speak meaningfully by use of the term 'God', identifying rules for competent usage of such a term and predicating properties of the being, if any, who instantiates the term. What can be said about such linguistic practices? Perhaps an effective way to begin answering this question is by asking how 'God' in a classically theistic sense functions in sentences, whether as a name, title, or definite description. It is commonly thought that 'God' is the name of a being instantiating, say, various omni-properties, such as omnipotence, omnibenevolence, and omniscience. 'God', then, might function as a proper name referring rigidly in every possible world to that supernatural being, if there is one, whose reference is fixed by descriptions contained in such predicates as 'is omniscient'. Competent language usage of the term 'God' seems to require something like this. The term has of course been used more idiosyncratically to mean all kinds of different things, from Tillich's ultimate concern to Wittgenstein's meaning of life, but Mill's point about the need for univocity in morality can equally be applied here to God. Someone using 'God' in a way entirely foreign to this standard linguistic practice would seem not to possess the requisite understanding of the term to use it competently.

What is more arguable than the association of some cluster of such descriptions with use of the term 'God' is how exactly such a name is connected with such descriptions. Saul Kripke rejects the notion that the reference of names
is to be fixed by descriptions, using his ‘Godel-Schmidt case’ (henceforth ‘G-S case’) to underscore the inadequacy of such an account. He would rather opt for a causal account of reference-fixing. The G-S case invites us to imagine that the only description that most people associate with the name ‘Godel’ is the descriptive information that he is the fellow who proved the incompleteness theorem. Now one is to imagine that he actually did not do this, but instead stole the proof from an unknown mathematician named Schmidt. Then one’s efforts to refer to Godel based on this description would actually pick out Schmidt, whom we have never heard of and to whom we do not intend to refer. So Kripke argues that the reference of names is not fixed by descriptions since such a case can be run on any description of, say, Godel that we choose. Michael McKinsey argues against Kripke here, insisting that the G-S case does not show that names are not fixed by descriptions. For it is plausible to suppose that speakers typically have a number of ways to refer to Godel, such as ‘the guy I have heard of named ‘Godel’ or perhaps ‘the man of whom I’ve heard that he discovered incompleteness’.

McKinsey does, though, find the G-S story useful for something, namely, as a test to determine which among proper names are descriptive names. Such descriptive names are still names, and thus genuine terms whose sole contribution to the proposition expressed by the sentence containing them (if there is one) is their referent, but whose contexts are not exclusively de re. For such descriptive names’ linguistic (rather than propositional) meaning can make its force felt in cognitive contexts like belief. Such descriptive names are relatively rare, featuring descriptions that are publicly accessible rules. As rare as such cases may be, they are well known in the philosophy of language, such as Frege’s ‘Hesperus’ and ‘Phosphorus’. A further example, relevant to present
purposes, is ‘God’. The decision procedure to determine whether a name is
descriptive or not using the G-S test goes as follows: If we can tell a G-S story for
a name, and it has the kind of result that we get in Kripke’s case, then the name
does not have a descriptive meaning. On the other hand, if we tell the story in
which the consequence is clearly that the corresponding object is the referent
intuitively, then we have a descriptive name. Suppose we say, "Ah, there’s the
entity who’s omniscient, omnibenevolent, and the Creator of the world, but it’s not
God." Intuitively, the entity with such features is God, so by McKinsey’s lights
‘God’ qualifies as a descriptive name.

If ‘God’ indeed is a descriptive name, that is another reason to rule out of
court extremely idiosyncratic usages of the term. Such language use, it can be
argued, fails to exhibit the minimal competence that standard usage of the term
requires. One potentially troublesome aspect of McKinsey’s account for the theist
is his claim about the epistemic distance from us of the referents, if any, of
descriptive names, like ‘God’. Such referents tend to be identifiable by a relative
paucity of publicly accessible descriptions associated by the term – like ‘the
morning star’ or ‘the being who is omniscient and the Creator of the world’.
Personally I am probably less convinced of God’s epistemic distance from us
than is McKinsey, but should God’s epistemic distance from us make us despair
of spelling out in any detail what the nature of God is like? Perhaps not, so long
as a strong enough guiding conception of God can be found, as this chapter will

3 So in the proposition ‘AI believes that God is omniscient’, a belief can be ascribed to AI
based on the linguistic meaning of the imbedded sentence even if God does not exist and
no proposition is expressed by the imbedded sentence. No referent is able to be
contributed to make the proposition possible, but McKinsey can still account for the belief
ascription. In this way McKinsey’s theory of belief ascriptions has an obvious advantage
in this regard over a relational theory of belief ascriptions according to which ascribing
belief is affirming a relation between a believer and a proposition. For in the epistemically
world where God does not exist, the imbedded sentence of ‘AI believes that God is
strive to provide. But even if such a methodology suffices for purposes of making clear enough our conception of deity, the recurring problem of divine hiddenness and the already argued ineliminable aspects of divine mystery are enough to make such a conception remain somewhat incomplete. This is perhaps ample justification for the continued claim that ‘God’ functions descriptively.

A few caveats are needed here. First, this dissertation’s operative conception of God will insist on certain essential aspects of the divine character, without which a being possessing other attributes necessary for deity but lacking in these will not count as God. Second, not everything needs to be discovered about God in order for some things to be discovered, and what is discoverable – on the assumption of the reliability of the guiding methodology to be discussed in the next section – should be more than adequate for purposes of this study. Irrespective of the reliability of this methodology, it still might point to the kind of God who would serve counterfactually and informatively as adequate grounds to resolve the ED. Again, that mere possibility is sufficient to demonstrate that the ED does not pose an in-principle objection to theistic ethics.

Some philosophers, like Pike, insist that ‘God’ is less a proper name than a title. Others, like Forrest, insist it is a definite description. There are compelling considerations in favor of treating it as a name instead of, or at least in addition to, merely a title or description. Treating it as a descriptive name seems able to capture the aspects that characterizing it as either a title or description is after, and also carries an additional advantage over each. This advantage is the ease with which essential attribution of divine qualities can be made.

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*omniscient* expresses no proposition and, thus, on the relational theory, ascribes no belief to Al.
There is more to Pike's suggestion for construing 'God' as merely a title than meets the eye. For it accomplishes in one fell swoop two important tasks, one insightful, the other objectionable. The insightful task it accomplishes is lending itself to a purely de dicto analysis of a divine feature like impeccability. Impeccability, of course, is the doctrine not just that God does not sin, but cannot sin. Pike, seemingly innocuously, takes the import of this doctrine to be that no entity who sins can inhabit the office of deity, but that whoever heretofore functioned as deity can in fact sin. It is just that if this entity does sin, he will cease to be God. For the moment it must be stressed that insofar as Pike's analysis provides a partial explication of our locutions about God, it is a helpful analysis. But when he insists that 'God' must be treated as a title to the exclusion of being a name, he is precluding a de re analysis of impeccability, that is, the literal attribution to God of the essential feature of being sinless. This is not acceptable, at least not on this dissertation's construal of God. Why this feature of deity is thought to be an essential feature of God will be made clear as the dissertation progresses.

Purely definist or de dicto analyses of God's properties also carry with them too great a risk of begging important questions where morality is concerned. If included among those descriptions is, for instance, anything like 'a being whose commands are always morally right', without a corresponding synthetic account of theistic ethics, we are simply left with a semantic analysis of DCT replete with all the accompanying deficiencies of such a view. A simplistic application of this analysis neatly circumvents the problem of evil by analytically making it the case that whatever God does is right, irrespective of content, but falls prey to the arbitrariness objection with a vengeance as a result, as a plethora of commentators have decisively demonstrated.
Similarly, to what extent is ‘God’ evaluative in nature? From the proposition ‘God commands X’ to the inference ‘X is morally obligatory’, one is inferring a moral conclusion on the basis of a fact about divine commanding. It would seem to call for another premise to the effect that what God commands confers a moral duty. Even without such a premise, some theists think the inference works, and without inferring a prescription from a mere description, since any proposition involving ‘God’ is necessarily already evaluative in nature. In most theists’ minds this is probably the case, and perhaps for good reason. However, for present purposes, for similar semantic reasons as already adduced, this assumption will not be made here, at least not without acknowledging the need for augmentation by a synthetic de re account of the connection. For otherwise I would simply be providing another semantic version of DCT, just from another angle, and this will not be the version of DCT of this dissertation.

Irreconcilable Differences?

Up until now, the insistence that the operative conception of deity must be both a necessary being (in accord with perfect being theology) as well as sovereign in an orthodox Christian sense might strike readers as an insistence on blending widely divergent traditions. Given the explosion of interest in recent years in philosophical theology and the diversity of ways in which to conceive of deity – from Ockhamistic to Thomistic to Hegelian conceptions, to mention but a few – it is of paramount importance that the controls on this dissertation’s operative conception of God be made clear. This is especially the case if this exercise in philosophical theology is to be anything more than just creative speculation and empty conjecture. This guiding methodology will then also function as a control on the version of DCT to be defended here, and needs to
integrate the sorts of attributes of God already seen as important to retain. The methodology must be more than an *ad hoc* procedure of generating a theological potpourri by drawing from diverse traditions in patent tension with one another. If such a methodology can be provided, it can facilitate the needed move from the semantic meaning of ‘God’ to the metaphysical and ontological question of the nature of God himself.

Why might someone consider the insistence for necessity and sovereignty to be simultaneously instantiated in God to be an illegitimate blending of diverse theological traditions? Simply put, the reason is clear: The emphasis on God’s sovereignty in accord with biblical teachings is beholden to the Judeo-Christian conception of God, whereas the necessity of God is most often associated with an Anselmian conception of God as the possessor of the maximally compossible great-making properties. The biblicist tradition claims to be rooted in the particulars of experience and history, and is thus thoroughly *a posteriori* in orientation. The Anselmian tradition begins with what is supposed to be, in contrast, a self-evident conception of deity, rooted in the universal dictates of reason and logic, and thus decidedly *a priori* in nature and orientation. Thus the conflict is seen as immanence versus transcendence, and as empiricism versus rationalism. The latter are merely epistemological distinctions, however, so they might be thought to entail nothing ontologically about the compossibility of sovereignty and necessity. Indeed, I will eventually argue that they do not. But first, allow me to explain the tension as some see it.

Take the experientialist’s emphasis on God’s Incarnation in Christ, or trinitarian nature, or the commands to the ancient Israelites to engage in something like ethnic cleansing. Many in the experiential tradition would find the God of the philosophers arid and sterile by comparison to the living God whose
still small voice speaks to their hearts and whose audible voice could be heard by Moses out of a burning bush. In Tertullian one finds a religious believer exulting in irrationalism and anti-intellectualism, for "What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem, or darkness with light?" he queried. Whereas many in the a priorist tradition, in patent contrast, would find the God of the Old and New Testaments to be, frankly, something of an embarrassment, with his bloody sacrifices and warnings of brimstone. In the contingency of a perceived conflict between the two traditions, one philosopher squarely in the a priorist camp explains his assumption that

The problem...of reconciling the results of philosophical theology with the claims of some revelation must always, insofar as philosophical theology is concerned, lie with the advocates of the revelation in question. It is hardly incumbent upon the philosopher to demonstrate the compatibility of his findings with whatever may be advanced as the fruit of some revelation. This is an important methodological point. If an analysis of the received concept of God, i.e. as supreme being, leads to a conclusion which seems at odds with those of revelation, the former may claim the credentials of reason, the analysis being open to inspection by all concerned. If and insofar as the supporting reasoning seems cogent it has a claim on us logically prior to that of the interpretation of some special experience (Tomkinson 1982, 186-87).

In the philosophy of William James, a similar tension can be perceived between the a priorist and a posteriori traditions, between universal and particular theological paradigms, between a rationalistic and experiential modus operandi in religion. James is more inclined to give primacy to the experiential
side. As an empiricist of a more expansive temper than Hume, James emphasizes the content of one’s experiences quite broadly construed as the most important determining factor in constructing theories and in conducting life. For James, the significance of religious views is understood less in terms of doctrine and dogmatics and more in terms of relating to the divine, less in terms of theology and more in terms of religious experience. Perhaps his imaginative openness to religious accounts of mystical intensity – to which he confesses that his own mystical germ responds – reflects his view that it is a mistake to deny the veridicality or exclude the possibility of certain realities just for lack of personal experience of them. Empiricists, on his view, should construe experience broadly enough to listen to such accounts carefully and with an open mind.

James’s own pluralistic views contrast with the monistic idealist’s block universe constituted by one substance with completely interacting and interlocking parts. Monistic idealism – represented by such contemporaries of James as Royce, Bradley, and Green – was something of the reigning theological paradigm of James’s day, though today it has largely faded from the scene. Such philosophy was pantheistic, saw the world as one great spiritual reality, involved abstract and bloodless analyses, denied freedom of the will, made much of the unity of things, and left no room for genuine regret. James’s own view contrasted with any sort of theological monism, whether such monism took the form of a nontheistic stoicism like Buddhism, Hindu holism, or Hegelian idealism.

Since James distinguishes his pluralistic moralism from various monisms and dualistic theologies that smack of absolutism, insofar as Christian orthodoxy resembles such absolutism, James opts for a conception of religion that makes possible a bolder commitment to ethics and self-sufficiency. In James’s mind, the
theology of the scholastics, Anselm, and Calvin all too closely resemble aspects of absolutism. If we take such expressions of orthodox Christian faith to represent traditional supernaturalism per se, we can assemble a plausible case that James rejects traditional dualistic Christianity in favor of an exalted moralistic religion. It seems clear that James counts his own pantheistic conception of deity as less monarchical and sterile than the impersonal magistrate of Anselmian theism, more immanent and intimate than the dualistic God of scholastic theology, more organic and particular than the transcendent and unapproachable God of absolutistic monism, more limited and finite than the all-enveloping God of Spinoza or Hegel, and more human and civil than the sovereign cosmic lord of theological determinism.

I have argued against a morally reductionist view of James's philosophy of religion at length elsewhere (Baggett 2000). For the moment one quotation from James will suffice to underscore the distinction that James sees between the biblical God and the God of the philosophers:

Neither the Jehovah of the old testament nor the heavenly father of the new has anything in common with the absolute except that they are all three greater than man; and if you say that the notion of the absolute is what the gods of Abraham, of David, and of Jesus, after first developing into each other, were inevitably destined to develop into in more reflective and modern minds, I reply that although in certain specifically philosophical minds this may have been the case, in minds more properly termed religious the development has followed quite another path. The whole history of evangelical Christianity is there to prove it (James PU 63-64).
The point to stress for present purposes is that James discerns a palpable disconnect between the entailments and deliverances of biblical, experiential, concrete religion on the one hand and those of a priori, rationalistic, abstract philosophical theology on the other. He includes Anselmianism among those expressions of theology at some distance from experiential or evangelical Christianity. Apparently he thinks one can be an evangelical Christian or an Anselmian theologian, but not both. If he is right, this would undermine the project of this chapter to construct a conception of God that is thoroughly orthodox (though in important respects not Calvinistic), consonant with the biblical tradition and evangelical experience, while simultaneously Anselmian. I will now attempt to demonstrate that such a rapprochement can after all be successfully effected and applied, and by so doing provide the controlling methodology for this dissertation's operative conception of deity.

An Anselmian Methodology

The irony in contrasting Anselmianism with a Christian conception of God is that Anselm himself was a Christian. To be fully Anselmian, James seems to have missed, is to allow not just the dictates or entailments of perfect being theology to function as controls on one's operative conception of deity, but also the deliverances of the authoritative texts of Christian revelation. In this connection, Morris writes, "As a Christian theologian, Anselm accepted the documents of the Bible and the traditions of the church as providing vitally important and inviolable standards for theological reflection. This is the other side of Anselm, not quite so widely appreciated in modern times" (Morris 1987a, 3).

Is James right in seeing Anselmianism as an instance of absolutism, along the lines he construed it? James sees as a salient feature of every form of
absolutism the denial of human freedom, accounting for why he thinks not only a materialistic vision of reality is absolutist, but also Calvinist double predestination, Lutheran bondage of the will, Hegel's block universe, etc. What of Anselmianism? What is likely motivating James's concern about it is its affirmation of God's omnipotence – as one expression of his all-encompassing nature – which is often seen as incompatible with human freedom. Recall the tension Levin detects between God's sovereignty and human freedom, except here the issue is omnipotence. Similar sorts of concerns can be found elsewhere. Einstein, for instance, once said that an omnipotent God is irreconcilable with moral agents sufficiently free to be held accountable for their actions. And Robert Richman argues that the peculiar difficulties of DCT are connected with God's omnipotence, for it would be self-contradictory for an omnipotent being to desire or to will something to happen, then for it not to happen.

There can be little doubt that the theological imprecision exhibited by certain Anselmians or mistakenly attributed to them by non-Anselmians contributes to this perceived incompatibility between God's power and human freedom. For instance, suppose an affirmation of God's omnipotence is thought to mean the ability by God to do anything at all. Questions immediately suggest themselves: Can God make the sum of two and three equal seven? Can God make a rock so big he cannot lift it? Can God causally manipulate the choices of moral agents who possess libertarian freedom? Can God create another creature as powerful as himself? Can God make some state of affairs that obtains never to have obtained? Can God make the inflicting of gratuitous suffering good? Can God make his own character something radically different than it is? Persons who wish to affirm God's omnipotence in an unqualified way would simply answer in the affirmative, embracing the paradox and biting the theological bullet.
However, not only do such unqualified affirmations render religious discourse incoherent, reducing talk of omnipotence to nonsense, they also represent an altogether needless step to preserve a robust commitment to divine omnipotence or sovereignty. God is construed in Anselmianism as a perfect being, possessing those properties the instantiation of which conduces to a more perfect or excellent state. How the ability to reconcile contradictions or vitiate mathematical theorems or preclude necessary moral facts conduces to a more perfect being is altogether unclear. Most sophisticated Anselmians would instead have the quite clear and contrary intuition that such abilities would make him decidedly less than perfect. The result of such radical possibilism would be no mere affirmation of mystery in the form of an ultra-exalted view of God beyond our ken, but patent contradiction and a notion of deity cognitively vacuous. The credulous theologian who sees the embracing of contradictions as virtuous is surely mistaken, saddled with a view of omnipotence crudely unrefined.

A more thoughtful and circumspect Anselmian has an obvious way to avoid such mistakes, by defining omnipotence as God’s ability to do anything broadly logically possible. This of course means that God is constrained by the laws of logic, but meaningful dialogue about God seems to require it. That God is constrained by the laws of logic does not entail that such constraints are ultimately external to God, for they may be a reflection of the very nature of God. Such constraints in both modality and morality will function centrally in this dissertation’s attempted solution to the ED. If there is necessarily no world in which gratuitous torture for fun is morally virtuous, then God’s inability to make it so is no challenge to his omnipotence. Indeed, God might well be the best explanation of such necessary moral truths. So long as those modal or moral constraints are internal to God’s character, God’s sovereignty and omnipotence
are protected, in accord with orthodox theology. Mistakes in thinking otherwise have all too often produced needless departures from orthodoxy. On my view – a view that rejects universal possibilism in matters of logic, mathematics, ethics, and metaphysics – God’s omnipotence can be affirmed in a way that comports with the constraints of logic, de re necessary moral truths, and his other attributes. When God’s omniscience conflicts with his omnipotence, for instance, what I will affirm is the maximally consistent instantiation of both of these properties within the constraints of logic. If God knows it is going to rain tomorrow in Detroit, then he lacks the ability to prevent that, and conversely. This is actually nothing new; Anselmians for some time have incorporated such insights into their unpacking of perfect being theology: Thus the emphasis on God as exemplifying necessarily a maximally perfect set of compossible great-making properties. That some faulty definition of omnipotence entails that no individual can exemplify it does nothing to detract from Anselmianism properly understood. Instead such failures can enrich and qualify what maximal set of properties is appropriate for an Anselmian to expect.

The suggestion that God’s omniscience might function as a threat to human freedom is a little more serious, but not intractable. For one, it is only possibly a threat to freedom if omniscience is thought to include knowledge of the future. If it were confined merely to knowledge of the past and present, there is little challenge to freedom. William James was drawn to this solution, insisting that God might still know general outcomes without knowing every detail. He used his famous chess-master analogy to liken a brilliant chess player’s ability to win against you no matter what particular moves you might choose with God’s knowledge of the trajectory of history given whatever particulars surface. Since I am not inclined to take that route, I face the challenge of reconciling omniscience
inclusive of specific future actualities with genuine human freedom. The challenge should be obvious enough. If God knows at t that at t+1 I am going to recite the Pledge of Allegiance, then how can I at t+1 choose to do otherwise? The ability to choose otherwise, qualified appropriately to handle tricky counterexamples, is usually thought to be a prerequisite for genuine freedom. Basically the solution that satisfies me is that God’s knowledge of what seems to us to be the future is precisely analogous to his perception of us freely choosing a particular course of action. This solution seems to require God’s being differently related to time from the way we are, but this accords with my intuitions. If God’s knowledge of the future is analogous to perception, then a modal distinction comes in handy. We can distinguish it being necessarily the case that if God sees me doing X at t then I will do X at t, which is true, from the quite different proposition that God’s seeing me do X at t implies I necessarily do X at t, which is false. Deploying this distinction, construing God as differently related to time than we, and likening God’s knowledge of the future to perception has convinced such solid Christian thinkers as Aquinas and Plantinga that there is no inconsistency between God’s omniscience and human freedom.

If neither omnipotence nor omniscience pose a challenge to human freedom, what other Anselmian commitment might? I can’t think of any. To the contrary, Christian thought includes God’s having bestowed on us the requisite freedom to make meaningful moral decisions and to choose in an uncoerced way to enjoy spiritual communion with God. Certain critics might argue that not even God can confer anything like libertarian freedom on human beings given the intractable philosophical problems besetting such a metaphysical feat. But such criticisms are not counted as decisive here and freedom in a quite strong sense is presupposed. Such libertarian, contra-causal, or agent-causation freedom
distinguishes reasons from causes and affirms that an agent is free in performing action A at a time t only if no causal laws or antecedent conditions determine either that he performs A at t or that he refrains from so doing (Plantinga 1974, 170-71). Such freedom contrasts both with naturalistic versions of determinism and compatibilism as well as with the versions of theological compatibilism found in Calvin or the Westminster Confession. The latter in particular strikes this reader as embracing a patent contradiction, predicated on a faulty and confused conception of divine sovereignty and omnipotence. Indeed, in the absence of a universalist soteriology, high Calvinism, to my thinking, makes God irredeemably evil according to even the minimal moral requirements imposed by finite human ethical understandings. I will assume libertarian freedom in what follows without further argument. For a full-fledged defense of libertarian freedom would require an entirely separate treatment, many of our moral linguistic practices involving strong ascriptions of praise and blame seem to presuppose it already, and a substantial number of extremely competent contemporary analytic philosophers see no objection to it as insuperable. Such freedom may remain mysterious in certain respects, but it has yet to be shown to be a patent contradiction. The literature of late has actually featured some increasingly sophisticated and persuasive defenses of such freedom.

James simply seems to be wrong in grouping Anselmianism with various versions of absolutism. It is altogether appropriate to take as a consistent set the conjoining of perfect being theology and the deliverances of orthodox Christian religious experience. Perhaps an "evangelical Anselmian" is no oxymoron after all, but just the person to defend theistic ethics against the ED. James is fond of according primacy to religious feeling over philosophical and theological reflection. But if religious expression is to be cognitively meaningful and to
involve real truth claims and orthodox theology, rather than just an affirmation of
the ineffable, an evangelical Christian needs to make his theological
commitments and convictions coherent and explicit. A narrowly Anselmian
conception of God alone underdetermines for the devout Christian the proper
content of religious belief. James is right about that, but wrong if he thinks that
experience alone – largely uninterpreted and cognitively empty – is adequate for
orthodox religious purposes. It may well be true that Anselmian content cannot all
be found in scriptural teachings alone. But it is equally true that important and
specific content of Christian revelation – the Incarnation and Atonement, for
instance – is not contained in narrow Anselmianism either. As long as the two
traditions do not conflict and are not mutually exclusive, there is no need for the
content of the one to entail the other before coming together. The differences
between them might be precisely what enables the one to augment the other in
important ways. Anselmianism more broadly construed – as doing just this work
of integrating and synthesizing insights from both the experiential and a priorist
traditions – seems to offer a powerful and, for present purposes, sufficient set of
controls on one's philosophical theology.

By removing the tension between these two important traditions, we can
speak to the quotation cited above that insists on giving primacy to the
rationalistic entailments of philosophical theology over the more dubious
experiential ones. Such a view is not at all in the spirit of Anselmianism rightly
understood, but of a distorted caricature of just the a priorist half of it. Morris
points out that Anselm, like so many other medieval theologians, brings a
concern for both rational adequacy and biblical integrity to his own theological
work, tearing the curtain, as it were, separating the two. Christian philosophers
today should be no less committed to doing so.
Some of the contours of the a priorist tradition have been explained. What are some of the distinctively Christian controls on one's theology of God? Obviously, anything that will be said here in a few paragraphs will fail to do justice to the scope and depth of the Christian tradition, so no effort at exhaustiveness will be made. Most fundamentally, Christianity comes out of the Hebraic tradition that is radically monotheistic. Pantheism, deism, process theism, and polytheism are all ruled out as a result. Greek and Roman pantheons of gods, an indifferent creator who now allows the world to run on its own, a god numerically identical to the physical world, are all conceptions of deity precluded as a result of Christianity's foundation in Judaism. This shift from Hellenism to Hebraism marks perhaps the most important distinction between the original context of the ED and today's discussion of DCT.

James is no doubt right to notice that the Christian God is not transcendent and aloof, but immanent and dynamically connected to history and particular events of the human drama. Such a conception of deity does not portray God as simply off in his heaven, oblivious to the goings-on of this world, but vitally concerned about it and actively engaged in the process of bringing it to its intended state. Indeed, he goes so far as to allow the incarnate son of God to die a bloody death nailed to a cross in a particular place and time to effect the world's redemption. Manifesting the particularity of this God is his concern for the people of Israel in the Hebrew Testament (and Greek as well), the formation of the Christian church in the New, and what has been called the "scandal of particularity" exhibited in the exclusive salvific efficacy of Christ's sacrificial work of Atonement. Additional particularity and uniqueness of the Christian God is his Trinitarian nature, one of the great mysteries of the Christian faith, according to which God, though supremely one in the most important sense, is also three in a
different sense also of great importance. The potential import of this doctrine to the ED has been suggested by Mar and Hanink, as yet another feature of deity of which Euthyphro was unaware.

Such features of stubborn particularity do not lessen the general features of Christianity: the biblical plan of salvation as being intended for all, the universal work of the redemption of the whole of creation accomplished through Christ, and the New Testament church as the particular means by which the Good News of God's salvation is to be proclaimed to the farthest reaches of the Earth. On the Christian conception, this God is the ultimate reality, the basis of all that has been created, and the sustaining, sovereign, continuous creator of the world. Closely linked to God's status as creator is his status as savior, responsible for the redemption of creation, the restoration of reality to its originally intended state.

God's inherent Trinitarian character and desire for harmonious relationships with his creation demonstrates a profoundly social and relational divine nature. To speak of personal relations with the divine may sound presumptuous, but part of the Christian message has always been that this very kind of relationship is indeed possible after all. James happens to think that the surest guide to the quality of a worldview is the hope it offers of a meaningful relationship with the divine. Though Christianity understood in an orthodox sense cannot offer a unity with God wherein the distinction between the creator and creation disappears, it does offer the prospect for a powerfully transforming, intimate relationship with one's heavenly father. It is for such a relationship with the divine that human beings are primarily designed, Christianity teaches, and it is in such a relationship that we find our deepest joy and fulfillment.
To affirm belief that God exists in the Christian sense is to affirm a personalist universe in which self-giving love, eternally instantiated in God's triune nature, functions at the base and core of reality. On a Christian story, the universe has been intentionally and marvelously created. Humans made in God's image – able to think, form meaningful relationships, and grow in self-giving love – have been put into a world tainted by sin and can, through incorporation into the community of those reconciled to God through faith in Christ's sacrifice and through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, participate in God's universal redemptive work.

The operative conception of deity in this dissertation, then, in broad outline – constrained by both orthodox Christian and Anselmian theological controls – is that God, the ultimate reality, is profoundly personal and loving and good, relational and creational, and the sovereign and sustaining source of all there is in at least some substantive sense. He is not an absolute monarch who would preclude free will or feature no constraints whatsoever on his actions or abilities. He is the possessor of the divine omni-qualities to the greatest compossible degree, constrained by the laws of logic, immutable, eternal, and redemptive. Related to his sovereignty, God is said to exist a se, that is, he is uncreated, self-sufficient, and independent of everything else. Finally, God is worthy of worship and the real source of genuine moral transformation. 4

4 Are these various properties of God necessary features of God, such that no being who lacked them would be God? I suspect so. That is, I suspect that these features, if accurately gathered from a priori and a posteriori sources, are partially constitutive of what deity means. But of course what particular people mean by 'God' retains some plasticity, even though I've argued that it can't mean just anything at all. I'm even more interested, of course, in issues of essence than meaning, and de re properties than de dicto ones. As such, I'm inclined to think of God's features as necessary in the sense of being features essential to him.
On Whether God Can Sin

Making Anselmianism the operative conception of deity produces a quick result germane to a defense of theistic ethics. For if God can sin, then he can, presumably, utter sinful commands, either falsifying DCT or rendering morality arbitrary. One argument that God can sin, contra my own view, is inextricably tied to our conception of God particularly and conceivability more generally. This dissertation's Anselmianism can be deployed as a partial defense against it.

God is usually said to be good, even by atheists. What they of course mean is something akin to "Santa Claus is jolly." God and goodness have often been thought to be connected analytically. At the least, the following proposition has often been accepted to be necessarily true: If X is God, then X is good. Suppose that a particular entity inhabited the office of divinity and then began behaving in morally reprehensible ways. It might be suggested that at just that moment the entity in question would cease qualifying as God. This de dicto analysis is one way to capture the traditional Christian doctrine of divine impeccability. Impeccability asserts not just that God does not sin, but cannot sin. In the history of Christian thought, however, impeccability has more often been understood not just as an explication of our concept of God or as a de dicto analysis of propositions about God. It has usually been conceived of in terms of a substantive synthetic connection, where goodness is a necessary or essential feature of God. The necessity thought to attach between God and goodness is understood, on this view, to be de re. On a de re account of impeccability, God is necessarily or essentially good. On this view, impeccability is not just a doctrine concerning semantics, explicable in terms of necessarily true propositions, but a substantive ontological or metaphysical thesis about what the nature and character of an Anselmian God would be.
In recent years this idea has come under fire from various quarters. Even some otherwise orthodox and traditionally minded theists have felt the perceived force of these objections and have begun rethinking their allegiance to the doctrine.\(^5\) Rejecting the doctrine, however, carries with it a rather high philosophical cost that we should not be willing to pay, especially after we spend some time examining the arguments against impeccability. Various arguments against it have been advanced, including arguments from omnipotence, divine freedom, and divine praiseworthiness. Each of these arguments is worthy of close examination, but for now I will focus on an argument based on the notion of conceivability. I will call this argument the "conceivability argument," which can be put like this:

(1) God's sinning is conceivable.
(2) If God's sinning is conceivable, then God's sinning is possible.
(3) If God's sinning is possible, then God is not impeccable.
(4) So, God is not impeccable.

In my effort to show that this argument against impeccability fails, despite its evident validity, I am obviously a far way from defending impeccability against all its various objections or from providing positive reasons in support of the view.

As one salient example of this sort of argument, Nelson Pike - in his now well-known "Omnipotence and God's Ability to Sin"\(^6\) - argues that since God is

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omnipotent he cannot be said to be essentially sinless. Pike then salvages a sense of impeccability by giving it a de dicto reading, helpful in instructing readers that certain entailments follow from an analytic, albeit partial, explication of God's nature alone. What is troublesome, at least for traditional theists, is not Pike's rather illuminating de dicto analysis of divine impeccability, but his presumption that his analysis necessarily stands at odds with a de re account of impeccability, according to which an essential attribute is predicated of God himself. At first sight Pike's argument appears to be based not in conceivability considerations so much as omnipotence considerations. This is too hasty, as Thomas V. Morris points out:

Some criticize [Pike] for relying on too simplistic and inadequate an understanding of what the property of omnipotence involves. And it is true that he operates with a very unrefined conception. But the real problem with his argument is that he makes too quick a transition from the claim that a certain sort of states of affairs is (in some sense) conceivable to the stronger assumption that it represents a genuine, broadly logical, possibility (Morris 1987, 47).

Premise (3) of the argument is beyond dispute, for impeccability indeed requires an inability to sin. The more controversial premises are (1) and (2). I will basically argue that the notion of conceivability is such that at least one of those premises ought to be rejected.

Let us begin with premise (2), the notion that the conceivability of God's sinning entails the possibility of God's sinning. This premise is of course just an instance of the more general claim that the possibility of something is entailed by its conceivability. That is, (x)(If x is conceivable, then x is possible), which we can dub the "conceivability principle." Is the conceivability principle true?
It has had its notable and luminous advocates, most certainly. No less than David Hume wrote the following:

It is an established maxim in metaphysics, that whatever the mind clearly conceives includes the idea of possible existence, or in other words, that nothing we imagine is absolutely impossible. We can form the idea of a golden mountain, and from there conclude that such a mountain may actually exist. We can form no idea of a mountain without a valley, and therefore regard it as impossible.\(^7\)

(Hume 1888, 32)

Descartes too seems to have accepted the principle in several passages of his own.\(^6\) More recently David Chalmers has been advancing a version of the principle as well, generating quite a bit of attention in the process.\(^9\)

The notion of conceivability is notoriously fuzzy. Some might mistakenly confuse it with the notion of epistemic possibility. Some simply think of it in terms of possibility more broadly construed, either by equating these or presuming that conceivability entails genuine possibility or vice versa. Others think of conceivability as narrowly logical possibility. Probably equivalently, others cash conceivability out in terms of more specific logical categories or designations such as “consistently describable” or “formally consistent.” Yet others focus on the thinkability connotations of conceivability, or more specifically on clear


\(^6\) See, for instance, Principle VII (HR 1:221), Principle LIII (HR 1:240), and Descartes’s second reply to the third set of “Objections” (HR 2:63). Also see Notes Against a Program (HR 1:437-438) and a letter to Gibieuf of 19 January 1642 (K 123-26).

thinkability. What is surely obvious is that conceivability is a bit of a vexed notion, and that any effort to discuss it had better first acquire at least some clarity on its true meaning.

With respect to, say, propositions, what is meant by the sort of conceivability that has at least some hope of entailing genuine possibility? Let's suppose we begin with a simple notion indeed, specifically, that which is conceivable by me. For all I know, Goldbach's conjecture or Fermat's Last Theorem could be true or could be false. However, my ignorance of the truth value of Goldbach's conjecture and my conception of its falsehood does not necessarily make for a genuine possibility that it's false, since if it is true it is necessarily true, and of course vice versa. This point, however, little detracts from the ability of conceivability to entail possibility. For my ignorance of the falsehood of a proposition does not necessarily mean I am conceiving of its falsehood (or even that I am capable of conceiving of its truth value), but only that it is epistemically possible for me that the proposition in question is false (or true). A weak sense of possibility indeed. Epistemic possibility does not make for conceivability.¹⁰

Conceivability is more likely connected with what I can think of with a fair bit of clarity. The difficult question of just how much clarity is called for is of course one reason for the fuzziness of the concept of conceivability. Setting that issue aside for now, although we will return to it, conceivability on this construal is something like thinkability or imaginability. If I can think of something clearly and distinctly, I can conceive of it.

¹⁰ Epistemic possibility was first discussed by Moore ("Certainty" in Philosophical Papers [New York: Collier, 1962], pp. 223-48) and later by Wilfrid Sellars ("Phenomenalism" in Science, Perception, and Reality) and Paul Teller ("Epistemic Possibility," Philosophia 2
What becomes almost immediately obvious on reflection is that conceivability so understood fails to be a necessary condition for genuine possibility. For my noetic limitations preclude my ability to be able to apprehend or imagine a wide range of propositions that are altogether congruent with the dictates and constraints of first-order logic but whose complexity renders them beyond my ken.

Since I am not concerned here, though, with what anything like a full list of the necessary and sufficient conditions are for genuine possibility, the limits of my capacity for conceivability are not a major concern yet. They would simply underscore the obvious enough fact that my unique conceivability powers do not constitute necessary conditions for genuine possibility. A good thing for the realm of modalities if I ever happen to cease existing!11

The more relevant question is whether my capacity to conceive of a proposition constitutes a sufficient condition for the possibility of the state of affairs stipulated by that proposition. Even more specifically, does such sufficiency obtain necessarily, that is, does my ability to conceive of a proposition entail the genuine possibility of the state of affairs expressed by that proposition?

This is of course a difficult question, for it rides on whether or not I can conceive of something that is formally inconsistent or not consistently describable, that is, something that is not congruent with the dictates and constraints of first-order logic. The range of propositions, we've already seen, that I can conceive of is smaller than the full range of consistently describable

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11 In seriousness, the remedy is easy to see. A more expansive account of conceivability is called for, according to which it deals with what is imaginable by an ideally rational agent. This probably renders that account of conceivability equivalent to the set of
propositions, but are all those I can conceive of included within the set of those consistently describable? Or rather am I able to imagine with sufficient clarity some propositions to be, say, true that ultimately, perhaps in ways not immediately obvious, violate the canons of logic? There are some propositions consistently describable that I can't imagine, but are there other propositions I can imagine that aren't consistently describable? Is consistent describability or formal consistency a necessary condition for my conceiving something?

The answer to these questions simply is not obvious. That I am saddled with noetic limitations that cause some consistently describable propositions to stand beyond my ken is obvious enough, but do these limitations also lead me to imagine with sufficient vividness propositions that are not finally consistent after all? Or should it instead be said that, for the same reasons precluding my ability to discern the ultimate inconsistencies involved in the proposition, I can't with sufficient vividness imagine the proposition's truth after all?

I am inclined to think that I can imagine with a fairly intense level of vividness the truth of propositions that ultimately are not consistently describable after all. The insistence to the contrary seems a bit question-begging to me. To say that I can't very well be clearly imagining a proposition's truth because it's not, as it turns out, consistently describable and thus not possibly true seems just to be restating the conviction that conceivability entails possibility, only in its contrapositive form. However, if denials of mathematical theorems are not consistently describable in first-order logic, then someone with the requisite mathematical background who mistakenly holds a vivid enough intuition or imagining of the wrong truth value of Goldbach's conjecture would seem to

propositions or states of affairs formally consistent and consistently describable. If there's any remaining gap, we can stipulate the practical equivalence for present purposes.
represent a compelling counterexample to the principle that conceivability entails possibility. The defenders of the conceivability principle require, it would seem, more support for their view than a circular appeal to its contrapositive form.

If I am wrong in thinking that one can conceive of an ultimately inconsistent proposition, then it's at least still possible that conceivability entails possibility. But nothing much rides on this for present purposes, for either I can mistakenly conceive of the false truth value of Goldbach's conjecture or I can't. If I can, then the conceivability principle is false and the conceivability argument unsound. For the conceivability principle, together with my conceiving of something necessarily false, would imply that something is possibly true when clearly it is not. If I cannot mistakenly conceive of the false truth value of Goldbach's conjecture (perhaps because something like formal consistency is a necessary condition for conceivability and I'm imagining false a necessarily true, broadly analytic proposition), the fact remains that intelligent people have mistakenly thought they could. Michael Hooker, for instance, writes:

I think that a sufficiently informed person is in a position to conceive the truth or falsity of the conjecture. I think that I, for example, can conceive of, or imagine, Goldbach's conjecture being false. Certainly I can imagine the discovery by computer of a counterexample to the conjecture, the attendant discussion of it, the subsequent revision of philosophical examples, etc. (Hooker 1978, 178).

Hooker himself almost immediately admits that there may be some acceptable analysis of 'p is conceivable' that avoids such counterexamples. His hesitation in rejecting the conceivability principle is because of its "importance...as a
philosophical bedrock.... Virtually the whole history of metaphysics pivots on the principle," he writes (Hooker 1978, 178).

It certainly seems to many intelligent thinkers that they can meaningfully conceive of the false truth value of Goldbach’s conjecture, a point that is supremely instructive. For even while they admit that they might be wrong and that they may be unable to conceive of this after all, what coaxes this admission out of them is not any intuition about conceivings, but rather the way the world really is and could be. It is nonnegiably accepted that Goldbach’s conjecture is true only if it’s necessarily true. What is less certain is whether there is some sense of conceivability by which we can’t imagine the conjecture’s wrong truth value. That there is such a sense remains an epistemic possibility, but at this point all we have is a promissory note on which to rely of this sense’s being explicable. For all we know, sure enough, maybe there is this elusive sense of conceivability; but conceivability as we’re inclined to employ the notion, as understood by the requirements of linguistic competence in the use of the term, is at present (and perhaps intrinsically) simply too fuzzy a notion on which to base ambitious conclusions, particularly metaphysical conclusions.

To recapitulate, someone like Hooker, we’re imagining, sincerely believes that he is able to conceive of the falsehood of Goldbach’s conjecture. It turns out, suppose, that the conjecture is true. In such a case something has to go: either Hooker’s ability to have conceived of the conjecture’s falsehood, or the conceivability principle itself. They can’t both stand, since together they entail a (necessarily) false conclusion. Now, since the epistemic possibility obtains that there’s a sense of conceivability according to which he wasn’t actually conceiving of the wrong truth value of Goldbach’s conjecture, Hooker admits that for all he
knows he may well not have been conceiving of what he thought he had been conceiving of after all.

On such occasions it becomes obvious that we are unable to distinguish between a real conceiving and a pseudo-conceiving apart from an appeal to the actual realm of modalities into which these conceivings or alleged conceivings are supposed to shed light. The subjective phenomenological experiences of cognizers entertaining both the real and illusory conceivings remain virtually indistinguishable. The conceivability principle, even if true, is thus rendered epistemically impotent to imbue in us much confidence in the needed claim that we are experiencing a real conceiving. So even if the principle is true, and perhaps especially if the principle is true, counterexamples to alleged conceivings abound that should radically shake our confidence in determining when we're actually experiencing a genuine conceiving on which to base an inference.

This finding poses an intractable difficulty for the conceivability argument against impeccability. Recall to mind the argument:

(1) God's sinning is conceivable.
(2) If God's sinning is conceivable, then God's sinning is possible.
(3) If God's sinning is possible, then God is not impeccable.
(4) So, God is not impeccable.

Let's suppose it's true that the conceivability of God's sinning entails the possibility of God's sinning, possibility in the sense of broadly logical or metaphysical possibility. Now suppose someone comes along and insists that he can conceive of God's sinning. It seems easy enough. And now look at just a smattering of the profound philosophical conclusions that without much effort could be shown to leap forth: God can't be essentially sinless; God is not
impeccable; there's a possible world in which God, if he exists, sins; divine command theorists cannot on pain of contradiction embrace the existence of de re necessary moral truths, etc. Unfortunately, philosophy is not that easy.

To the contrary, once (2) is affirmed, the Goldbach case should give us pause to invest much confidence in the claim that we can conceive of God's sinning. We have learned that the difference between a genuine conceiving and a pseudo-conceiving is sufficiently subtle that nothing short of an appeal to the way the world really is and can be is likely to enable us to distinguish them. Surely we can conceive of propositions being true in the vicinity of (1) - an assertion that some Cartesian demon or Humean demi-god might behave morally reprehensibly. But suppose for a moment that an omnibenevolent deity exists who is essentially sinless. Can we really conceive of such an entity sinning? Are we able to conceive in the requisitely clear way that an essentially sinless being can sin? Does entertaining such a confused notion seem worthy of an ideal cognizer? It seems well nigh unlikely. Truth be told, even a de dicto, purely definist analysis of impeccability logically precludes it, an analysis consistent with the atheistic view of God with which this section began (and equally consistent with a traditional theist's de re construal of impeccability, contra Pike).  

12 In Anselmian Explorations Morris actually argues that all that's required to salvage impeccability is stable property exemplification, not even necessary existence. Chalmers, for one, admits that God's necessary existence would be a counterexample to his claim there are no "strong necessities," but immediately claims that such a notion of a necessarily existing God is inconceivable. I don't doubt that Chalmers's conviction is that such a notion is inconceivable, but I have several reasons why I doubt whether such a notion indeed is inconceivable, some of which have been cogently presented by Robert Adams in "Divine Necessity," Journal of Philosophy 80 (November 1983), pp. 741-752. At any rate, Morris's point, which seems persuasive, is that necessary existence is not a prerequisite for the strong stability a property like impeccability requires.

13 In his book and in the aforementioned July 1999 PPR discussion, Chalmers expresses skepticism over the existence of any "strong necessities" that limit the range of metaphysically possible worlds to a set of worlds narrower than those circumscribed by
The findings of the direct reference theorists like Hilary Putnam and Saul Kripke, and what they have had to say by way of denying the conceivability principle, are enough to persuade great numbers of philosophers not to invest too much epistemic power in the fuzzy modality of conceivability. This goes even for the clearest expression of conceivability as formal consistency and consistent descriptability, for 'Water is XYZ' satisfies that constraint but is nevertheless usually thought to be necessarily false. As Brian Loar has written, it has become more or less standard at least to entertain a distinction between conceivability and possibility: we cannot proceed unqualifiedly from conceivability to real possibility. The recent work by Chalmers has, however, resurrected some of the old faith in something of a new conceivability principle and bolstered the confidence of some who remain skeptical of de re necessity, synthetic necessary truths, or necessary a posteriori truths and/or various philosophical uses to which

logical possibility narrowly construed. In his equating of narrowly with broadly logically possible worlds he of course deviates from Planttinga's characterization of such distinctions in The Nature of Necessity (Oxford 1974). Conjoined with his allegiance to the conceivability principle, this leads Chalmers into views with which traditional theists will strongly disagree. For instance, Chalmers admits, "Of course a theist could take the second phrase ['ways the world really could have been'] literally, and perhaps call the resulting modality 'metaphysical modality'. This way we would use God to ground a modal dualism. Even so, it's not clear why God's powers should prevent him from creating any logically possible world....." This unrefined understanding of omnipotence and dubious "conceiving" (or lack thereof) on Chalmers's part underscores the potentially unreliable method of putting too much stock in finite and fallible cognizers' conceivings by entirely neglecting potential broadly logical internal constraints imposed on an Anselmian God's actions, such as moral ones. Incidentally, Chalmers's basic sentiment here resonates closely with the argument against impeccability based in omnipotence. The theist's reply to Chalmers could follow the lead of Thomas V. Morris: "In a less than Cartesian sense, the God who is impeccable is the ground of all possibility. Our ability to describe situations which would involve God's contravening some duty should just remind us of the distinction between conceivability and possibility. They do not coincide. And omnipotence ranges over only what is possible." See Morris, "Impeccability," Analysis 43 (March 1983), pp. 106-112, and his Anselmian Explorations. Also see Joshua Hoffman, "Can God Do Evil?", Southern Journal of Philosophy 17 (1979), pp. 213-20, and Jerome Gellman, "Omnipotence and Immutability," The New Scholasticism 51, (1977), pp. 21-37. For a considerably more nuanced conception of omnipotence than the one on which Chalmers bases his intuition, see Alfred J. Freddoso and Thomas P. Flint, "Maximal Power," in The Existence and Nature of God, ed. Alfred J. Freddoso (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 81-113.
the alleged existence of such truths has been put.\textsuperscript{14} Even Loar admits that
deploying the standard rejection of the conceivability principle as an argument
against Chalmers's impressive account is a bit too hasty. In this section I haven't
waded into the intricacies of various criticisms that have been launched against Chalmers by Loar and others.\textsuperscript{15} I didn't need to, for I have delimited the scope of
this discussion just to the conceivability argument against impeccability, in my
attempt to show that even the acceptance of the (dubious) conceivability principle
does not vindicate this conceivability argument. Irrespective of which of the
traditional construals of conceivability we opt for - whether thinkability by us,
imaginability by an ideal cognizer, formal consistency and consistent
describability - the prospects seem dim that the conceivability argument against
impeccability will work. Either the conceivability principle is false or we are left
with precious little confidence in our ability to conceive of an Anselmian God
sinning. Or both.

A Philosophical Anthropology

This chapter's abbreviated overview of Christian theology has already
broached the topic of anthropology. For a Christian understanding of God as the

\textsuperscript{14} For instance, among such skeptics I've heard it suggested, no doubt due to Hume's
continuing influence, that necessity has to remain a function of "what we mean by our
terms." Like Alvin Plantinga, this simply leaves me baffled how modus ponens is made
valid by anything that we as humans have done. In addition, since 'God is our Creator' is
an example of what we "mean" by our terms while being a presumably contingent matter,
it's importantly different from the necessary analytic truth that "All bachelors are
unmarried." To put it another way, one of those broadly analytic analyses yields an
entailment (the bachelor example) while the God example yields but an implication. How
we can distinguish these without appealing to notions of necessity that definitist analyses
are alleged to give an account of also leaves me baffled.

\textsuperscript{15} One such criticism has recently been advanced by David Clemensen in "A Paradox of
Actualty," in Analysis 61.2, April 2001, pp. 139-41. Clemensen argues that a paradox
results from conjoining the conceivability principle with (1) the 'invariance principle' (no
sentence that is true at the actual world can be false there) and (2) the assumption that 'it
is conceivable at p' is equivalent to 'at some possible world it is conceived at p'. 
ultimate reality, the creator and sustainer of all there is, if true, invariably holds implications for the nature of human beings, implications relevant to ethics.

In this section, as a prolegomena to this dissertation's version of theistic ethics, some of those implications about human nature will be spelled out. The title of this section borrows from Basil Mitchell who, in the course of his critique of prescriptivism, asserts the view that fundamental evaluations indeed can be based on some kind of reasoning drawn from a general picture of the human condition: a philosophical anthropology. Such a view seems no doubt correct, despite protestations to the contrary by those fearful of the naturalistic fallacy. But even G. E. Moore, whose connection to the naturalistic fallacy need not be repeated here, admits

I should never have thought of suggesting that goodness was 'non-natural', unless I had supposed that it was 'derivative' in the sense that, whenever a good thing is good (in the sense in question) its goodness (in Mr. Broad's words) 'depends on the presence of certain non-ethical characteristics' possessed by the thing in question: I have always supposed that it did so 'depend', in the sense that, if a thing is good (in my sense), then that it is so follows from the fact that it possesses certain natural intrinsic properties, which are such that from the fact that it is good it does not follow conversely that it has those properties (Moore 1942, 588).

Even if moral properties are not reducible to or identical with, say, natural ones, natural properties may still be potentially relevant to the nature of ethics. Since natural properties on a theistic understanding are ultimately rooted in God's creative and sustaining activity, theistic ethicists can avoid the charge that
that they are indifferent to issues of human nature or flourishing in their understanding of ethics. Rightly understood, the relevance of those considerations for ethics is entirely consistent with a robust theistic ethic. It is just that the theistic ethicist will not divorce them from a theistic understanding of anthropology.

Who and what we are affects what the right view of ethics is. Pascal has this insight when he writes, "There is no doubt that whether the soul is mortal or immortal ought to make the whole difference in ethics. And yet philosophers have drawn up their ethics independently of this!" (Pascal 1995, 121-22). If we as human beings are not the measure of all things, then the effort to root the content of morality entirely in something like human flourishing seems wrongheaded. To the extent that human flourishing, though, models aspects of the God who, on my view, is the ultimate Good and in whose image we have been created, then it is entirely likely that reflections about how to maximize human flourishing may well serve as one epistemic means of access to moral truth. Similarly, theists see God as inviting us to care about intrinsic goods as much as he does, to the extent that we are capable of doing so. God may even regret having to issue certain commands, much preferring that we would care about the relevant goods on our own, but knowing the rebellious condition of the human heart.

Insights into the nature of ethics based on considerations of human flourishing can be thought of as analogous to features possessed by instantiations of various logical forms of arguments. A particular instance of \textit{modus ponens}, say, is valid because it is a specific example of a broader logical form that is impeccable. If a necessary moral truth is ontologically rooted in God's nature – a truth such as "It is always morally wrong to inflict suffering for fun" – note that this is a general principle that need make no mention of human beings
at all. Human beings would simply be one specific instance of this general principle, as would animals, or extra-terrestrials capable of experiencing suffering. The insistence that morality has to be confined to issues of human flourishing strikes theists as unjustifiably provincial. Yet the examination of issues like human flourishing may well be ethically revelatory, even if not exhaustive of morality's significance and content. For claims about human flourishing may well fall under the rubric of general necessary moral truths rooted in God.

What are some of the anthropological implications of an Anselmian view of God, synthetic facts resulting from our having been created by God in his image? One implication seems to be that we, like our creator, are intrinsically relational and social creatures. We are designed to experience and enjoy healthy, harmonious, and mutually advantageous relationships of reciprocally self-giving love with God and with others. Since God exists as a purposeful creator, human beings do have an essence logically prior to their existence, and this communal nature is an important part of it. Little wonder that Jesus summarized the greatest commandment of all as loving God with all of one's heart, soul, mind, and strength; and the second commandment as intimately tied to it: loving one's neighbor as oneself. In such communion with God and with others, human beings, on a Christian understanding, find their destiny, their telos, their greatest fulfillment, that for which they were created. Greeks spoke of eudaimonia, contemporary philosophers of human flourishing, the Bible of shalom; each is a conception of an ideal toward which human beings strive. Not surprisingly, rather than eudaimonia or human flourishing, the preferred characterization of man's summum bonum here will be shalom: a biblical depiction of all of reality – God and his creation – existing in perfect and peaceful harmonious relationships of self-giving love with one another. Morality's content
in its true nature can be fruitfully thought of along Christian lines as behavior (actions, intentions, thoughts, etc.) that conduces to shalom. Obviously this formulation remains at a quite broad level of generalization at this point.

Philosophers often ask “Why be moral?” To me, the question often seems fundamentally malformed, since “morality” is ambiguous between (at least) the deontic notions of permissibility, obligation, and supererogation. To ask the question more specifically would entail asking why do what’s merely permissible (which of course we need not), why do what we ought to do (which in at least some important sense strikes me as a silly question given the signification of ‘ought’), and why do what is supererogatory (which of course we need not).

Those reservations aside, the question typically elicits attempts to provide non-moral reasons for moral action. But as Robert Gascoigne points out, the question need not be oriented that way at all. For it could rather be oriented to elucidate what general description of the human condition is most compatible with the fundamental character of morality. His point resonates with a recognition of the role of worldview in the investigation of crucial areas of human inquiry. Brian Walsh and Richard Middleton lay out four fundamental questions that a person’s worldview will address: Who am I? Where am I? What’s wrong? What is the remedy? As Richard Mouw points out, Leslie Stevenson correspondingly analyzes various accounts of human nature according to their general conceptions of reality, their understandings of what constitutes essential humanness, their diagnoses of what is presently wrong with human beings, and their prescriptions for correcting these defects. “To analyze worldviews, then,” Mouw writes, “is to deal with some crucial areas of investigation that are located at the intersections of these four areas of philosophical and theological thought:
general metaphysics, anthropology, hamartiology, and soteriology" (Mouw 1991, 23).

Mouw points out that much that goes on by way of ethical discussion among philosophers and theologians “virtually cries out for a more explicit wrestling with worldview type issues.” Taking the subdiscipline of medical ethics as an example, Mouw writes,

The Christian who wants to understand the full human significance of medical practice will have to look to more than ethics, even to more than theological and philosophical ethics, for help. The contributions of several other philosophical and theological disciplines and subdisciplines are certainly of crucial importance. Only a small sampling of the issues where medicine intersects with various areas of theological and philosophical inquiry would include: metaphysical, epistemological, and anthropological questions concerning the genesis and cessation of human life; dualistic and monistic accounts of human composition, as they touch on basic issues concerning the significance of medical treatments in the careers of human persons; questions about the role of science in human society; issues having to do with the nature, merits, and demerits of human “technique”; analyses of the function of medical institutions in human cultural formation; theological and aesthetic criteria for deciding what counts as “deformity” and “normalcy” in human beings (Mouw 1991, 25).

Rather than Hellenism and Aristotle, Hebraism and Abraham are taken as the worldview paradigms for this dissertation’s theistic ethic. Behaving in accord with one’s relational and communal nature is what maximizes a condition of
shalom both individually and collectively, and so of course it can thus be seen as necessarily in one's ultimate self-interest, and thereby rational. But the prescribed behavior is rational because it is loving, rather than loving because it is rational. Ethics is more fundamentally about relationality on my view than rationality. Such is an implication of a profoundly personalist view of the universe, according to which the ultimate reality is a triune loving person rather than, say, a set of impersonal principles. A Christian account of reality no doubt features a rational heaven, but not merely rational. The writer of the Gospel of John, writing to a group of people familiar with the presocratic assumption that the animating principle upholding all of reality was the logos – the word – wrote something quite remarkable. He wrote that the Word was with God from the beginning and the Word was God. Through this Word all things came to be and no single thing was created without this Word. And this Word, he said, is no mere impersonal animating principle, but a person, God the Son. The fabric of reality, on the Christian worldview, is therefore intensely personal, a view that has remarkable implications.

If the view of this dissertation is right, man's desire for loving and caring relations is no relative newcomer in the history of the world, which fortuitously emerged from the blind forces and accidental collocations of matter. Even if evolution is affirmed (this dissertation takes it as one explanation candidate among others), mechanical and teleological explanations are not mutually exclusive. Rather, on this view, love and relationship go all the way down, as it were, in the structure of reality. They really are written in the nature of things. All is not vanity in the universe, whatever appearances suggest. As George Mavrodes notes, even in Kant, notorious for his defense of a moral law without a divine lawgiver, is the recognition that there cannot be, in any reasonable way, a
moral demand upon us unless reality itself is committed to morality in some deep fashion. A Christian conviction that reality most assuredly is so committed stands in contrast, then, to Bertrand Russell's atheistic world's firm foundation of unyielding despair, or Sartre's abandonment of hope to find values in an intelligible heaven, or Nietzsche's transvaluation of values predicated on the death of God, or J. L. Mackie's rejection of moral facts as irremediably odd without God to create them.

The differences between theistic ethics and secular ethics are sometimes misconstrued. In many cases a theistic ethicist might agree that morality is intimately connected with issues of human flourishing, like the secularist. But what is in dispute in such cases tends to be conditionals like "if something is a patent thwarting of human flourishing then it is bad." Certain moralists would simply construe this analytically, but if Euthyphro has taught us anything it ought to be that something like moral badness is not a matter of definition, not even definition conditioned by sociology or biology. I instead construe the conditional as primarily synthetic, taking morality's distinctive contribution to be its providing us with forceful prescriptions to care about something like human flourishing more than just because it is in our ultimate best interest to do so, though it is. Theistic ethics also roots moral value more deeply in reality than is possible in a world whose ultimate constituents are mere atoms and molecules. It is not just a matter of our having decided to define morality in a particular way. The root of moral prescriptions and value does not lie in us or in the physical world at all. But this makes my theory no less concerned about human flourishing. To the contrary, it saves it from a superficial, analytic, practically disingenuous assessment of morality's prescriptions as merely a definist matter. If a secular moralist believes in the existence of synthetic necessary moral truths, the
difference between us is relatively slight. Indeed, it is considerably slighter, I contend, than between such realists and definist theorists (of either the theistic or secular varieties). In fact, a belief in synthetic necessary moral truths brings one right to the verge of theistic ethics, so long as one more intuition is granted, as the next chapter will argue.

In sum, in an effort to clarify the operative conception of deity that will function in this dissertation, this chapter ranged from McKinsey on descriptive names to Wesley on prevenient grace to Mitchell on philosophical anthropology. Beginning with semantic considerations of ‘God’ and then moving into ontological features of deity itself, I have opted to construe ‘God’ as a descriptive name whose reference is fixed by Anselmian descriptions. Such an Anselmian conception, shaped by both a priori and experiential criteria, was then distinguished from a capricious monarchical conception of absolutism of the type James critiques. Contrary to James’s insistences, however, God will be understood as all-inclusive in important respects. Unlike a Calvinistic conception of deity, though, the scope of God’s sovereignty or omnipotence does not extend so far as to preclude human libertarian freedom or vitiate various necessary truths. To the contrary, I will argue that God is the foundation and probably best explanation for such truths. Finally, God’s various attributes, especially his relational nature, entail features of the human condition that help flesh out some of the content of ethics. Setting such content-theoretic issues now aside, it is time to construct a defensible version of theistic ethics, beginning with a theory of the Good, then moving to a theory of the right. Although more points will be made about morality’s content, greater focus will be directed to morality’s ontological dependence on God.
In the two chapters to follow, a theory of morality predicated on this chapter's theology will be constructed. The final chapter will then attempt to show that the theory is not susceptible to (at least some versions of) what are often thought to be the two strongest criticisms of theistic ethics.
With preliminaries now over, it is time to spell out the first tier of theistic activism, that portion dealing with the nature of the Good. Next chapter will deal with the dimension of theistic activism that calls for a divine command theory of the right: moral permissibility and obligatoriness. Divine command theory is often thought to suggest that an action has the moral standing it does simply because God chooses to label it good or bad. On this construal of DCT, the nature of the Good is voluntaristic, a matter of God's volitions. The most radical version of this theory is a definist sort of approach, embraced by a thinker like Ockham. From the proposition that 'God wills x' to the inference 'x is good' a needed intermediary conditional (IC) would be 'If God wills x then x is good'. Much of philosophical significance rides on the interpretation of this conditional. Perhaps the most challenging task for the divine command theorist is to spell out the exact nature of the dependence relation presumably obtaining between moral and theological properties.

Various attempts have been made, but some of the most prominent, among both contemporary and classical analyses, have been instances of a straightforwardly definist analysis of moral and theological terms. Analytic philosophy's emphasis this century on the "formal mode" (as opposed to the "material mode"), when it came to ethics, probably encouraged definist analyses that concerned themselves less with the nature of goodness than with the meaning of 'good'. Such semantic analyses would take IC to be something of a meaning rule, thereby making crystal clear from the outset the nature of the
dependence relation between moral and theological predicates. According to this analysis or interpretation, what is meant by 'good' is roughly akin to 'something conforming to God's will'. Undoubtedly there is something almost unassailable in a semantic or linguistic analysis of this variety. For what could seem to capture better the significance of a term than another term or predicate with which it is analytically equivalent and by which the relevant concept denoted by the words is explicitly clarified and explicated? Conducting discussion of divine command theory or the voluntarist horn of the ED at this level of analysis is a matter of meta-ethics, specifically, meta-ethics along the lines of its semantic concerns and questions, as distinguished from, though related to, either its metaphysical or epistemological concerns and questions.

Not only have many contemporary analyses opted for a definist analysis, but the nature of the discussion of theistic ethics in the Euthyphro also most naturally lends itself to various semantic analyses. Socrates' emphasis on the primacy of clear definitions of terms is well-known, definitions called for by the demands of conceptual clarity and effective communication. Socrates and his followers regarded definition as "a quasi-magical doorway to essence" and a necessary condition for a rational account of morality. This makes unsurprising Socrates' insistence to Euthyphro to provide ever clearer definitions of piety (Porter 1968, 45). Thus, bolstering definist analyses of theistic ethics has been the preoccupation with semantics of divine command theory since its official inception in western philosophy. This general definist orientation to locate the crux of this matter in issues of semantics, verbal meanings, conceptual analyses, the import of linguistic expressions, or meaning rules will be generally dubbed 'the semantic analysis' of IC specifically or divine command meta-ethics more generally. This will be done despite the fact that there is obviously more than just
one way in which to construct such a view. Clarity on the nature of the particular
dCT under examination and its criticism is of vital importance, especially given
the many versions of theistic ethics. The first portion of this chapter will confine
its attention specifically to the nature and adequacy of a semantic analysis of
DCT. After underscoring such an analysis’s limitations and problems, I will then
move on to provide a nondefinist account of the Good according to which it is
dependent on the nature of God.

Important to note is that my effort will not be to spell out exactly what
goodness is. Rather, I will try to show that, on theistic activism, it may well be the
case that the Good - which I am assuming we are already fairly proficient at
recognizing when we see it - bears an interesting metaphysical dependence
relation on God. This of course goes contrary to what is often thought to be the
lesson from *Euthyphro*. Nor is there any pretense that every logistic, dynamic,
and mechanism of this alleged dependence relation will be spelled out in minute
detail. I can know that something happens in my head to cause my fingers to
type these words without knowing all the specific mechanisms involved. What I
will sketch is merely a framework in which a clear and compelling enough idea of
such an account makes such a relation seem plausible for theists, at least for
some critical number of them.

**Euthyphro 10A-11B: An Interpretation**

Discussion of the key passage of the *Euthyphro* introduces vital questions
for our consideration: from the issue of whether Socrates equivocates on
‘because’, to the question of the relative plausibility of reconstructing Socrates’
argument in terms of a demand for definition, to the nature of the definition for
which Socrates is seeking. The context is Socrates’ refutation of Euthyphro’s
third formulation of the idea or essence of piety: The pious is what is loved by all the gods. It is entirely possible that Euthyphro, pressed by Socrates to say what the pious or piety is (5D7), then later for “the characteristic in virtue of which everything pious is pious” (6D10-11), had not come to appreciate the force of such words. Euthyphro may not have ascribed to definition the importance that Socrates did. Euthyphro may not have been at home in the philosophical topic of definition, and may well have considered it sufficient to produce a formula he felt would pick out all and only pious things. An adequate reply to such a question, at least provisionally, would feature a list of necessary and sufficient conditions by which a category of actions and people is selected that is co-extensive with the category of pious things.

Prodded by the central question of the ED, Euthyphro claims not to understand Socrates’ question, which is at the heart of the traditional interpretation of the Euthyphro. S. Marc Cohen provides a defense of the traditional reading of the ED. That traditional interpretation goes like this:

If ‘pious’ is to be defined in terms of the gods’ approval, then the piety of a given act cannot be that upon which the gods base their approval of it. If the gods’ approval of a pious act has any rational basis, then, it must lie in their perception of some other features of the act. And then it is these features in terms of which ‘pious’ should be defined. In general, if one’s normative ethics are authoritarian, and one’s authorities are rational and use their rationality in forming moral judgments, then one’s meta-ethics cannot also be authoritarian (Cohen 1971, 159).

To make this case, Socrates asks Euthyphro this question after Euthyphro defines piety in terms of the love of all the gods: “Is the pious loved by the gods
because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved?" Socrates hopes to get Euthyphro to affirm the first and deny the second of these two alternatives. His effort to explain the question to Euthyphro can be found in the most difficult and arguably most important segment of the Euthyphro, 10A-11B. Socrates' tack is to show that 'pious' is not the same as 'loved by the gods'. To arrive at this conclusion, he takes a circuitous route traversing subtle grammatical differences between active and passive participles and inflected third-person singular passives and employs either a sort of substitution principle antedating Leibniz' Law or a principle about formal causation. The difficulty of figuring out just what his argument amounts to in this section of the dialogue is well known, and has been the source of much controversy. Cohen's intelligent proposal to wade through the passage accentuates the traditional interpretation of the ED.

On Cohen's analysis, Socrates argues that it is false that (a) someone, say, loves a thing because it is a loved thing, while it is true that (b) something is a loved thing because someone loves it. Admittedly, such a view requires that 'because' not be used univocally. In case (a) 'because' is a 'reason-because', giving reasons for someone's loving something. Since merely being a loved thing is not a good reason to love something, (a) is false. In (b), though, 'because' is a 'logical-because', introducing logically sufficient conditions for the application of a term. So (b) is true since being a thing loved is sufficient for its being a loved thing. Similarly, then, assuming co-extension between pious and god-loved things, a thing is loved by the gods because ('reason-because') it is pious, not because it is god-loved. And something is god-loved because it is loved by the gods; it is not loved by the gods because it is god-loved.

At 10D1 Socrates poses his question again, and this time Euthyphro answers that the pious is (a) loved by the gods because it is pious, not (b) pious
because it is loved (by the gods), and (a') god-loved because it is loved by the gods, not (b') loved (by the gods) because it is god-loved. Socrates claims that this shows the pious and the god-loved to be “different from one another” (10D13), for “if they were the same,” (b’) would follow from (a) and (b) would follow from (a’). Cohen says, “The warrant for this inference, not stated by Socrates, can only be that the substitution of ‘god-lovedness’ for ‘pious’ in (a) yields (b’) and the substitution of ‘pious’ for ‘god-loved’ in (a’) yields (b). Cohen takes Socrates’ point here to be that ‘god-loved’ does not introduce the characteristic in virtue of which a thing is pious. Cohen adds,

And I think it is safe to say that the phrase which does introduce the characteristic in virtue of which a thing is pious would be the definition of ‘pious’. So the principle which Socrates’ argument depends on is not, as Geach thinks, ‘the Leibnizian principle that two expressions for the same thing must be mutually replaceable salva veritate’. Rather, it is a principle which might be formulated roughly as follows: two expressions, one of which is a definition of the other, must be mutually replaceable salva veritate. We might call this the principle of substitutivity of definitional equivalents, understanding definitional equivalents to be a pair of expressions one of which is a definition of the other (171-72).

Sharvy and Friedman express their reservations about Cohen’s analysis that will not be discussed here, so for present purposes let us assume that some account like Cohen’s makes at least Socrates’ conclusion relatively clear. Again, Cohen puts it like this:

The more general point I take to be this: If a moral concept M is such that there is an authority whose judgment whether or not
something falls under M is decisive and it is rationally grounded, then 'M' cannot be defined in terms of that authority's judgment. This may be taken to be a generalization of the conclusion of the central argument in Plato's *Euthyphro* (175).

Expressing this in monotheistic terms and replacing 'love' with 'commands', Cohen takes the central point of the ED to be this: If God's moral authority is decisive and rationally grounded, then morality cannot be defined in terms of God's judgment. Conversely, if morality can be defined in terms of God's judgment, then it is not the case that God's moral authority is decisive and rationally grounded.

The semantic analysis of DCT might be thought to get around this challenge of Cohen's by stressing that there need be no reasons for God to command as he does. Instead, since divine fiat is assumed to have priority and 'moral' is just analytically defined as that which God commands, there need be no examination of the reasons why God commands what he does. There may not even be such reasons, but whether there are or not simply isn't relevant to the right analysis of morality.

The salient difficulty this answer faces, however, can be seen more clearly by noting the resemblance of Cohen's conclusion to a version of the arbitrariness objection to divine command theory. A later chapter will deal with the arbitrariness objection in more detail and in more of its variations, but it is important to point out this first version here. Elliot Sober expresses a version that is quite close in content to Cohen's conclusion derived from his semantic sort of analysis of the ED. As Sober puts it, "If the only thing that makes an action right or wrong is God's say-so, then God has no reason, prior to his pronouncement, to decide one way or the other. This means that God makes an arbitrary decision
about what to say..." (Sober 2001, 424). Putting Cohen’s and Sober’s thoughts together into ‘the disjunctive problem’, we might reason as follows:

1. Either God has reasons to command something or he does not.
2. If God has reasons for his commands, then we ought to look to those reasons in analyzing morality.
3. If God has no reasons for his commands, then his commands are arbitrary and should not be thought of as the basis of morality.
4. So, either we at most ought to look to God’s reasons in analyzing morality or God’s commands are arbitrary and should not be thought of as the basis of morality.
5. Therefore, God does not provide the basis for morality.

If DCT countenances God’s having no reasons for his commands, as the definist analysis does, then God is arbitrary and moral goodness appears to be subject to divine caprice.

Further difficulties plague definist analyses of DCT. For instance, suppose that God were to command the torture of innocent children for fun. If goodness is just whatever God commands, then such behavior would become something morally good, which just seems ridiculous. Even if we were to swallow that possibility, it would make the meaning of value terminology lose all its determinate content – a version of the vacuity objection to be discussed in a later chapter. It would also make knowledge of moral facts entirely contingent on our knowing the latest commandments from God, an intractable epistemic objection. Definist analyses, in short, seem to encounter insuperable arbitrariness, vacuity, and epistemic objections.

However, rejecting definist analyses of DCT does not mean we ought to reject the possibility of theistic ethics altogether. Showing that one version of
DCT fails ought not too quickly be generalized into thinking that all of them fail. There may well be a nondefinist account of theistic ethics that avoids these various objections and the disjunctive problem posed by Cohen and Sober. What would such an account look like? In my effort to explain what such an account might look like, I will provide a narrative from the history of philosophy.

A Narrative of Necessity

Now for the narrative from the history of philosophy I promised. To get a handle on this dissertation’s version of theistic ethics, a story from philosophical theology is in order, a narrative of necessity, of morality and modality, within which this dissertation can then be located. The *Euthyphro* was of course an early Socratic dialogue, probably reflecting pretty accurately the views of Socrates himself. As time went on, the paradoxical denouement of Socrates’ skepticism featured Plato’s taking the liberty to posit the existence of the Ideas or Forms, unchanging, eternal Truths, effective in capturing the objectivity for which Socrates struggled. Plato’s account was decidedly nonsemantic. To the contrary, it was predicated on the existence of a world even more real than this one, a world in which reality itself is committed to fixed principles. George Mavrodes characterizes Platonic realism as follows:

The idea of the Good seems to play a metaphysical role in [Plato’s] thought. It is somehow fundamental to what is as well as to what ought to be, much more fundamental to reality than atoms. A Platonic man, therefore, who sets himself to live in accordance with the Good aligns himself with what is deepest and most basic in existence. Or to put it another way, we might say that whatever values a Platonic world imposes on a man are values to which the
Platonic world itself is committed, through and through (Mavrodes 1995, 587).

Platonic realism affirms the existence of both necessary truths and necessarily existing entities. Examples of the former from the realm of mathematics would include that 2+2=4 and from the realm of morals perhaps that torturing innocent children for the fun of it is bad. Among necessarily existing entities would be such members of the Platonic pantheon as numbers, propositions, essences, properties, etc. At least two distinct features emerge from realism of this sort, both important to note for present purposes. One is the absolute commitment of reality itself to certain truths, truths that are invariant and unchangeable, absolutely certain and necessary, beyond all the obscurities and illusions of present experience. Anything susceptible to change or malleability is associated with this phenomenal world of mere images and shadows. The real world features realities not at all capable of change or fluctuation. The second distinct feature of such realism, at least as it subsequently developed in the history of western thought, is the mind-independence of these truths. Plato's quest for objectivity was a reaction against the fickle deities of the Greek pantheon of gods. Truth for him is not rooted in divine whim, but instead is ontologically independent. Richard Tarnas suggests a connection between the invariability and ontological independence of realism's truths when he writes, "Despite the continuous flux of phenomena in both the outer world and inner experience, there could yet be distinguished specific immutable structures or essences, so definite and enduring they were believed to possess an independent reality of their own. It was upon this apparent immutability and independence that Plato based both his metaphysics and his theory of knowledge" (Tarnas 1991, 4).
Realist thinkers like Duns Scotus as a medieval example, or Nicholas Wolterstorff among contemporaries, affirm the ontological independence of Platonic truths. This is a view that has held great sway in much of western philosophy, and continues to do so today. There is, of course, an important reason and intuitive force behind such realist assumptions. Employing modal principles, the Platonic entities posited by the realists are said to exist necessarily. Likewise, Platonic truths are said to obtain necessarily. Such truths are the same in all possible worlds, to express this in Leibnizian terms, and could not be different from what they are. No actual world could exist without instantiating such truths. Even in this imperfect world the truths of realism necessarily remain true — to put it in a way that does not deviate too much from traditional Platonism. It is an easy leap from such features of these necessary truths and states of affairs to thinking of them as ontologically independent of anything else. For normally dependence entails control, and if such truths were dependent on X, then it would be customary to think that X retains control over them. My physical life is dependent on oxygen, without which I would die. Dependence in such a case introduces the possibility of my physical life coming to an end. Since the necessary truths simply cannot be snuffed out, they are naturally thought of as existing independently, beyond anyone’s control, and autonomous, not dependent on anyone. Their truth value and modal status will not and cannot change.

Not all theists have been so easily reconciled with the central claims of realism, however. For pushing the realist line can be seen as a challenge to some of the tenets of classical theism. Specifically, the ontological independence of realism’s necessarily existing entities — their aseity — seems to run counter to an affirmation of God’s absolute sovereignty and superintending of all of reality.
Jonathan Edwards' version of temporal parts theory was a misguided effort to capture this aspect of God's radical status as Creator, whereas Descartes' doctrine of continuous creation was a more traditional effort. Berkeley's denial of independently existing matter\(^1\) – Lockean substances – was also motivated by this same theological conviction, or philosophical intuition, that absolutely everything that is depends for its existence on God. The linkage of the dependence of the contingent physical order with God's sustaining activity is one matter, but considerably more radical is the effort to make even the necessary truths themselves dependent on God. In fact, the typical result of the effort to do so is that necessary truths are denied existence, which issues in a tension between an affirmation of God's sovereignty and an affirmation of reality's aseity. Realism's invariance further contributes to this perceived tension between theism and Platonism, for such an affirmation is often construed as an affront to God's omnipotence. If God cannot alter the contents of such truths, then God is limited in his power, so the argument goes.

Both theists and atheists are aware of such tensions. J.L. Mackie, for instance, insisted this century that once someone affirms invariant moral principles – synthetic necessary moral truths, to put it into modern parlance – there is no further need for God to sustain morality. For such truths can stand on their own as an independent basis for ethics. Similarly, theistic ethics can be

\(^1\) Berkeley's concern that the affirmation of the existence of matter would lead to idolatry can arguably be said to have been more than amply vindicated. With the powerful emergence of materialism as the prevailing paradigm in academia this century, materialism is now usually claimed to be the entailment of our most reliable science-inspired epistemology. Such naturalistic perspectives are now perceived as part of a worldview not only rivaling but outright surpassing religious conceptions as the guiding regulative factor in philosophical discourse. William James explicitly fell into the mistake of thinking that independently existing matter as substance should lead to polytheistic religious language.
thought to entail implausible consequences because of the possibility of God’s issuing patently immoral commands. As Cudworth writes,

That it is not possible that any thing should be without a nature, and the natures or essences of all things being immutable, therefore upon supposition that there is any thing really just or unjust, due or unlawful, there must of necessity be something so both naturally and immutably, which no law, decree, will nor custom can alter (Idziak 1979, 161).

Cudworth’s suggestion seems tantamount to saying that affirming necessary truths goes counter to theism, since an affirmation of theism would require a denial of anything (else) necessary.

Cudworth’s worry is not without precedent in the history of western philosophy. A radical affirmation of God’s power and sovereignty has most often been taken to imply that God’s prerogatives are without constraint or limit of any kind. Descartes, for instance, seems to be an example of a philosopher and theist who believes that even mathematical and logical truths are contingent (or at least not necessarily necessary) due to God’s ability to alter their contents. This obviously accounts for why Descartes is often cast as a universal possibilist. Descartes writes

The mathematical truths which you call eternal have been laid down by God and depend on Him entirely no less than the rest of his creatures.... Please do not hesitate to affirm and proclaim everywhere that it is God who has laid down these laws in nature just as a king lays down laws in his kingdom.

Again it is useless to inquire how God could from all eternity bring it about that it should be untrue that twice four is
eight, etc.; for I admit that that cannot be understood by us. Yet since on the other hand I correctly understand that nothing in any category of causation can exist which does not depend upon God, and that it would have been easy for Him so to appoint that we human beings should not understand how these very things could be otherwise than they are, it would be irrational to doubt concerning that which we correctly understand, because of that which we do not understand and perceive no need to understand [Cited by Plantinga (1980, 96, 101)].

That last argument is really quite suggestive. The Anselmian intuition that God is omnipotent usually takes the form, on the first go, of saying that God can do absolutely anything at all, as we saw last chapter. Confronted with the challenge of how God could make a rock too big for him to lift or could make a square circle, the Anselmian typically modifies his affirmation to say that God can do anything logically possible or, more narrowly, anything metaphysically possible, acknowledging that there are some actions that fall outside such categories. The stubborn Anselmian, though, can stick to his guns and bite the bullet, continuing to insist that God can do absolutely anything. Descartes seems to fall into this category, putting more stock in his understanding of God's total sovereignty and asseity than in what follows from our failure to understand certain entailments of universal possibilism. Descartes attributes his inability to understand such entailments to God-imposed limits in human rationality. For Descartes, in order for the eternal truths to be genuinely dependent on God, they must be within his control. On Descartes' view, God must have the ability to alter their contents.
The examples Descartes uses are from mathematics, but the same procedure could be applied to ethics, as is done by Ockham. Ockham seems to have affirmed a total dependence relation here, by separating acts – even acts like hating God! – from their moral characteristics:

God is able to cause all that pertains to X as such without anything else which is not identical with X per se. But the act of hating God, as far as the sheer being in it is concerned, is not the same thing as the wickedness and evilness of the act. Therefore, God can cause whatever pertains to the act per se of hating or rejecting God, without causing any wickedness or evilness in the act (Idziak 1979, 55-56).

It would seem that such an approach would preclude in-principle and unalterable moral axioms, any necessary moral truths, save the primacy of divine whim. The irony here is that DCT, which is sometimes touted as a way, or perhaps the only way, of retaining moral objectivity, seems entirely unable to safeguard it after all. At least when it comes to versions of DCT like this. Nothing spawns subjectivity and relativity in ethics like a denial of necessity. As soon as primacy is given to divine commands with no constraints, moral necessity is perceived to fall by the wayside.

A worrisome possibility! After all, it is not as if what is being discussed are contingent moral truths only. The attribution of at least contingent moral facts to God the Creator and Sustainer of the corporeal world just does not appear to be that challenging a task, and in fact seems quite a natural step for a committed theist to make.² The challenge is accounting for necessary moral facts. Take the

² The biggest challenge here is how to account for an immaterial God's effecting changes in the physical universe, which admittedly introduces difficult metaphysical questions. But
example of slaughtering an innocent child. If any necessary moral truth is out there, something like the moral impropriety, indeed treachery, of such an action would seem to qualify impeccably. Yet if God’s sovereign volitions dictate the content of morality, then how could such a moral truth be a necessary one? For God’s command could ostensibly contravene and override it. Abraham in the Old Testament is portrayed as having been issued a divine command to perform this very deed, to offer up his own innocent son as a sacrifice to God. Abraham is then further portrayed as doing the laudable thing by his willingness to obey the command. Indeed, in certain Hassidic literature on the passage, Abraham is depicted as obedient to the precise extent to which he excises feelings of remorse or compassion for his son out of his overriding desire to please and obey God. Yet it is easy to imagine Abraham feeling at least a conflict of obligations, for a prohibition against the killing of innocents is also something he would have expected of divine commands. Such conflict of obligations seems to be a living possibility once a radically voluntarist DCT is affirmed, for given whatever moral principle the theist might be tempted to think of as necessary, she always sees the need to retain a measure of tentativeness given the possibility of a new command from God. If even the killing of innocents is alterable, then so would just about anything else, it would seem.

With this background, we can see more clearly the metaphysical issues at stake in the Euthyphro Dilemma. Is something good or right because God wills it, or does God will it because it is good or right? It is common to think that if morality is dependent on God, then God could have rendered its contents into

such questions are not within the purview of this dissertation. That God in fact can and does effect such changes in the physical world, though, is an important and historical part of orthodox Christian theology. A philosophical defense of such divine intervention would
whatever he chose it to be. Dependence is thought to entail control. Such a radically voluntaristic view like Ockham's stands in patent variance with realism or, historically, natural law. If morality, on the one hand, rests on objective, necessary truths that not even God can change, then DCT is taken to be false. For then morality is ontologically independent of God. Invariance is thought to entail aseity, as we saw with the twin pillars of realism. What is a thoroughgoing theist to do? Affirm realism and deny that God's creation encompasses the realm of necessity, or affirm DCT and deny that there are any necessary (moral) truths? Neither option strikes the theist as the slightest bit palatable. Fortunately, there is a third option, and it is an option that this dissertation embraces.

The new alternative, though, is really quite old. It has a venerable history in the tradition of Christian thought. Augustine's "divine ideas tradition," Leibniz's effort to root mathematical truth in God's noetic activity, Aquinas's insistence that anything, that in any way is, is from God, Descartes's view of constant creation—all of these efforts were motivated by the theological conviction that God is at the root of reality. It's the view that his creative power is what sustains reality and that absolutely everything apart from him is dependent on him. This dissertation is well aware of the differences among such thinkers, and does not endorse each of their ideas. For instance, I reject Descartes's mathematical voluntarism, just as I reject Ockham's moral voluntarism. But the impulse and theological rationale behind such maneuvers is one with which I sympathize and wish to retain. Fortunately, there is a way of doing so generally, and specifically within the realm of value theory, that may not result in intractable objections.

have to argue, minimally, that even if the logistics of such intervention remain mysterious, they at least do not necessarily involve a patent or insuperable contradiction.
Following Morris, this dissertation calls such a solution, this third option between realism and voluntarism, theistic activism. According to this view, a divine intellectual activity is responsible for the framework of reality. "A theistic activist," writes Morris, "will hold God creatively responsible for the entire modal economy, for what is possible as well as what is necessary and what is impossible. The whole Platonic realm is thus seen as deriving from God" (Morris 1987a, 168). The trick in effecting this rapprochement between realism and classical theism is to affirm realism's invariance while rejecting its aseity, except of course when it comes to God. This way dependence on God can be maintained while universal possibilism can be rejected. The account of how the recent version of this contemporary developing view has come about is interesting as well.

It began with Plantinga taking on universal possibilism in Does God Have a Nature? Examining Descartes's arguments, he shows that the debate over universal possibilism thus theologically motivated boils down to a conflict over intuitions. Specifically, the conflict is between the intuition that (1) some propositions are impossible and the intuition that (2) if God is genuinely sovereign, then everything is possible. Clearly it seems the case that not everything is possible and that God is genuinely sovereign. The tension stated thus baldly leads one to reject the latter before the former. As already pointed out in Chapter 2, meaningful religious discourse requires a deity at least some number of whose features are somewhat epistemically available to us. For the result of unqualified Anselmianism is not an affirmation of mere mystery and an exalted view of God, but patent contradiction and a cognitively vacuous notion of deity. This philosophical point has to be made with fear and trembling by the theistic philosopher, who is ever aware of the danger of confusing a human
inability to understand X with God's inability to do X. But in this case the theist can have a fair measure of confidence in the theological propriety and relative circumspection of the maneuver. For otherwise his theological commitments are rendered meaningless. If absolutely nothing is impossible, then a true affirmation of God's existence is compatible with God's actual, and indeed necessary, nonexistence! A rejection of universal possibilism is an affirmation that some propositions are true necessarily, and it would seem that all advocates of DCT ought to realize they are functioning under this constraint.

An affirmation of necessity, though, particularly synthetic nonnatural necessary claims, has been thought inconsistent with full-fledged theism. For such necessary truths are taken to be in competition with God, eternally co-existent with God, unchangeable by God, independent of God, and potential constraints on God. As such they are perceived as a decisive threat to God's sovereignty and omnipotence. However, if we draw a distinction between control and dependence, and deny Descartes's assumption that dependence always requires control, then perhaps such necessary truths do not pose a threat to Anselmian theism after all. This seems to be what Plantinga is groping for in his rejection of the Cartesian intuition that if God is genuinely sovereign then everything is possible. Is God's sovereignty consistent with there being truths — certain ethical truths, for instance — that obtain necessarily? Could necessary truths depend on God in some sense other than control? Closer to the end of Does God Have a Nature?, Plantinga speculates about such a possibility, suggesting that such a possibility may mean that exploring the realm of abstract objects (necessarily existing entities and necessary truths) is tantamount to exploring the very nature of God. But largely this possibility is left unexplored at this juncture, with Plantinga posing a number of questions:
Can we ever say of a pair of necessary propositions A and B that A makes B true or A is the explanation of the truth of B? Could we say, perhaps, that necessarily \(7+5=12\) is grounded in [it's part of God's nature to believe that \(7+5=12\)]? If so, what are the relevant senses of 'explains', 'makes true' and 'grounded in'? These are good questions, and good topics for further study. If we can study them affirmatively, then perhaps we can point to an important dependence of abstract objects upon God, even though necessary truths about these objects are not within his control (Plantinga 1980, 146).

Plantinga himself would take up such questions two years later in a presidential address to the APA entitled "How to be an Anti-Realist," offering a means to affirm such a dependence relation other than by way of control. In an effort to mediate the realism/anti-realism dispute, Plantinga first distinguishes between existential and creative anti-realism. To be an existential anti-realist with respect to other minds, for instance, is to deny their existence. Creative anti-realism, though, owing its inspiration to Kant, posits that things in the world owe their fundamental structure and perhaps their very existence to the noetic activity of minds. The creative anti-realists Plantinga then takes as representatives of one side of the dispute are those like Richard Rorty who want to make a claim about truth, namely, that it is "provability, or verifiability, or perhaps warranted assertability" (Plantinga 1982, 50). Plantinga demonstrates how Putnam too makes a similar claim that truth is just verifiability, since even if verification is tied to the deliverances of an ideally rational scientific community that had all the relevant evidence, the conditions under which a statement is verified depends on our having adopted a certain set of practices and modes of behavior. "On
Putnam's view, therefore, whether dinosaurs once roamed the earth depends upon us and our linguistic practices" (Plantinga 1982, 52).

After arguing against Rorty's and Putnam's versions of anti-realism, Plantinga tries to capture the central impulse of anti-realism in his own account. That central impulse is that truths cannot be totally independent of minds or persons. As Plantinga puts it,

Truths are the sort of things persons know; and the idea that there are or could be truths quite beyond the best methods of apprehension seems peculiar and outré and somehow outrageous. What would account for such truths? How would they get there? Where would they come from? How could the things that are in fact true or false – propositions, let's say – exist in serene and majestic independence of persons and their means of apprehension? How could there be propositions no one has ever so much as grasped or thought of? It can seem just crazy to suppose that propositions could exist independent of minds or persons or judging beings. That there should just be these truths, independent of persons and their noetic activities can, in certain moods and from certain perspectives, seem wildly counterintuitive. How could there be truths, or for that matter, falsehoods, if there weren't any person to think or believe or judge them? (Plantinga 1982, 67-68)

Platonism, again, is an example of a view that such entities as the pantheon of abstract objects – propositions, states of affairs, possible worlds, numbers, properties, etc. – exist and exist independently of everything else, including minds and their noetic activity. Such a view goes counter to this anti-realist
impulse of which Plantinga speaks. Note that Plantinga is not rejecting the objectivity associated with realism, only the mind-independence. I mentioned earlier that we ought to consider rejecting just this distinction. If we did, then Plantinga's notion would be a defense of realism consistent with a particular kind of mind-dependence. Plantinga can be seen here, despite his forceful words, to be providing less an argument than a consideration that some, though not all, may find compelling:

So what we really have here is a sort of antinomy. On the one hand there is a deep impulse towards anti-realism; there can't really be truths independent of noetic activity. On the other hand, there is the disquieting fact that anti-realism, at least of the sorts we have been considering, seems incoherent and otherwise objectionable. We have here a paradox seeking resolution, a thesis and antithesis seeking synthesis. And what is by my lights the correct synthesis, was suggested long before Hegel. This synthesis was suggested by Augustine, endorsed by most of the theistic tradition, and given succinct statement by Thomas Aquinas:

"Even if there were no human intellects, there could be truths because of their relation to the divine intellect. But if, per impossible, there were no intellects at all, but things continued to exist, then there would be no such reality as truth." The thesis, then, is that truth cannot be independent of noetic activity on the part of persons. The antithesis is that it must be independent of our noetic activity. And the synthesis is that truth is independent of our intellectual activity but not of God's (Plantinga 1982, 68).
Plantinga's suggestion is interesting. What he is attempting to provide here is a way that propositions can depend on God without their truth being necessarily subject to God's control. What he therefore attempts to provide is what he had been groping for in Does God Have a Nature?, namely, a nontrivial dependence relation of even necessary propositions on God other than one of control. Plantinga is not suggesting that a necessarily true proposition is true because God believes it. Instead, he suggests that a proposition exists because God conceives it. Propositions, on his view, are best thought of as thoughts of God. Rather than this compromising the necessary existence of propositions, it accounts for it; for God is a necessary being who has essentially the property of thinking just some of the thoughts he does. These thoughts, then, are conceived by God in every possible world and hence exist necessarily. So God believes a proposition because it is true, but the proposition exists because God thinks it. In this way Plantinga argues that the best way to capture the fundamental anti-realist intuition is by being a theist.

This view of Plantinga's is highly controversial. It is also extremely difficult to make more compelling or convincing to those unpersuaded. Worse yet, it is a view or close to a view central to much of this dissertation's approach. It happens to constitute that aforementioned one additional intuition that, conjoined with a commitment to synthetic nonnatural necessary moral truths, inexorably leads one to something like theistic ethics. Of course, not an insubstantial number of philosophers do find it compelling, not so much as an argument perhaps than as a means of capturing Anselmian intuitions on the matter. Similarly with belief in God's existence among many theists, which often is not much based in philosophical argument, even if those arguments are there. Similarly, one's belief in the existence of other minds is not typically generated as the deliverance of
philosophical argument. Belief in God’s sustaining of, e.g., moral truths is more like a deeply held intuition than the deliverance of a protracted argument. Whereas Plantinga is tipping his hat to the tradition of equating realism with mind-independence (or at least making the latter necessary for the former), this dissertation would rather revise the notion of realism to capture invariance and leave mind-independence out of it. Creative anti-realism in Plantinga’s sense applied to ethics reminds readers of Mackie’s view that the prescriptively odd features of moral facts and relations make them unlikely to have arisen without God to create them. Except whereas Mackie rejects such facts and such theism, Plantinga accepts them. We might say Mackie had a similar intuition, though, that perhaps God could account for the existence of such moral realism, if only he existed. It is interesting to note that he probably did not have anything like a well-thought-out account of the mechanisms of this dependence relation, just a general sort of intuition. To be honest that is largely all I still have, an intuition that my belief in synthetic necessary moral facts seems more likely in a theistic universe than an atheistic one. Surely this sort of intuition is why some have felt that God’s nonexistence has huge ethical implications. I am probably more open to Plantinga’s argument because of this prior conviction of mine than because my conviction is bolstered by Plantinga’s argument. All of this may suggest that the plausibility of Plantinga’s insight for the reader might be a function of the relative quality one attaches to something like a moral argument for God’s existence. But if so, there is only so much I can try to do to provide further support for Plantinga’s argument before I find myself exceeding the parameters of this dissertation.

Before proceeding further, however, allow me to direct the reader’s attention to one other discussion of related topics in the article “Necessary
Existence" by Robert M. Adams (1983). At the end of his piece, while discussing how to account for human knowledge of necessary truths, finding other accounts lacking, and admitting a heavy indebtedness to Leibniz, he writes:

Suppose that necessary truths do determine and explain facts about the real world. If God of his very nature knows the necessary truths, and if he has created us, he could have constructed us in such a way that we would at least commonly recognize necessary truths as necessary. In this way there would be a causal connection between what is necessarily true about real objects and our believing it to be necessarily true about them. It would not be an incredible accident or an inexplicable mystery that our beliefs agreed with the objects in this.

This theory is not new. It is Augustinian, and something like it was widely accepted in the medieval and early modern periods. I think it provides the best explanation available to us for our knowledge of necessary truths. I also think that that fact constitutes an argument for the existence of God. Not a demonstration; it is a mistake to expect conclusive demonstrations in such matters. But it is a theoretical advantage of theistic belief that it provides attractive explanations of things otherwise hard to explain.

It is worth noting that this is not the only point in the philosophy of logic at which Augustinian theism provides an attractive explanation. Another is the ontological status of the objects of logic and mathematics. To many of us both of the following views seem extremely plausible. (1) Possibilities and
necessary truths are discovered, not made, by our thought. They would still be there if none of us humans ever thought of them. (2) Possibilities and necessary truths cannot be there except insofar as they, or the ideas involved in them, are thought by some mind. The first of these views seems to require Platonism; the second is a repudiation of it. Yet they can both be held together if we suppose that there is a non-human mind that eternally and necessarily exists and thinks all the possibilities and necessary truths. Such is the mind of God, according to Augustinian theism. I would not claim that such theism provides the only conceivable way of combining these two theses; but it does provide one way, and I think the most attractive (Adams 1983, 751).

Applying this to ethics, consider the proposition 'It is bad to torture children for the fun of it'. Such a proposition is usually thought to be necessarily true. On Plantinga's creative anti-realist view, God believes such a proposition because it is true, rather than its being true because God believes it. On this score, Plantinga seems to embrace the guided will horn of the ED. Consistent with Plantinga's rejection of universal possibilism, not even God could alter such a proposition's truth value. Yet the proposition expressing such a truth exists due to God's thinking it, which he always has and always will. Thus, the proposition, at least, expressing such a necessary truth depends on God, even though God does not and cannot alter its contents. Of course on my view he has not the slightest intention to, either; for there is perfect resonance between his nature and will. From this perspective, Plantinga affirms a substantive dependence relation of propositions expressing necessary truths on the creative activity of God. It is important to emphasize that Plantinga, quite rightly, recognizes such a
maneuver as much in the spirit of Augustine's divine ideas tradition and of an important strand of Thomistic thought, and thus generally consonant with some powerful historical elements of the Christian tradition.

In a more recent work, Plantinga suggests that what we can learn from Christian scripture and by faith gives us a clearer view of the world. Now we see, for example, "what is most important about all the furniture of heaven and earth — namely, that it has been created by God. We can even come to see, if we reflect, what is most important about numbers, propositions, properties, states of affairs, and possible worlds: namely, that they really are divine thoughts or concepts" (Plantinga 2000, 280). Plantinga calls such a view 'theistic conceptualism', which can be thought of an important subset of what Morris calls theistic activism. He adds that though such a view is controversial, it is certainly the "majority opinion in the tradition of those theists who have thought about it" (280). On such a view, of which Augustine's doctrine of "divine ideas" was a precursor, propositions are divine thoughts, properties divine concepts, and sets divine collections.

Again, applying this model to value theory, Morris writes,

Distinguishing carefully between issues of dependence and control is itself of some significant philosophical interest. For consider as an example the famous Euthyphro problem concerning morality. Is whatever is right right because God wills it, or does God will whatever is right because it is right? It has been thought by many philosophers that if morality is dependent on God, it follows that God could have made it right to torture innocent people for pleasure merely by willing it. This is the extreme position of theistic voluntarism, for which William of Ockham is notorious. On the other hand, if morality rests on
objective, necessary truths such as that it is wrong to torture innocent people for pleasure – truths outside God’s control – then it is widely held that this entails that morality is independent of God. On the view of theistic activism, moral truths can be objective, unalterable, and necessary, and yet still dependent on God. Thus, activism offers us a new perspective on the Euthyphro dilemma for morality. And this should come as no surprise, since theistic activism can be understood, in part, as resulting from an attempt to deal with what can be considered a parallel and more general Euthyphro-style dilemma for modality: Is it merely the case that God affirms the necessary truths because of the way in which they are true, or are they necessarily true because of the way he affirms them? For a theistic activist, a careful distinction between questions of dependence and control allows an answer which can serve as an important component of any thoroughly theistic metaphysic with a Platonist ontology and an S5 modal logic (Morris 1987a, 171-172). [The relevant aspect of an S5 modal ontology is, of course, the entailment of necessity from possible necessity.]

God as the Good

A reconciliation of realism and mind-dependence goes hand-in-glove with an effort to identify God with the ultimate Good. Thomists, Anselmians, and theistic activists, along with such contemporary analytic philosophers as Alvin Plantinga and Robert M. Adams, all concur that on a Christian understanding of reality God and the ultimate Good are ontologically inseparable. More than that,
God is in a sense prior to the latter. Goodness depends on God in a deeper sense than God depends on Goodness. But this asymmetry is subtle, because Goodness, on this view, is nothing but God's nature itself. What God wills or commands is a function of that nature, but his nature, on my view, takes ontological primacy, just as issues of the Good stand prior to issues of obligation in what I take to be the right moral theory.

Although these various philosophers and philosophical systems agree that God is the ultimate Good, they tend to disagree on how best to arrive at this conclusion. The Thomists arrive there by means mentioned in an earlier chapter, Plantinga by making Goodness a category of God's mind, and Adams by a slightly different route yet. The consistency of these various means of arriving at the conclusion is a question better left for another time. In a sense this dissertation is less committed to any particular way of arriving at the conclusion than to the conclusion itself. I suspect that the ultimate ontological inseparableness of God and the Good is something of a rock-bottom Anselmian intuition. That so many solid theists through the centuries have gravitated toward such a view bolsters this impression. If God is the ultimate Good, such that necessary moral truths are somehow grounded in or dependent on God, then indeed Plantinga is right that to apprehend such truths is to catch a glimpse of God himself. I believe this is the case, but I know of no universally compelling way to persuade my readers of such a view. In a sense this is permissible given the limited goals of this dissertation. If such dependence obtains or is even possible and could make a theistic ethic work, avoiding the various common objections, then the ED does not pose the intractable objection for which it is often credited. That I can't construct the precise mechanism of this dependence relation right now leaves work undone, to be sure, but the greater burden is on
the critic of theistic ethics to demonstrate it's not possible. Personally for now I'm content, following Plantinga's advice to Christian philosophers, with tentatively offering this theistic hypothesis to see where it might lead. This isn't uncommon in philosophy; a utilitarian, for instance, doesn't have to spell out exactly how maximizing utility makes for morality every time he offers an analysis from his perspective.

To see one intelligent and plausible paradigm of such a view that God is the Good, let's review this aspect of Robert M. Adams's *Finite and Infinite Goods*. Borrowing some themes from Plato, Adams insists that a natural move for a theist to make is to take God as best filling the role played by the Beautiful in *Symposium* or the Good in the *Republic*. Adams takes intimations of an ultimate Good or ultimate paradigm of Beauty as veridical, akin to beatific visions of God among theists, and thinks it only natural a theist would take God himself as ultimately that which we apprehend in those moments. On Adams's view, the infinite and transcendent Good, understood as God himself, is central and foundational to the right moral theory. He notes that Kantian, Aristotelian, and utilitarian approaches in ethics flourish, while Platonic theories often go neglected. His is a theistic Platonic account, though he admits more theistic than Platonic. For while he tries to think through the whole area of ethics from a theistic point of view, he does not agree with everything in Plato, key points of resonance notwithstanding. Importantly, too, Adams, following Christian theology, does not view badness or evil as a commensurate contrast with the Good. Badness, though real, is not so deeply rooted in reality as the Good. Satan on a Christian view is not the ontological grounding of evil the way God is of the Good. Satan is instead a mere created entity dependent for his existence on the sustaining activity of God. Badness tends to be a privation or, more likely,
perversion of the Good, on a Christian understanding, not its equal and opposite paradigm.

One of the criticisms of a Thomistic equation of God and Goodness, understood in terms of God being the same as his properties, is that it seems implausible to suggest that God could be identical to some abstract object or property like Goodness. Adams's account makes better sense of the equation by first noting a recurring debate among Plato scholars as to whether the Forms are best understood as properties or universals on the one hand, or standards, paradigms, archetypes, or exemplars on the other. Adams opts for predicating the equation of God and Goodness on God functioning as the exemplar of Goodness. Thus understood, we can make better sense of the person of God constituting Goodness, in the sense of being its exemplar, perfect standard, ultimate paradigm, and final source. The tension between person and universal, or substance and property, is thus avoided. Although I mainly just critiqued Levin's contribution in Chapter 1, I think his work instructive in reminding us that we need not commit to making the standards of morality into universals before they acquire sufficient evaluative and binding prescriptive force.

In identifying God with the ultimate Good, Adams is not interested in saying the role filled by the Good captures every meaning of the word 'good'. For such a word is used in ever so many different varieties, including instrumental, emotivist, and colloquial ways not much related to the ultimate intrinsic Good. Adams is most interested in talking about the Goodness signified by uses of the word 'good' or 'goodness' in contexts when such words refer to something like excellence. Following the direct reference theorists, Adams generalizes their insight about natural kinds to suggest a relation of natures to meanings, and hence about the relation of metaphysics to semantics. Whether or not the direct
reference theorists are right about the way we use 'water', for instance, he insists that we certainly could use a word in that way. And he proposes that we do use ethical discourse in an analogous way, which enables us to distinguish between the semantics of ethical discourse and what we may call the metaphysical part of ethical theory. Not that good, he insists, is a natural kind; but the meaning of the word 'good' may be related to the nature of the good in something like the way that has been proposed for natural kinds (15). He writes

As good is not a natural kind in the way that water is, the meaning of the word 'good' does not direct us to anything like a chemical structure. And we cannot assume that causal interactions with concrete samples will fix the reference of 'good' in the same way that the reference of 'water' is fixed. What is it, then, that connects the word 'good' with things that are good, or with the property that is goodness?

It is possible, I think, to indicate a general pattern for the relation of natures to meanings where the nature is not given by the meaning. What is given by the meaning, or perhaps more broadly by the use of words, is a role that the nature is to play. If there is a single candidate that best fills the role, that will be the nature of the thing. In the case of a natural kind, arguably, the role its nature is assigned by our language is that of accounting causally for the observable common properties of identified samples. The role that the meaning of 'good' picks out for the nature of the good will be rather different (16).
The role of our desires, on Adams's view, is to fix the signification of our value terminology to a property or object that has its own nature independent of our desires. He writes that if there is indeed a single best candidate for the role of the Good itself, or the property of goodness, there may certainly be some things that do not agree with it, and therefore fail to be good, even if virtually all of us think they are good. But a property that belonged mainly to things that almost all of us have always thought were bad would surely not be filling the role picked out by our talk of 'goodness'.

For Adams, whatever best fills the role of Goodness is an object of admiration, desire, and recognition, at least commonly and to some degree. He insists that if we do not place some trust in our own recognition of the good, we will lose our grip on the concept of good, and our cognitive contact with the Good itself. But it's more subtle than the Good always being the object of our eros. The thesis in this vicinity that seems to Adams the most clearly correct is that to the extent that anything is good, in the sense of "excellent," it is good for us to love it, admire it, and want to be related to it, whether we do in fact or not. Adams believes that x is excellent implies not only that it is good to value x, but also that this goodness of valuing x is grounded in the excellence of x and independent of ulterior values that may be served by the valuing.

As a theist, Adams understandably thinks it most plausible to take God as best filling this role, and heartily commends other theists to do the same. I submit that it's the most natural move for any committed theist, or at least any committed Anselmian, to make. On this foundation Adams then makes the claim, roughly following Plato, that the property of goodness consists in the relation of resemblance to the ultimate Good. To the extent finite goods measure up to the ultimate standard, they are themselves good.
From here on, I will assume something at least close to Adams’s account of the ultimate Good, predicking much of what I have to say on it. Anyone who rejects this identity will find some of what I have to say proportionately less persuasive.

A More Virulent Strain of Anti-Realism

By way of anticipating a possible objection at this point, a more strident version of anti-realism needs to be mentioned and its challenge acknowledged. A reader might construe Adams’s deployment of the insights of the direct reference theorists as a subtle way of conferring on moral facts an ontological status they do not have, and such a reader may find such a move dubious. Noncognitivists, for instance, or most anti-realists more generally, remain skeptical about there being anything more to ethical properties and relations or moral facts than simply what our moral language use is designed to mean. Thus there is no need to go from semantics to ontology in Adams’s sense, for there is nothing ontologically there to find. Semantics is enough to capture meaning. And given obvious disanalogies between morality and something like water, the argument goes, the assumption that there is anything more to the nature of morality than the meaning of our moral locutions remains doubtful.

An examination of the logic of moral language in fact yields considerable insight into the way language is used, perhaps enough to satisfy our moral appetite. Consider ‘ought’-talk, for instance, language to the effect that one morally ought to perform some action, help disenfranchised persons, or refrain from cultivating a particular personal habit or character trait. Setting aside the origins of such talk, and holding in abeyance any meta-ethical theory by which to explain it, we can content ourselves with semantic analysis about what such talk
implies and presupposes. Such language is not merely descriptive, for instance, but also prescriptive and evaluative, at least often, involving the adoption of a particular kind of attitude toward the action so characterized. To characterize X as obligatory is to prescribe the action for ourselves, to be committed to it when appropriate circumstances arise, and to prescribe it for others.

Divine command theorists can fully appreciate the semantic force of such observations while still remain hungry for something more than what such insights provide. Semantics is important, but not all-important. People's actual moral language usage arguably gives an advantage to realist theories over stridently anti-realist ones, but allow me to soften the reader up to more than a semantic analysis alone a different way. To make my case I wish to appeal to semantics itself. In these increasingly permissive days of moral license, talk of 'open-mindedness' is often promoted in popular discussions of ethics. People need to loosen up, we're told, not impose their views on others, realize that people are diverse, and generally be more open-minded about other people's moral attitudes. Whatever the particular merit is of such individualistic and relativistic sentiments, I would like to make my own case for a brand of open-mindedness in the realm of moral discussion. On the basis of an examination of the way moral words are most typically used and understood, I would like to make a case against being closed-minded to the possibility of a theistic foundation of ethical ontology. Just such an examination of language use is a key component of any substantive semantic analysis of the language of conduct. It should be noted, in this connection, that Adams's appeal to direct reference was not so much intended as an argument against the importance of the semantical and linguistic as it was intended to underscore the deficiency of semantics in capturing morality's essence if such an essence is there to be found. In this way,
Adams’s suggestion about the limits of semantics is analogous to William James’s critique of Cliffordian evidentialism on the basis that it would potentially prevent finding certain kinds of truth even if they are there to be found. And as James was wont to say, such an approach is irrational.

What is needed for taking up Adams’s suggestion to consider what the essence of morality may turn out to be beyond merely the meanings associated with ‘moral’ is no knock-down argument for a nonnatural moral ontology. Rather, all we need is a good reason to consider such an ontology possible. As long as this is at least possible, then Adam’s point – and the point of this chapter – can be taken simply as this: A semantically reductionist analysis alone will be inadequate for capturing what the essence of morality may be in the contingency of this ontological possibility as the way reality actually stands. The logical question to ask is what, if any, considerations might be given for taking such a possibility seriously? Interestingly, in an important article written several decades ago, Elizabeth Anscombe gives a powerful, historically informed, Wittgensteinian-inspired semantic consideration that can be adduced in favor of entertaining such a possibility. In “Modern Moral Philosophy” (1958), she makes a case that to understand the way the moral language-game is played we have to see the way it developed out of a specifically theistic context in the western world. In this context, oughtness and rightness and other moral concepts were tied to the commands of God. Lacking such ongoing undergirding assumptions, our moral terminology lacks its historical foundations and retains its force only insofar as it illegitimately borrows against that history, which it usually does without citing the source. Thus, ‘ought’ still carries its perceived prescriptive force, in accord with those aforementioned semantic insights about moral locutions. But such force historically derives from prevailing assumptions about oughtness being rooted in
theology among those from earlier generations not nearly so averse as we to moral metaphysics. Today it retains such prescriptive connotations only illegitimately, without the undergirding background theories, prevailing assumptions, and plausibility structures that made for this language game initially.

The force of Anscombe's point is limited, most certainly. We can see the feet of the genetic fallacy at the door, as it were, since the historical origins of words and concepts we employ have a limited relevance to the way we choose to use them today. But I submit that there is more than ample force in Anscombe's point to make the case, with one proviso, that we should be at least open to the possibility of a nonnatural ontology generally or even a supernatural moral ontology specifically. Such openness is all that is required to concede the radical limitations of semantic analyses in providing insight into what the essential nature of morality might be. The aforementioned proviso is that such an argument should work at least for those who continue to use traditional moral language to refer to such concepts as goodness, wrongness, and oughtness in the usual ways, replete with this borrowed prescriptivity. Granted, this is nearly everyone, save perhaps those who make explicit their idiosyncratic usage of such terms and notions. These eccentric users of moral language need not acknowledge the force of Anscombe's story in taking seriously the ontological possibility, and would instead have to be offered other sorts of considerations. And of course, even if someone does not buy Anscombe's historical points, a modicum of fair-mindedness is all that's needed to see the potentially question-begging orientation of a semantic analysis that precludes metaphysical analysis, offers only an anti-realist metaphysical bias from the outset, or in any other way stacks the deck against a supernatural ontological possibility.
Conclusion

This chapter began and ended with semantics, but in between we explored the nature of goodness rather than just the meaning of 'good'. A serious look at semantics and definist analyses of terms is of vital importance, offering all of the following:

(1) rules for competent language usage,
(2) a window into practices of linguistic communities,
(3) insights into the emotional and dispositional attitudes associated with various expressions,
(4) limitations in specifying logically sufficient conditions for the application of a term,
(5) a delimitation of the range of analytic entailments an expression can possess, and
(6) a picture of the complexity of the social forms of life contributing to the way words are used and what they conversationally imply.

But both the logic and history of DCT show semantic analyses as inviting philosophers beyond mere words to a world to which words merely point. A full discussion of DCT cannot avoid examining substantive metaphysical claims involving relations of supervenience, causation, or some other type of dependence relation that transcends semantics. Theistic activism posits a dependence relation of moral goodness on God that suggests their ontological inseparability, making an examination of necessary moral truths an apprehension of the very nature of God. An Anselmian God is much more like the ultimate and invariant Good for which Socrates groped than the man-made, fickle Athenian deities. Even though God and Goodness are conceptually distinct, they are, on
my view, ontologically inseparable. Though this dissertation embraces a nonvoluntaristic axiological conception of the Good, it rejects Sober's thought that this entails that the Good is independent of God. Outside his control, yes, but not independent. Once more, this dissertation rests content with a God who is less than absolute in every sense.

Of course, the thrust of this chapter stands somewhat at odds with certain trends in philosophy from the twentieth century, such as Wittgenstein's radical demarcation of the range of philosophical inquiry as involving just a study of words we use and what they presuppose in terms of social practice and shared assumptions. However, a great many philosophers hold the view that this preoccupation with semantics leaves many of the enduring philosophical questions largely untouched. Moreover, we've identified a set of semantic insights along distinctively Wittgensteinian lines — for Anscombe was one of his star students — that can serve as a corrective to inordinately reductionist semantic analyses.

This dissertation thus rejects the notion that something is good because God commands it. James Rachels, for one, simplistically rejects DCT by blurring distinctions between the good and the right in a way entirely unbecoming of good philosophy. Assuming that God might command us to be truthful, Rachels writes, "On this option, the reason we should be truthful is simply that God requires it. Apart from the divine command, truth telling is neither good nor bad. It is God's command that makes truthfulness right" (Rachels 1993, 48). This is confused. On my view God invites us to care about a good like truth entirely independently of God's commands, and to tell the truth because we want to, not because we have to. Rachels's claim that apart from God's command the advocates of DCT is committed to the view that truth-telling is neither good nor bad is predicated on
their espousing voluntarist accounts of both the good and the right. Only the most simplistic and easily refutable versions of DCT do so, usually only the definist analyses. Then, rather than lamenting such weak versions of theistic ethics’ failure to distinguish between its axiological and deontic components, Rachels himself contributes to the confusion by using ‘good’ and ‘obligation’ interchangeably. The net effect is the erecting of DCT as the most eminent of strawmen. This is not a practice befitting good philosophy.

Having discussed axiological issues, it is now time for the deontic aspects of my view. In other words, having discussed a theory of the good, now it is time for a theory of the right, by which I primarily mean a theory of moral obligation.
IV

A Theory of the Right

Divine command theories come in numerous varieties, depending on the stance they assume on several important questions concerning what will be referred to here as 'DCT distinctions' that offer differing ways in which to affirm morality's dependence on God. Some of these distinctions have already been introduced, such as whether the theory in question is pure or guided, whether it is to be taken as a semantic or ontological theory, and whether it is deontic or axiological in nature or both. Those three particular distinctions are just the beginning of a substantial list of vitally important distinctions – some mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive and others not – that pose a challenge to the defender of DCT to explicate the nature and scope of his particular theory. These distinctions cut across the topic in different ways, from various angles, and at disparate levels. Nonetheless they collectively hold in common a practical monopoly in shaping the nature of each DCT. Both their differences and certain connections and intersections obtaining between the DCT distinctions will be made clear in the following pages. In this chapter the salient dozen of such distinctions will be explicating in the process of showing some measure of the variety of ways in which morality has been argued (in the literature) to be dependent on God in one way or another. Reviewing this litany of distinctions will serve both as a review of some of the most important points made so far, as well as a way to extend the discussion the way a full treatment of DCT requires. Then, the particular form of DCT to be defended in the upcoming chapter – against probably the two strongest objections to DCT (arbitrariness and vacuity)
Varieties of Dependence: The Twelve Distinctions

Perhaps the most fundamental DCT distinction holds between whether the theory in question depends on God's existence or not, thus involving an existential question. At first the idea may seem more than a little paradoxical that any DCT might countenance an atheistic universe and still be held as true. As has already been noticed, however, an atheist can hold a DCT but then just maintain that, since God does not exist, morality has no undergirding foundations. Certain theistic DCTists, though by no means all, similarly endorse the Karamazov hypothesis that, if God does not exist, everything is permissible. Another way that DCT, of a kind, can be noncommittal about God's existence is in the form of an Ideal Observer Theory (IOT), of which there are two main varieties. An ideal observer is a hypothetical being possessed of various qualities, whose moral reactions to actions, persons, and states of affairs figure centrally in certain theories of ethics. The two main types of the theory are those that take the reactions of ideal observers as a standard of the correctness of moral judgments, and those that analyze the meanings of moral judgments in terms of the reactions of ideal observers (Audi 1999, 414). This dissertation has embraced a stronger ontological dependence relation of morality on God. IOT can hold irrespective of whether God exists or not; this dissertation's view, in contrast, is simply wrong if God does not exist (and perhaps wrong even if he does). God's nonexistence would lead to the Karamazov hypothesis, on my theory, just in case the anti-realist intuition denying the aseity of synthetic necessary moral truths is veridical. But since I do not have more confidence in
that intuition than in something like the evil nature of torturing kids for fun, the Karamazov hypothesis, even if true, will not pose a serious temptation to embrace. For the most part this dissertation refrains from speculating about the nature of morality in the contingency of God's not existing, since I consider such a scenario to be a counterfactual (indeed, a counter-essential) about which I have little to say (other than the fact that if it's true then I am radically wrong). The ED, in contrast, is often put forth as an argument against an ontological connection between God and morality by atheists conjecturing about a theistic world they consider counterfactual. Nontheistic detractors from DCT thus tend to be considerably more ambitious in their critiques of my view than I am of theirs, which would be fine if their criticisms work. I will argue that they do not.

The next DCT distinction is that between *motivation* and *content*: that is, is morality's dependence on God thought to be a dependence relation concerning the motivation of moral agents or the actual content of morality? These are by no means mutually exclusive, for a DCT'ist can easily affirm both. Nonetheless they are easily conceptually distinguishable and either can be affirmed without the other. The motivational aspects will be discussed briefly now, while a discussion of aspects of content dependence will be held in abeyance until the next section, so central it is to the version of DCT to be defended here. The motivation that religious conviction is thought to provide for

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1 It has already been emphasized that this dissertation will *not* deal with morality's content so much as morality's relationship to God. But I'm about to say that a consideration of content is central to this treatment, more so than a consideration of motivation. How is this reconcilable? 'Content' is equivocal here: On the one hand there is the content question of what exactly the good is, or what exactly are the obligatory actions, and attitudes we need to exhibit? This dissertation will not pursue those questions in great detail. What will be done instead is a discussion of the ways in which the good and the right are dependent on the nature and commands of God, respectively. This issue can loosely be said to be about morality's content too, but not what the content is so much as what the content (the nature of the good, morality's prescriptive force, etc.) rests on ultimately.
moral living centers around a mercenary consideration not unlike that of Euthyphro's. As religiously construed, morality is often depicted as a requirement for salvation, and thus necessary for, in one sense or another, a relationship with God and perhaps entrance into heaven. Thus a moral life is enjoined by religion, it is suggested, in J. P. Moreland's words, to "cover one's cosmic rear end to avoid getting flames on it" (Moreland 1993, 119). Descartes expressed the view that since in this life there are often more rewards for vices than for virtues, few would prefer what is right to what is useful if they neither feared God nor hoped for an afterlife.

Ironically, though, religious conviction often seems to fail as an effective moral motivator. Measured by its own standards, religionists of various stripes have fallen woefully short of ethical greatness, as the history of religious conquest, holy wars, and inquisitions painfully remind us. Pascal's words that evil is never done so zealously as when it is fueled by religious convictions are a poignant reminder that religion has by no means exerted an exclusively positive influence in the history of the world. Not only is religious or Christian conviction not sufficient for ensuring a mature ethical way of life, it would seem unnecessary too. Arguing from features he finds in this world, for instance, Kai Nielsen points out that atheists often live altruistically, find meaning in life, and express considerable compassion.

Furthermore, not only has the presence of religious conviction not always been effective at producing moral behavior, and the absence of religious conviction often not at all harmful to morality, religious conviction has also been argued to be an inherently flawed kind of moral motivation. Moral philosophers, often influenced by Kant, typically bristle at the suggestion that morality's motivation is one of earning a reward or avoiding a punishment. Divine retribution
or reward seems unable to constitute a legitimate form of moral motivation, yet this condition often resides at the heart of basing ethics in religion or theology. Seemingly altruistic behaviors, thus motivated, at their root would reveal self-interested motivations. Rather than feeding the poor, clothing the naked, and housing the homeless out of genuine concern for them and their welfare, the ultimate motivation would instead be sheer self-interest, precisely the kind of mercenary motivation of which Socrates was so critical in the *Euthyphro*. The power of God to effect his purposes (i.e. to punish or reward) might constitute a motive for someone to live morally in such a scenario, albeit an ethically dangerous one, but not much of a principled reason.

However, it is far from clear that religious conviction cannot and should not contribute to a healthy sense of moral motivation. There are no doubt certain religious believers whose convictions stifle their ability to think critically or philosophically. But others, convinced there really is truth to be found, allow their religious convictions to instill in them a love of learning, passion for wisdom, and commitment to careful thought. Analogously, religious conviction gone awry, as it were, can contribute to a modern-day pharisaic, negative, unloving attitude and lifestyle in some people, and no doubt has. But equally undeniably has religious conviction often contributed to a heightened concern for the welfare of suffering sentient beings, a passion for upholding the dignity of human life, and a commitment to serve others selflessly and sacrificially. Great numbers of religiously motivated persons, believing themselves to have been reconciled with God by his grace, demonstrate a profound capacity for altruism by perceiving human relationships as reflective in some sense of the divine. Think of St. Francis of Assisi, for instance, who took so to heart biblical injunctions about pleading the cause of the poor and oppressed, visiting the fatherless and widows
in their affliction, and living worthy of the Christian vocation to which he was
called. His love for God translated into an insatiable love for people, and most
especially a commitment to and love for the poor. For he said he loved the poor
not because they were poor but because Jesus is in them, taking literally the
scriptural teaching that when we do something for the least of those among us,
we do it for God. He found among the poor and those afflicted with leprosy whom
he served an almost sacramental infusion of the person of Christ, waiting to be
loved and cared for. Recall seeing Mother Teresa pouring out her energies in a
lifetime of selfless service for the poor and marginalized. Or consider again
Francis, exchanging his clothes with those of filthy beggars or kissing his lepers,
or Francis Xavier or St. John of God, who are said to have cleansed the sores
and ulcers of their patients with their respective tongues, such benevolence as to
make us, in the words of William James, admire and shudder at the same time.

Even if an unbeliever retains faith in a moral universe, there still remains
a qualitative difference between the Christian and the secular moralist. As
William James writes in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*,

> Morality pure and simple accepts the law of the whole which it
> finds reigning, so far as to acknowledge and obey it, but it may
> obey it with the heaviest and coldest heart, and never cease to
> feel it as a yoke. But for religion, in its strong fully developed
> manifestations, the service of the highest never is felt as a yoke.
> Dull submission is left far behind, and a mood of welcome, which
> may fill any place on the scale between cheerful serenity and
> enthusiastic gladness, has taken its place.... It makes a
tremendous emotional and practical difference to one whether one
accepts the universe in the drab way of stoic resignation to
necessity, or with the passionate happiness of Christian saints. The difference is as great as that between passivity and activity, and that between the defensive and the aggressive mood.... If religion is to mean anything definite for us, it seems to me that we ought to take it as meaning this added dimension of emotion, this enthusiastic temper of espousal, in regions where morality strictly so called can at best but bow its head and acquiesce. It ought to mean nothing short of this new reach of freedom for us, with the struggle over, the keynote of the universe sounding in our ears, and everlasting possession spread before our eyes.... This sort of happiness in the absolute and everlasting is what we find nowhere but in religion (VRE, 41-42).

Perhaps Kant would like to disagree, so convinced he was that nothing stirs the soul like the moral law inscribed within the heart. But it is just this conviction that reality itself is committed to morality in some deep fashion that makes a religious ethic potentially so relevant to moral motivation.

This goes to show that there can be moral benefits of religious conviction that derive from a source other than fear. As Pascal writes,

The immortality of the soul is something of such vital importance to us, affecting us so deeply, that one must have lost all feeling not to care about knowing the facts of the matter. All our actions and thoughts must follow such different paths, according to whether there is hope of eternal blessings or not, that the only possible way of acting with sense and judgment is to decide our course of action in the light of this point, which ought to be our ultimate objective (Pascal 1995, 159).
But mention of eternal blessing resurrects the charge of egoism. As Alasdair Macintyre writes,

> If I am liable to be sent to hell for not doing what God commands, I am thereby provided with a corrupting, because totally self-interested, motive for pursuing the good. When self-interest is made as central as this, other motives are likely to dwindle in importance and a religious morality becomes self-defeating, at least insofar as it was originally designed to condemn pure self-interest (Macintyre 1966, 113).

This type of objection, Jerry Walls notes, has the most force when the sufferings of hell are seen as an externally imposed punishment, bearing no necessary relation to the nature of the moral action involved. But the objection loses some of its momentum when the anguish of hell is seen as a function of a life of evil. This point too is vulnerable to a Kantian-styled objection that criticizes moral motivation to avoid evil simply to avoid the anguish that is typically a natural consequence of such actions and attitudes in a moral world. To the Kantian must be conceded some ground at this point; heaven and hell do, at some level, appeal to self-interest. However, not all self-interest is selfish, and proper self-interest is a legitimate part of genuine moral motivation.² (Walls 1992, 155) This is particularly the case when the self-interested motivation takes for its normative form the renunciation of self-absorption and indulgence. Further, an action that is in one’s self-interest may have been sufficiently motivated by

² At the heart of the mystery of the Christian message is a recurring and suggestive paradox, echoing its refrain in different keys time and again: by losing one’s life one gains it, by confessing and repenting of one’s sin one is forgiven, by dying to self one can come alive in Christ, by pouring your life into another you can be filled, by acknowledging our weaknesses God’s strength can be perfected in us, and most relevantly for present
something other than self-interest to qualify as something for which to be praised. Even Kant himself insisted that practical rationality demands the postulate of a God who will ensure, ultimately, that the virtuous are the happy. Mavrodes writes that "what we have in Kant is the recognition that there cannot be, in any 'reasonable' way, a moral demand upon me, unless reality itself is committed to morality in some deep way" (Mavrodes 1995, 587). Theistic ethics potentially provides an account of how reality itself is thus committed, thus providing a liberation from a Stoic commitment to morality without the psychologically vital confidence that reality itself is ultimately concerned about the best interests of moral persons.

Lest this defensive maneuver designed to salvage the connection between God and morality against Kant's objection makes us lose sight of an important point, it should be remembered that what the theological stance is often criticized for here is the "vice" of solving a heretofore intractable moral dilemma. That dilemma resides in attempting to reconcile morality as concurrently requiring sacrifice of self-interest and protection of self-interest. What has been presented are some steps in the direction of accounting for a meaningful, coherent, and consistent way to retain both of these moral intuitions in synergistic balance. Heaven and hell, thus understood within a matrix of orthodox religious beliefs – according to which salvation is not earned but received through faith in Christ's sacrifice, involving both orthodoxy and orthopraxy – can at least potentially offer substantive motivation to live morally, and perhaps even endure sacrifice of personal interest or even persecution. Since it is often agreed that the proper contents of ethics, generally speaking, are

purposes, by renouncing my self-indulgence and self-absorption I can do the most self-interested thing of all.
not what is up for grabs so much as any sufficiently motivating factors to do what is right, the doctrines of heaven and hell may well provide some hard and needed motivation to live the kind of moral life that makes best sense when understood within a larger context than this life alone.³

A third DCT distinction of vital importance is the aforementioned semantic/nonsemantic distinction, or meaning/signification distinction, whether the DCT in question is a theory about the meaning of moral terms on the one hand, or the nature of morality on the other. The notion that all versions of DCT are definist, preoccupied with the meaning of moral and theological predicates alone, is simply mistaken. The fact is that the strongest versions of DCT seem to be nondefinist in nature. This distinction remains a broad one, for within semantic theories there is quite a bit of diversity, as there is within nonsemantic theories. Some of these internal distinctions will be discussed momentarily. Brown, Quinn, (the later) Adams, and Wierenga are a few examples of DCT'ists whose focus is more nonsemantic. Ewing, Nielsen, Flew, Phillips, Rees, (the early) Adams,

³ Before moving on to the next DCT distinction, a word about this dissertation's view on internalism is in order. As I am following Adams's lead, what he has to say about this is applicable here. Internalism is the view that motives or reasons for action are internal to the content of judgments of value and obligation in such a way that it is impossible to assent sincerely to such a judgment without having a motive, or acknowledging a reason, to act in accordance with the judgment. This is thought by many to support antirealism about value and obligation. Internalism can be distinguished between applying to reasons and applying to motives, where reasons are construed as justifying reasons. An internalism about justifying reasons is compatible with this dissertation's view according to which we are invited to care about intrinsic goods quite apart from being commanded to do so. What of motives, though? Adams at most affirms this: The meaning of 'good' is in large part shaped by the fact that most users of the term are in fact motivated to pursue many of those things that they judge to be good, and are sometimes so motivated because they judge them to be good, and that it is therefore an important part of the semantically indicated role of the good to be the object of the motivated pursuit. Is it an implication of this view that if less than fifty percent of people were not relevantly motivated then 'good' would no longer mean what it does? Perhaps, though this is not objectionable. It would simply imply that the meaning of 'good' would be different, not that the signification of goodness would be any different. This is precisely analogous to the way that 'water' would be the term to pick out XYZ if XYZ had been the predominant liquid in ponds and oceans, but that doesn't change the fact, presumably the necessary fact, that water is H₂O.
Bartley, Paley, Scotus, Ockam, and Biel have spoken of the semantic variety of divine command ethics.

A fourth DCT distinction, also already discussed, is that between pure and guided will theories. (I have also already discussed whether this distinction is mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive.) This important distinction, naturally growing from the ED itself, parallels and encompasses the intension/extension distinction, the objectivity/subjectivity distinction, the metaphysical/epistemic distinction, and the voluntarist/nonvoluntarist distinction. A pure will theory endeavors to provide a voluntarist account of the content of morality, whereas a guided will theory — presupposing coextension between morality and God’s will but making God merely the epistemic source of such content — provides only an extensional account of morality. This distinction is further enriched with the addition of the seventh distinction to be discussed.

A fifth distinction pertains to how broad in scope commands are to be taken. By way of tipping their hat to the DCT tradition, many religious ethicists continue to employ the term ‘command’ but by such a term mean something more than just God’s commands, such as his nature, essence, will, etc. It has been argued that an extension of the traditional terminology of DCT in this way is not uncommon and is in fact a plausible and legitimate way to construct a more defensible version of DCT broadly construed. Such theories should, however, be explicit about what exactly they mean by various terms. This dissertation’s two-tiered theistic ethic features a DCT version of obligation only, since its value components are not rooted in God’s volitions or commands at all, but instead in his nature. Since I do not construe God’s commands as encompassing every apprehension of moral goods, I allow that some moral obligations accrue independently of God’s commands.
A sixth DCT distinction concerns issues of modality. It would seem that a DCT can make some or all contingent moral facts dependent in some sense on God and/or some or all necessary moral facts dependent in some sense on God. Any full treatment needs to make its stance on this issue clear. The construal of this dependence relation of the necessary truths in particular on God – especially whether this dependence entails God’s volitional control of such truths’ content – will shape a DCT’ist’s stance on universal possibilism. It might be thought that a denial of God’s ability to alter the necessary moral truths rules out any dependence relation at all of such truths on God. But as argued, Plantinga, at least, seems to grapple for a substantive dependence relation despite his rejection of universal possibilism, and interestingly in so doing echoes earlier efforts by Augustine and Aquinas. At the heart of this cluster of modal concerns, then, is the specific distinction of dependence versus control, or asseity on the one hand and invariance on the other.

A seventh DCT distinction is the aforementioned deontic/axiological distinction, whether the DCT in question roots in God the morally good, the morally right, or both. Certain DCT’ists wish to delimit their deontic theories just to ethical rightness (like Burch) or just to ethical wrongness (like the early Adams), for the sake of simplifying discussions. But they insist they can easily extend their theories to a much larger family of ethical concepts. Quinn’s book on DCT provides an elaborate and systematic effort to do so with the entire family of moral concepts, from permittedness to supererogation to prohibitedness. Bertrand Russell, however, seems to labor under the misguided assumption that a DCT’ist, by making morality a function of God’s fiat, is committed to a DCT both deontic and axiological in scope. “For God himself,” he writes, “there is no difference between right and wrong, and it is no longer a significant statement to
say that God is good." In this variant of the vacuity objection, Russell obviously blends the deontic and axiological, the good and the right, casting all DCT'ists as committed to this posture. Sober and Rachels do the same, but not all DCT'ists assume such a view. Adams, for instance, endorses a deontic conception of DCT and explicitly rejects an axiological conception. Before him, Locke held a form of DCT that explicitly presupposed some nontheological value concepts, such as intense physical pain being bad, distasteful, undesirable, and so forth. Adams suggests that it is even possible for a given DCT'ist to regard as moral concepts some value concepts of which the DCT'ist gives a nontheological analysis. This dissertation embraces a guided will axiological view and a pure will deontic view for a range of moral duties (within the constraints on possibility imposed by an Anselmian God).

That last suggestion by Adams raises an eighth DCT distinction, this one bearing on whether God functions as necessary for morality, sufficient for morality, or both. To give an example, let us specify that it is a content-theoretic, deontic version of DCT under consideration according to which 'commands' is shorthand for God's prohibitions that are at least partially constitutive of ethical wrongness. Three possibilities for a DCT present themselves in such a scenario: (1) God's prohibitions of X are necessary but not sufficient for X's being morally wrong. In such a case God's prohibitions, though required, nonetheless underdetermine moral wrongness. An Adamsian theory insists that, in addition to God's prohibiting X, God must also be loving in order for his commands to exert moral authority. My view can be thought of this way too, if 'God' were thought of as a title. Since instead I take it to refer to a necessarily existing and loving entity, my view is a little different. My view deviates from Adams (and this first
possibility) also in suggesting that God’s commands are not always necessary for obligations to obtain.

(2) A second possibility for a DCT is that God’s prohibitions of X are sufficient but not necessary for rendering X morally wrong. Here morality, or at least ethical wrongness, is overdetermined, with God’s prohibitions only one among other factors constitutive of it. This dissertation does not interpret God’s commands so broadly that they cover every clear recognition of ethical goodness or badness. So it leaves open the possibility that God’s commands and prohibitions constitute some but not all obligations. Interestingly, an Ideal Observer Theory would also fall under this category, mainly for the reason that if deity is not instantiated moral obligations can still accrue (though of course if God does exist then he fills the role of IOT and his commands are sufficient to impose obligations). Now, there are two further possibilities here: (a) If every morally wrong act is overdetermined and something other than God’s command (either a single factor or some collection of them) can be specified as sufficient for rendering an act morally wrong, then arguably the theory in question is not a DCT at all except in a most attenuated way. On the other hand, consider the case where (b) some morally wrong actions are not overdetermined but are instead wrong solely due to God’s command. In that case, even if other morally wrong actions are overdetermined, such a situation would be more aptly characterized as a bona fide instance of DCT. On such a theory some but not all morally wrong actions would be dependent for such status on God’s commands. Arguably such a mixed theory shades into the third possibility, next to be discussed. (3) A version of DCT according to which God’s prohibitions are both necessary and sufficient for moral wrongness represents a clear case of God’s commands being wholly constitutive of morality, or at least ethical wrongness.
Encompassed within theories of variety (2) are those views according to which divine prescriptions and proscriptions are conceived of as an enrichment of morality. One of the last important Scholastics, Francisco Suarez, presents such a position. A divine prohibition, on his view, imparts an additional obligation to avoid an evil that is already evil in its own nature. Likewise a positive command can add an obligation to do what is already righteous. Divine laws thus superimpose their own moral obligation over and above what may be called the natural evil or virtue inherent in the acts themselves. This added dimension of violating a divine prohibition is what Suarez thinks completes sin’s theologically depraved character. Resembling and revising a certain aspect of Suarez’s enrichment view in the recent literature are Swinburne’s suggestion that the commands of God can add to an obligation to do what is obligatory anyway and Ewing’s view that divine commands can add a new tone to ethics.

A ninth DCT distinction bears on whether the theory in question affirms or denies an identity between moral and theological properties. An Adamsian theory that generally affirms the sameness of God’s prohibition of X with X’s moral wrongness contrasts with a theory that denies the identity between moral and theological properties while affirming that the former in some sense depends on the latter. Even where an identity is affirmed, there can still be an element of asymmetry between the entities flanking the identity, as there is in the equation of the property of being an adult single male and the property of being a bachelor. It is sooner affirmed that a bachelor is a bachelor because he is an adult single male rather than that he is an adult single male because he is a bachelor. So arguably even a DCT affirming an identity of moral and theological properties can still feature an important element of asymmetry, according to which God’s commands are accorded epistemic or ontological priority. More
typically the asymmetry of DCTs is most obvious when identities are denied. This dissertation's view allows for God and the ultimate Good to be conceptually distinct while ontologically inseparable, for the latter to depend on the former, and for 'God is good' to feature the 'is' of both predication and identity. Even though, that is, I think God is the ultimate good, I still think it is not a vacuous claim to affirm that God is good. The property of being God is not the same as the property of being the ultimate Good, even if God is the ultimate Good. Similarly, even though water is H2O, the property of being water is not the same as the property of being H2O. The former does not logically imply the existence of hydrogen, for instance, whereas the latter does. I also argue for an asymmetric dependence relation to obtain between God's commands and a range of moral obligations.

A tenth DCT distinction contrasts DCTs that are normative ethical theories with those that are meta-ethical in nature. Most DCTs are predominantly one or the other, though some might aspire to be both. Cohen's argument, discussed in chapter 3, offers an argument against DCT filling the roles of both simultaneously so long as God's commands are principled. Normative ethics deals with questions of rightness and wrongness, in an effort to determine best whether or not particular actions are right or wrong. The three most important normative theories are deontologism, consequentialism, and some type of virtue ethic. DCTists are by no means of one mind as to the most preferable normative ethical theory. It seems likely that the ultimately right view contains elements of all three, and DCT could make sense of this with the right story. Meta-ethics is that branch of moral philosophy raising questions about connections between morality and rationality, about whether moral facts exist, what moral predicates mean, and how moral facts, if they exist, are epistemically accessible. Definist
DCT's are meta-ethical by offering a semantic analysis of moral terms, property-identity DCT's are meta-ethical in virtue of offering an ontological analysis of the nature of morality, etc.

Quinn conflates the meta-ethical/normative distinction with the aforementioned semantic/non-semantic distinction, confining meta-ethics to semantic analysis. As Adams notes, analytic philosophy itself probably contributed to the ease with which such distinctions are conflated, for

Their style of philosophy is called 'analytical' because it was long guided by the belief that the only way philosophy can make real progress in understanding is by analysis of the meanings of words or sentences. Philosophers were urged, accordingly, to shift from the 'material mode' to the 'formal mode' – from talking about the natures of things to talking about the meanings of words that signify them – for instance, from talking about the nature of the good to talking about the meaning of 'good'. The principle task of moral philosophy, on this view, was analysis of the meaning of the language of morals (Adams 1999, 15).

Quinn himself, the later Adams, and I all wish to leave semantics largely behind and talk about the nature of the right or the nature of goodness, not just the meanings of terms like 'good' or 'right'. Whereas Quinn, though, wishes to characterize this departure from semantics as a move away from meta-ethics, this dissertation sees meta-ethics as broader in scope than mere semantic analysis.

The eleventh DCT distinction has already been mentioned: causal versus noncausal accounts. A standard example of the sort of nontrivial, asymmetric dependence relation that a DCT is intuitively after is a causal theory according to
which something of God's possesses causal efficacy in undergirding something of morality in one way or another. What it is of God's that does this — whether his commands narrowly construed, nature, creative activity, etc. — varies quite a bit according to the DCT under review. Likewise with what aspect of morality that is undergirded — whether necessary or contingent moral facts, moral propositions' existence or truth value or modal status, the content of moral rightness or moral goodness, etc. Varieties of noncausal accounts might include relations of meaning, property-identity, entailment, supervenience, reason-theoretic DCT accounts, and so forth.

The twelfth and final DCT distinction to be discussed here pertains to the relevant image of God employed by various DCT's. This distinction actually involves a half-dozen item long disjunction to be understood inclusively. The salient images of God in the best-known DCT's seem to be the following: General, Monarch, Father, Creator, Sustainer, and Owner. As General, God is thought to possess the requisite authority to dictate the content of morality and inspire obedience. As Monarch, God is perceived as possessing the requisite power to shape the content of morality or at least undergird it somehow. Hobbes seems to take such a view in Leviathan. The issue for Hobbes is less that God is omnipotent and more that he is just considerably more powerful than anyone else. As Father, God is owed the filial and patriarchal duty of obedience, perhaps no matter what, just in virtue of that relationship. Swinburne is an example of a philosopher who emphasizes the possibility that God as Creator is the one to whom we owe our existence and as such our obedience as well. As not just Creator but also as a continuous Sustainer, God, in the view of one like Descartes, is the ground of all existence and sovereign undergirder of reality. As Owner, God is taken by one like Brody to possess property rights over his
creation. To make his case Brody seems to depend heavily on the Lockean notion of property rights as involving the mixing of one's labor with what already is or will become one's property. Taking these distinctions inclusively entails that they can be combined in various ways. A particular DCT list might wish to exploit both God's status as Creator and Father, for example. The relevant images on which any particular DCT is predicated ought to be made explicit given their vital and undeniable relevance in shaping the contours of the theory.

Most likely that list of DCT distinctions is not exhaustive, but it provides an adequate enough framework within which now to begin laying out the specific commitments of the DCT that this dissertation will then strive to defend against arbitrariness and vacuity objections. The best way to begin laying out this dissertation's DCT is by clarifying its stance on each of the DCT distinctions. The DCT defended here is predicated on the assumption of God's actual existence. It relies heavily on the orthodox Anselmian conception of God as the source of all reality. If it should turn out that this assumption is mistaken, then the DCT in this dissertation is left without the recourse enjoyed by defenders of an Ideal Observer Theory. The theory thus features theistic realism. The theory will also be nondefinist in nature, given the limitations of a purely semantic analysis that have been underscored. It also embraces reason-internalism, on the view that the ultimate Good, a reflection of God's nature, is also instrumentally good for us to enjoy, respect, admire, etc. In terms of the pure versus guided will distinction, my view is more voluntaristic in terms of deontology, and nonvoluntaristic when it comes to a theory of value. It is a theory embracing theistic activism, according to which moral truth depends on God in a substantive sense. Although even necessary moral truths depend on God on this view, universal possibilism will be rejected, based on the distinction between control and dependence.
So much for the theory's take on the first six distinctions; what about the second six? Communicated commands of God will constitute a sufficient condition for moral obligations to obtain. The DCT will be cast more in terms of a deontic theory than an axiological theory, though the full account is undeniably both. It will furthermore deny an identity of God's commands and moral obligations, though it will most assuredly affirm an asymmetric and substantive dependence relation of the latter on the former. This dependence relation will be causal in nature, making the theory primarily a meta-ethical analysis of the ontological basis of morality so construed. And it will encompass and incorporate elements of God in each of the aforementioned roles and functions performed: General, Monarch, Father, Creator, Sustainer, and Owner. Deficiencies and pitfalls applying to some or all of these pictures of God individually will not obtain when we affirm the whole list.

Thus, by way of summary, to put it broadly, this dissertation endorses a theistically active, nonsemantic, content-theoretic DCT of moral obligation and personalist theory of value. The view features a certain amalgam of components from both horns of the ED, rejects universal moral possibilism, yet affirms a nontrivial, asymmetric, ontological, causal, meta-ethical dependence relation of both necessary and contingent moral truths on the nature and creative activity of deity. The view is predicated on the real existence of an Anselmian God functioning actually as or analogously to a General, Monarch, Father, Creator, Sustainer, and Owner.

This dissertation will attempt to show that a theory containing the general features just discussed is able to withstand rigorous critical scrutiny. Before proceeding, a quick word is in order about the considerable amount of theological motivation behind such an ambitious theory, enough to make uneasy those
philosophers not inclined to accord much weight to such theological commitments. Undoubtedly the history of western philosophy features such luminous thinkers as Leibniz, Aquinas, Berkeley, and a veritable plethora of others endeavoring to construct their philosophy out of a radically theistic metaphysics. But it remains true that such theological doctrines functioning regulatively and centrally in one’s philosophical system or theory strains the credulity of many contemporary analytic philosophers. I freely concede this, admitting that calling into question the meaningfulness, coherence, metaphysical tenability, relative plausibility, abductive probability, or even logical possibility of such notions is well within the spirit of rational inquiry and critical philosophy. However, it is also in the spirit of philosophy not to accept as sacrosanct contemporary trends, even and especially philosophical ones, but rather to remain the gadfly, critically questioning prevailing assumptions and plausibility structures. Quite a number of ostensible features of the world – such as the relativity of simultaneity as a consequence of the axiomatic invariants of Special Relativity, or the falsification of the parallel postulate – initially strike one as entirely implausible in terms of *prima facie* intuitions. Acknowledging a difficulty to understand or immediately appropriate something is one thing, but categorically excluding the possibility of its truth on that basis is quite another – except of course for logical contradictions – not to mention downright antithetical to the purpose of philosophy.

**Impoverished Moral Discourse**

Before laying out this dissertation’s theory of the right, largely inspired by the work of Robert Adams, a word is in order about a contrast between the moral approach here and that of Judith Jarvis Thomson’s, a contrast that highlights the
bankruptcy of moral discourse when it is allowed to be unduly shaped by an exclusive consideration of rights. The view I espouse in this dissertation is that God's commands constitute some but not all moral obligations. I reserve room for some intrinsic goods being sufficiently clear to us that we can naturally and easily infer from their recognition certain genuine moral duties. Those goods themselves are on my view rooted in God, since I endorse a theistic Platonic account according to which, at least roughly following Adams, finite intrinsic goods are goods in virtue of their resemblance to God. God is either the ultimate good himself and/or the being on whose noetic activity the realm of the good vitally depends. But in terms of the right, God's commands are able to impose obligations. Now, if I am right that some obligations already accrue on the basis of our recognition of certain intrinsic goods, then if God commanded one of these preexisting obligations, his commands might well overdetermine the obligation. In other cases, God's commands might render dutiful what is supererogatory or perhaps morally neutral. In the latter case, God would then not be commanding something because it is good, but as an exercise of his authority, which at least can be said not to violate his nature. The resulting obligation might be more of a religious duty than a moral one strictly so called in such a contingency. Finally, on occasion God might command something that is bad, thereby making it obligatory, as chapter 5 will discuss in some detail.

That rights-talk is often overdone to the detriment of the quality of moral discourse in this culture is not to deny that rights retain an important place in ethical discourse. It may well in fact be the case that certain rights can be thought of along the lines of standing in an isomorphic relation to those duties that obtain as a result of our ability to apprehend certain intrinsic goods with crystal clarity. In such cases where duties apply apart from anything like divine command,
perhaps there are corresponding rights that obtain as well. Some ethical theorists embrace a correlative view according to which there is a right for every duty and vice versa. Personally I am inclined to think that though there is a duty that corresponds to every right, there is not a right that corresponds to every duty. I consider the class of obligations to be broader and, generally, more important to ethical discourse than rights. Although I am convinced that an inordinate emphasis on rights has contributed to an impoverished moral dialogue – as the following example will demonstrate – rights are not without their vital, albeit limited, importance.

In her famous piece on abortion, "A Defense of Abortion," Thomson uses the analogical case of the unwitting person's abduction by the Society of Music Lovers, awakening to find himself strapped back-to-back with a famous violinist whose survival depends on sharing the victim's kidneys for the next nine months. Her intuition is that the violinist has no right to expect the victim to comply to this imposition, though of course the victim could choose to do so in a compassionate act of supererogation. By parity of reasoning, she argues that a woman is under no obligation to carry a baby to term, even if a fetus turns out to be a person after all. Setting aside my reservations about this analogy, I would like to discuss a later portion of the article in which she alters the analogy to consider a case where the violinist needs the use of your kidneys for only an hour. Here Thomson admits that the insistence on immediately disconnecting the violinist would be "morally indecent," since presumably the cost in this case for something so important as saving a life is minimal. But she stops distinctly short of affirming a full-fledged moral duty to remain connected. She couches the discussion in terms of moral rights, and insists that the violinist would still have no right to expect the
victim's help. Again, it would be awfully nice of the victim to choose to help, but the violinist has no right to expect it.

There is a sense in which Thomson thinks the victim ought to help in such a case. But such deontological language stops short of a full-fledged moral duty. She refuses to allow the use of the term 'ought' to imply in this case that the violinist has a right to expect the help. She uses the example of a boy choosing to share his candies with his brother to illustrate. It would be very nice of him if he did, but the brother has no right to expect it. She also thinks that using the term 'ought' in a particular way — that from the fact that A ought to do a thing for B, it follows that B has a right against A that A do it for him — would make the question of whether or not a man has a right to a thing turn on how easy it is to provide him with it. Here she hearkens back to an earlier example she used of her requiring Henry Fonda's cool hand to touch her fevered brow to save her life. If Fonda had had to fly from the West Coast to deliver the healing touch, she says that Fonda would have been nice to do it, but that she has no right to expect it, no "right against him to expect it." She insists that even if Fonda were in the same room with her, still she would have no right to expect his help, since rights should not be a function of how easy they are to satisfy. Clearly she wants to use oughtness language here in a weaker sense than full-fledged moral duty. By denying that she has a right to Fonda's touch, she seems to be denying that Fonda has a moral duty to give it. He ought to, in some sense, but not in a sufficiently moral sense to render his refusal blameworthy.

She seems to want to reconcile ought language with the spirit of supererogation. Perhaps there is a sense in which one ought to do X in such cases, but in fact, she wants to say, the doing of X is praiseworthy, above and beyond the strict call of moral duty. That there are senses of 'ought' other than
distinctly moral senses comes as no surprise, of course. Thomson wants to tap into such senses and imbue them with just enough moral connotation (through phrases like “moral indecency”) to make them seem to be saying something about morality after all without such language implying genuine moral rights and duties.

My own intuitions on some of these matters stand in stark contrast to hers, and my account of ethics is altogether different. Let us take the example of Henry Fonda’s being in the same room when Thomson needs his touch on her brow. Does she have a right to expect it? Such language, taken from Thomson, underscores my first major reservation about conducting moral discourse exclusively or even primarily in terms of rights. Such discourse, I am inclined to believe, typically assumes that the world is constituted under adversarial power structures. Note that the question of whether she has a right is couched in terms of a “right against him.” Such language is relevant at some level to ethics, perhaps more important to the realm of legality, but frankly I see it as but scratching the surface of what is really going on here ethically. Conducting moral discourse in such adversarial terms as rights so construed and thinking that this somehow captures the essence of the situation results in impoverished analysis.

Whether or not she has a right for him to walk across the room and provide his help, I take it that he would have a moral duty to save life in such a case. This is the case at least so long as a number of ambiguities are not built into the situation, but there is no indication of this in Thomson’s thought experiment. There are no conflicting duties to complicate the situation, no shades of gray to fill the picture with ambiguity, no inconvenience in performing the deed. It is exactly such situations that have led more and more lawmakers to consider Good Samaritan legislation. For it is exactly such clear-cut situations that elicit
the clearest moral intuitions based on our ability to apprehend with perfect clarity the relevant intrinsic goods at stake. Most people's intuitions that Fonda should help are not at all weakened by Thomson's candy example. She should just acknowledge what she really thinks: Fonda in such a case would not be morally obligated to save a life when doing so would require the most minimal and costless of means. To say there is a sense in which he should and that his refusal makes him "morally indecent" is a disingenuous effort to blunt the force of her counterintuitive, overly individualistic, and rather emaciated ethical analysis.

To clarify differences between Thomson and my own view, consider why the candy example fails. It fails because what is at stake is the enjoyment of candy, which is not an intrinsic good, or if it is one is a trivial example of one. But what is at stake in the other case is the saving of a human life, an obvious candidate for an intrinsic good. Ethicists often rightly emphasize that moral agents should not do something because they have been told to do so, but because it is the good thing to do. I agree wholeheartedly. Yet Thomson, when depicting a situation in which the good thing to do is clearly laid out and easily done, namely, preserving an intrinsic good like human life with no compelling reasons not to, wants to deny that the clear moral entailment of the situation is a genuine moral duty. Casting the discussion in terms of rights helps conceal this point a bit, but this is just one more way rights language, when accorded primacy, results in impoverished moral discourse.

If Fonda in the situation Thomson sketches were to go ahead and save this life, his action would discharge a moral duty all right, but there is an important sense in which he could still, ideally, be accorded moral praise for the action. His behavior would not be supererogatory exactly, since I disagree with Thomson and think that his inaction would be morally culpable and blameworthy.
in a quite strong sense. But if he were to discharge the duty out of a recognition of the intrinsic good involved and a desire to protect and preserve it, then his walking over to touch her brow would be motivated not from his sense of duty at all, but from his desire to do it. He would be acting in accordance to a rule, but not because of the rule, an important distinction. No doubt Kant would characterize such behavior as less than fully moral, but most of us are inclined to think that Kant on this score was wrong. Fonda’s desire to save life and thereby preserve an intrinsic good would be far morally preferable to his dutifully discharging an obligation in order to avoid blameworthiness. This underscores that Thomson’s important point about supererogation can be accentuated and explained in a way that, contra Thomson, does not neglect intrinsic moral goods and their relevance to ethical decision-making, does not reduce moral discourse to rights language, does not deny obvious full-fledged moral duties, and does not rely on impoverished moral intuitions.

Supernaturalizing Moral Deontology

The inception of the resurgence of DCT in the last few decades is generally credited to Robert Adams’s groundbreaking article “A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness.” Subsequent work by such philosophers as Quinn, Idziak, Wierenga, and others have produced more and more precise formulations of the theory, innovative efforts to answer various objections, and a recovery of historical defenses of such a view. In terms of formulation, defense, and historical recovery, DCT has undergone a tremendous resurgence among contemporary analytic philosophers. It was Adams, though, who got the ball rolling, and his is an important example of both the importance of a semantic analysis of DCT as well as its limitations. The evolution of his own
thought after writing that first essay, as he would later pen its sequel "Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again," is a microcosm of what has been referred to here as the inevitable philosophical development of serious reflection on DCT. It involves a traversal of the philosophical landscape from semantics to ontology, from meaning-theoretic paradigms to metaphysical views, be they pictures of constituent analyses, causation, supervenience, or just some unspecified asymmetric dependence relation obtaining between morality and theology. Sketched below is the story of this transitional development in Adams's thought.

Adams confines his initial version of DCT to matters of ethical wrongness, not to ethical terms in general, although he thinks he can extend it to ethical obligatoriness and permittedness. He qualifies it as a "modified" theory of DCT because he renounces certain claims that are commonly made in such theories. He characterizes the unmodified DCT of ethical wrongness as the theory that ethical wrongness consists in being contrary to God's commands, or that the word 'wrong' in ethical contexts means 'contrary to God's commands'. It affirms the logical equivalence of the following propositions:

(1) It is wrong (for A) to do X, and
(2) It is contrary to God's commands (for A) to do X.

Though these are affirmed to be logically equivalent expressions, (2) is also affirmed by this theory to be conceptually prior to (1), so that the meaning of (1) is to be explained in terms of (2), and not vice versa. Thus, as Adams characterizes this theory, it does capture the asymmetry that a definition or analysis of meaning must feature (unlike what is implied by Cohen's terminology of 'definitional equivalents'). Generally, though, this theory has more in common with Cohen's explication of Euthyphro's than, say, with a causal-theoretic or
metaphysical analysis of the nature of morality. It is a straightforward definist analysis of (ethically) 'wrong', a semantic analysis of DCT.

Adams rejects this definist, unmodified view, thinking it immediately susceptible to an intractable objection: Such an analysis of meaning could not possibly be right, for not all people use the term, mean by the term, what this theory claims they do. An empirical investigation into people's actual usage of the term is sufficient to show that not everyone ties moral talk to divine commands. Adams, for instance, thinks no atheist would use 'wrong' in this sense, though of course this is not quite right. For an atheist, without contradicting himself, could (and some do) affirm this semantic analysis of DCT, but then just insist that, since God does not exist, any such moral affirmation is in error. The atheist could just be an error theorist, in other words, or could affirm the 'Karamazov hypothesis' that, since there is no God, everything is permitted (nothing is wrong). With this correction of Adams in mind, though, his point is well-taken: not everyone uses 'wrong' in this sense. Most atheists for example don't, along with theists who do not affirm the theory. Adams thinks he needs to restrict the scope of such language usage, to some but not all people. This restriction of scope to, say, an analysis of 'wrong' in Judeo-Christian religious ethical discourse (though this too is troublesome given lack of convergence even within that community on this question) is the first step toward Adams's modified theory. The second step toward his own theory comes about as a result of his answer to the arbitrariness objection saddling the unmodified theory. On Adams's view, 'It is contrary to God's commands to do X' implies 'It is wrong to do X' only if certain conditions are assumed, namely, only if it is assumed that God has the character of loving his human creatures, for one. In the contingency in which God, say, issues a patently and irredeemably unloving command, commanding cruelty for its own
sake for example, Adams thinks his concept of ethical wrongness, rooted as it is in the commands of God (on the presumption God is loving), would simply break down.

The rationale for this view enables a clearer insight into why Adams accords such importance to people’s use of language. In a semantic or definist analysis of DCT, the important question is people’s actual language usage, how words are used. What sort of factors contribute to the development of such language usage thus becomes a most relevant consideration. In an individual’s experience her ethical conceptions and terminology may have been conditioned and colored by the framework of her religious life. If so, it is easy to see why the concept of God’s will or commands has a certain function in her life, or in what Wittgenstein might call her distinctively religious “form of life” involving a vast web of beliefs, practices, customs, and so on. The use of such moral terms as ‘right’, ‘wrong’, and ‘obligatory’ will often most naturally become tied to that function served by God’s will. In the unthinkable situation envisioned in which God deviates from this socially formed view of what ethical terms are all about, the believer’s moral terminology would just break down. So Adams arrives at his modified view by confining DCT to an analysis of language usage among those in the Judeo-Christian tradition and by presupposing that God is loving. If the latter assumption turns out to be false, what follows is not moral arbitrariness but rather a breakdown in such language usage among believers, a lost ability to say any actions are right or wrong. Presumably such believers would then need to rethink their moral language usage. Given this logical possibility, his theory, though definist, is not rigidly so. For if it were rigidly definist, there could be no logically possible world in which the believer’s moral language usage could break down this way. In terms of emotional and volitional attitudes and in terms of
meaning, the expressions ‘it is wrong’ and ‘it is contrary to God’s commands’ are, on Adams’s view, virtually but not entirely identical, the slight differences normally being of no practical importance. The slight differences in associated attitudes and conversational implicature between moral and theological predicates to allow logical space for the arbitrariness counterexample is not, on Adams’s view, inconsistent with the claim that part of what the believer normally means in saying ‘X is wrong’ is that ‘X is contrary to God’s will or commands’.

Adams’s initial view here raises a number of questions and has much to say about such matters as the possibility of ethical discussion between believers and nonbelievers and vacuity objections to DCT. More aspects of his work will be discussed soon. For now the focus has been placed exclusively on those aspects of his theory that underscore its definist elements. It is now time to examine the subsequent shift in Adams’s thought. Almost as a precursor to this impending transition, Adams’s essay ends with him grappling with difficult questions concerning the relevance of semantics to ontology. He rhetorically asks, "What is the relation between philosophical analyses, and philosophical theories about the natures of things, on the one hand, and the meanings of terms in ordinary discourse on the other?" (Adams 1981a, 107) He admits he remains somewhat befuddled on the issue, attributing his confusion to a lack of philosophical development into the nature of meaning.

Then he was to read an important set of papers by such philosophers as Donnellan, Kripke, and Putnam, whose work provided some of the answers for which he was searching. These developments enabled him to modify his theory yet again, and effect in his theory a definitive move away from just semantics to include both semantics and ontology. Their work makes an impressive case for the view that there are necessary truths that are neither analytic nor knowable a
priori. Adams came to change his mind, and now thinks that the truth of ethical wrongness is of this sort. He uses an example of individual identity to demonstrate that if such an identity holds it holds necessarily given the transitivity of identity, even though such an identity cannot be established except by empirical investigation. If the identity actually holds – say, between the Levi and Matthew of the Synoptic Gospels – then a world in which they are distinct is still epistemically possible (in that we can imagine such a world for all we know) but it lacks broadly logical (in Plantinga's sense) or metaphysical possibility.

Similarly with Putnam's example of water, which has the nature of being made up of two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen. If such a theory of water's molecular composition is true, then it is a necessary truth but not a priori. Coming across a liquid just like water in various respects – transparent, suitable for drinking, tasteless, etc. – we can intelligibly ask if it is water, and test whether it is water by a laboratory analysis. If the composition of the liquid turns out to be, say, XYZ instead of H2O, then we are entitled to deny it is water. The warrant for our denial is not an analytic truth, though; for instead it is dependent on whether what we have been referring to all along is in fact H2O. That is an empirical question. What is analytically true is that if most of what we have been referring to as water has been of a single nature, then water is liquid that is of the same nature as that. Though it is an empirical truth that water is H2O, Putnam argues that it is metaphysically necessary. (Later he recants this view and says the necessity in question is exhausted by the notion of physical necessity.) Interestingly, on this view of the relation between the nature of water and the meaning of 'water', which Adams finds plausible, the property of possessing the features of water described by competent users of the term (like its tastelessness) is not a property that belongs to water necessarily.
Exploiting such insights, Adams changes his mind that every competent user of 'wrong' in its ethical sense must know what the nature of wrongness is. In this way, in his latest theory, he is able to jettison that aspect of his old theory according to which language usage has to be relativized to different linguistic communities. Words can be used to signify a property by people who do not know what the nature of the property is. To bolster such a point, Adams quotes Plato when Plato refers to:

That which every soul pursues, doing everything for the sake of it, divining that it is something, but perplexed and unable to grasp adequately what it is or to have such a stable belief as about other things (Adams 1981b, 112).

Competent users of 'wrong' need to know such things as that it is a property of actions, attitudes, etc. and that people are generally opposed to actions, attitudes, etc. considered wrong, and that people count such wrongness as a reason (either prima facie or all-things-considered) for opposing such actions and attitudes. Adams thinks competent language usage here also requires opinions about what sorts of actions have this property and perhaps some fairly settled dispositions as to what will count as reasons for and against regarding an action as wrong. Though such knowledge and dispositions are necessary and perhaps jointly sufficient for competence in the use of a word, they are not sufficient to determine what wrongness is. As Adams puts it, "What it can tell us about the nature of wrongness, I think, is that wrongness will be the property of actions (if there is one) that best fills the role assigned to wrongness by the concept" (Helm 1981, 113).

This underscores a real shift in Adams from semantics to ontology. Our language usage, of course, picks out the relevant concept to refer to as
wrongness. By 'wrong' we come to refer to actions and attitudes possessing the aforementioned features that competent speakers of the term must be aware of. However, just as water would still have existed even if no human being had named it, presumably, likewise with wrongness. So though our semantics enable insight into what competent users of a term must know, it is inadequate, on such a view, for providing an analysis of the nature of the concept picked out by the use of the word. By 'water' we contingently began rigidly designating a certain liquid as water based on its visible features, but water itself in its essential makeup just is H2O. That state of affairs, since it obtains in the actual world, is metaphysically necessary. Likewise, by 'wrong' we contingently began rigidly designating certain persons, actions, attitudes, etc. as possessing features of disapprobation, but wrongness itself in its essential makeup is not captured by those criteria for competent usage of the term 'wrong'. Adams, of course, thinks that contrariety to the commands of a loving God is the property of wrongness, the property that best fills the role assigned to wrongness by the concept. This fact, if Adams is right, is metaphysically necessary if true in the actual world. Again, my view deviates from this in saying that some but not all moral duties result from God's commands.

The distinction between Adams's old theory and his new theory having been made, it should be evident that this transition is a rather natural one. The theories are not in tension with one another so much as the latter extends the thrust of the former in a natural way, taking lessons from more recent insights of philosophers of language. Recall that even in the old theory Adams was grappling for something a bit beyond mere semantics, no doubt already having a sense of needed developments in the meaning of meaning. When these became available, he was immediately able to modify his theory in such a way that ethical
conceptions need not be relativized to linguistic communities and that clarified
the shift from semantics to ontology. No doubt the new theory captures more of
what a DCT ought to capture. A large part of why this is so is due to the insight
that semantic analyses, properly understood, simply do not in a noncircular way
warrant the drawing of ambitious metaphysical conclusions.

**Finite and Infinite Goods**

As mentioned, Adams has recently published the culmination of his three
decades' worth of work on DCT in a powerful new book *Finite and Infinite Goods*
(1999), probably one of the most important treatments on the topic ever written.
In his book, Adams assigns priority to the good over the right, making a number
of interesting and insightful points that deeply resonate with my own convictions
on the matter, and indeed deepened and extended my convictions in numerous
ways and directions.

As we saw last chapter, Adams provisionally adopts the thesis that God is
the ultimate Good, which includes more than just the moral, but also the
intellectual and aesthetic. Adams doesn't try to say exactly what the Good is, but
he leaves open the possibility that Godlikeness may still explain what sort of
property goodness is. Adams takes as veridical those intimations of a
transcendent Good that we experience at certain moments of our lives,
something of which we catch but a momentary glimpse. The ultimate Good is
transcendent in that it vastly surpasses all other good things and all our
conceptions of the good, and similarly with beautiful things that give us a sense
of being dimly aware of something too wonderful to be contained or carried either
by our experience or by the physical or conceptual objects we are perceiving. In
this way Adams thinks the ultimate Good is higher than the realm of the human
or the physical, not unlike Platonism in this regard, and certainly consonant with most religious conceptions.

His decidedly nonphysicalist approach contrasts with the primacy he attaches to the veridicality of our moral experience and insight, as he writes the following: "Given the strength of our confidence in many pretheoretical evaluative and normative beliefs, and the pervasiveness of their role in our thinking, I believe that physicalism has much more need to be found compatible with them than they have to be found compatible with it" (Adams 1999, 77).

Part III of his book then, predicated on the provisional adoption of a theistic theory of the Good, emphasizes moral obligation understood in relation to a social context. Since Adams provides the fullest account of his views in the book, it will do us good to go over some of the details of his latest account in more detail. In the book Adams expands his account to include more than just an account of wrongness when it comes to deontic issues. Whereas evil has to be understood in terms of its relation to the good, he claims, rightness has to be understood in terms of its relation to wrongness. Adams's theory of the right covers what it is \textit{not} wrong to do and what it is \textit{wrong not} to do. The former comprises ethical permissibility, the latter ethical obligation. Adams spends most of his time discussing issues of ethical obligation, and I will follow suit.

Adams's method for arguing his case for a divine command account of obligation parallels his earlier appropriation of the semantic insights of the direct reference theorists. Based on the semantic features of obligation, he raises the question what, if anything, best fills the role semantically indicated by our deontic language? What can be learned from the semantics of obligation? What must be true on broadly semantical grounds of anything that is to count as moral requirement or moral obligation? We were able to catch a hint of this in his earlier
work, but his book fleshes out some additional details. Adams's thesis is that if we have an obligation then it can only be in a personal relationship or in a social system of relationships, though he insists the same is not true of moral values in general. His main project of Chapter 10 is to argue that facts of obligation, in particular, are constituted by broadly social requirements. After arguing this, he offers a theistic adaptation of the social requirement model. Agreeing with John Stuart Mill, Adams thinks that it is a truth of meaning that obligation concepts are tied to social context.

Adams delimits his analysis of the semantics of obligation to contexts in which obligations are thought of as requirements. The first feature of anything that is to count as moral requirement or obligation is that we should care about complying with it. Anything that is a moral obligation, he insists, should be treated with a certain seriousness. Relatedly, it is something one should be able to be motivated to comply with, and the nature of obligation should be such as to ground reasons for compliance. Moreover, part of taking moral obligations seriously is that it is appropriate for someone to feel guilty for doing something wrong and for others to blame them in cases where there are not sufficient excuses. "What is essential for the role of wrongness," Adams writes, "is that blame in some form is appropriate when an agent is fully responsible for a wrong action" (Adams 1999, 236). Further, Adams is convinced that it is part of the roles of moral obligation and wrongness that fulfillment of obligation and opposition to wrong actions should be publicly inculcated. To the extent that one has done moral wrong, one has not just done something merely irrational or silly, but something for which one ought to feel guilty. Whether or not one in fact does feel guilty, one actually is guilty. Adams takes this as an objective moral condition that may be rightly recognized by others even if it is not recognized by the guilty
person. Another ineliminable feature of guilt is alienation from other people, at least typically. Usually a condition of guilt involves someone else who is or could be understandably angry with the guilty party. This feature of guilt makes intelligible that guilt can often be largely removed by forgiveness. That we originally learned guilt in the context of strained relationships, before we could understand rules, makes sense of this. Adams is convinced that it’s not childish, but “perceptive and correct, to persist in regarding obligations as a species of social requirement, and guilt as consisting largely in alienation from those who have (appropriately) required of us what we did not do” (Adams 1999, 240).

Earlier we saw what is analytically true of ‘water’. What might be said now to be analytically true of ‘wrong’? Adams would probably say it is that property of actions, if there is one, that makes people’s avoiding such an action something we ought to and often do care about. It’s also a feature of actions that should be able to motivate and provide reasons to refrain from doing them, and a feature of actions that makes it appropriate for someone who performs such actions to feel guilty and to be guilty for doing so. It is also a feature of actions that makes the performance of such actions typically result in strained relationships of some kind. Adams would then say that if there is a single candidate that best fills this semantically indicated role of ‘wrong’, then wrongness is that.

Why, we might wonder, does the nature of obligation give us reasons for action? This problem is especially challenging since doing the right thing does not always seem to produce the best results. What provides motivation and reasons to do the right thing in such cases? Adams points to a “richer, less abstract understanding of the nature of obligation” than what John Rawls calls “the purely conscientious act” motivated by a pure desire to do the right thing (242). "According to social theories of the nature of obligation, having an
obligation to do something consists in being required (in a certain way, under certain circumstances or conditions), by another person or a group of persons, to do it" (242). One obvious way in which this might be thought to work is by way of fear of punishment or retaliation for noncompliance, but Adams is interested in finding other motives and reasons for compliance.

The alternative explanation Adams pursues is that valuing one's social bonds gives us motive and reason to act. Will this mean that if one does not value one's social bonds one will lack reasons and motives to fulfill obligations? Not ultimately on Adams's view, as will become clear. The reason that valuing one's social bonds provides motivation to comply is that one's compliance can be seen as an expression of valuing and respecting the relationships. Clearly, not all socially undergirded obligations are morally valid, but Adams is of the view that nonetheless we have a pre-moral conception of obligation in which we can see social facts as constituting obligations independently of our moral evaluations of those facts (243). Obviously, however, a fuller account of moral obligation needs to impose a critique of reasons for complying, and to this task Adams next turns.

He argues that human social requirements can take us some distance in providing this critique, provided that we remember the following. First, "morally good reasons will not arise from just any social bond that one in fact values, but only from one that is rightly valued – that is, from one that is really good" (244). A truly valuable relationship provides a reason one has to comply with the demands of such persons. Second, our reasons for compliance are usually also affected by our evaluation of the personal characteristics of those who make them. And third, "how much reason one has to comply with a demand depends not only on the excellence of its source and of the relationship or system of relationships in which the demand arises, but also on how good the demand is"
Incidentally, at this juncture Adams interjects his criticisms of Ideal Observer Theory. He doubts whether the counterfactuals on which IOT is based are true, and he admits to not being motivated by them anyway. His social theory, he claims, is better connected with guilt, and his theory also accounts for how actual social requirements play a large role in our coming to hold the moral beliefs we do about obligation (246-247).

Having touted some virtues of human social requirement theory, he admits that as it stands it is too subjectivist. Society would be able to eliminate obligations by just not making certain demands, and this, he admits, is out of keeping with the role of moral obligation. In this way he views such an account as failing to cover the whole territory of moral obligation. "If we are theists, however," he adds, "it is not necessary, and seems to me somewhat unnatural, to confine ourselves to that apparatus, since a more powerful theistic adaptation of the social requirement theory is obviously available" (248).

Here enters Adams's latest version of DCT, depicted as an idealized version of social requirement theory. Adams thinks such an account can absorb the strengths and avoid the salient weaknesses of a social theory of obligation. Again, it is important to remember that Adams only bases this account of moral obligation on his theistic theory of the Good, according to which God is the ideal candidate for the semantically indicated role of the supreme and definitive Good. Adams's view is also confined to a theory of obligations, not of moral properties in general. Adams notes that this restriction of scope is not uncommon, for it was common in the seventeenth century DCT'ists like Locke, Cumberland, and Pufendorf, all of whom presupposed a theory of goodness independent of the commands of God (251).
Next, Adams argues that a divine command theory "agrees very well with the features of the role conceptually assigned to moral obligation" (252). He develops this argument by citing several features, beginning with the reason-giving force required by the role. First, Adams stresses reasons for compliance that arise from a social bond or relationship with God. "If God is our creator, if God loves us, if God gives us all the good that we enjoy, those are clearly reasons to prize God's friendship" (252). Many of our reasons for compliance will be reasons rooted in gratitude to God for the blessing he has bestowed upon us. Second, the personal excellences and admirable features of the demander contributes importantly to our reasons for compliance, and of course "on the view advocated here, God is the Good itself, supremely beautiful and rich in nonmoral as well as moral perfection" (253). Adams insists that the majesty of moral requirement is much better sustained by a source in a transcendent Good than in any human society. Third, the quality of God's commands, insofar as they are reconcilable with our deepest moral intuitions, is important to our reason for obeying a divine command. On this score, Adams and I will take differing lines on the conquest narratives and binding of Isaac of the Old Testament.

Besides divine commands' reason-giving force, Adams continues, they are also well-suited to the role of constitutive standard of moral obligation. They satisfy the demand for the objectivity of moral requirement. Plus, we rightly expect a theory of the nature of right and wrong to yield a large measure of agreement with our pretheoretical beliefs about what actions are right and wrong. Both Adams and this dissertation give pride of place to our considered moral intuitions. Our preexisting moral beliefs are bound in practice and principle to function as a constraint on our beliefs about what God commands. Also, DCT satisfies the principle that facts of moral obligation should play a part in our
coming to recognize actions as right and wrong. For God can create faculties, providentially govern human history, and inspire prophets to make this the case. DCT also connects guilt as involving an offense against a person, and includes the possibility of forgiveness to take away the guilt.

In the remaining chapters, something close to this account of moral permittedness and obligatoriness, conjoined with an axiological conception of God and Goodness as ontologically inseparable, will be defended against three major criticisms. Before concluding this chapter, however, allow me to anticipate a few objections based on objections that have been launched against Cornell Realism.

Challenges against Cornell Realism

Adams's view can be construed as a version of Cornell realism. As we have seen, Adams's account of both the good and the right relies on insights of the direct reference theorists, and realism of this type has been dubbed 'Cornell realism'. After G.E. Moore's open question argument was successfully deployed against analytic naturalistic accounts of ethics, the semantic insights of the direct reference theorists like Kripke and Putnam began to be incorporated into a defense of synthetic naturalistic accounts of ethics. One popular example of Cornell realism is naturalist Richard Boyd, who adopts a view in the semantics of morals quite similar to Adams's and a position in the metaphysics of morals quite opposed to Adams's conception. Boyd's view is often taken as paradigmatic, practically canonical, of a synthetic naturalist account of morality and of Cornell realism.

The phrase 'Cornell realism' is used, for instance, by Simon Blackburn. He admits that Cornell realism deflects Moore's open question argument by
deploying the distinction drawn by direct reference theorists between properties and concepts, and emphasizing that different concepts can be expressed by predicates that nevertheless refer to the same properties (Blackburn 1998, 119). Property A can be identical to property B without predicates referring to them being synonymous. The doctrine of Cornell realism holds that ethical predicates refer synthetically and necessarily to real natural properties of things, just as 'water is H2O' represents a necessary, synthetic, a posteriori truth. Terence Horgan and Mark Timmons refer to this same phenomenon among recent ethicists when they refer to "new-wave moral realism" (Horgan and Timmons 1993, 115). Blackburn, Horgan, and Timmons all express doubts about the success of Cornell realism. Although it seems to hold promise of much – objectivity, right answers to moral questions, epistemic access to those answers – new-wave moral realism is thought vulnerable to insuperable objections.

Before examining those objections, an obvious point of disanalogy between Cornell realism and Adams’s view ought to be identified. Cornell realism is a version of naturalism, predicated on the view that all that exists is part of the natural, physical world that science investigates. Naturalist realists like Boyd think that all truths are ultimately explainable on the basis of facts involving ontologically primary entities. This leads to his thinking that if there are any moral properties or facts, they must be naturalistically accommodated. Moreover, he also thinks that if moral knowledge is possible, our access to and knowledge of moral properties and facts must be explainable according to epistemological principles we use to explain our knowledge of the natural world generally (Horgan and Timmons 1993, 117). As a naturalist, Boyd parts company from Adams in choosing the realm in which to look for the ethical properties. Boyd looks to naturalism, Adams to supernaturalism. This affects their comparison of the
meaning of ethical terms with that of natural kind terms. For Boyd ethical terms signify natural kinds, and the role they pick out is a causal role quite similar to the role of semantics of natural kinds would assign to ‘water’. For Adams ethical terms assuredly do not signify natural kinds. So despite Adams’s similarity with Boyd with respect to the semantics of morals, Adams is not exactly a Cornell realist.

Adams and Boyd do, however, see eye to eye on a number of important matters, making the comparison between them significantly informative. For instance, they agree that basic ethical terms are used to signify real properties, if there are any properties that fit the roles indicated by our use of the terms. They also agree that being a competent user of the terms doesn’t imply knowing with any precision what properties they signify, and yet they agree that ordinary use of moral terms provides us with epistemic access to moral properties (Adams 1999, 58-59).

In looking to the natural realm for what those moral properties consist in, Boyd’s view features three main ingredients. First, Boyd proposes to construe moral terms like ‘good’ and ‘right’ (and the concepts they express) as being semantically like natural kind terms, in having natural synthetic definitions that reveal the essence of the property the term expresses. Second, this claim requires that moral terms function as rigid designators, referring to the same property in every possible world that they refer to in this world. Third, Boyd maintains that for moral terms, just as for names and natural kind terms, reference is a matter of there being certain causal connections between people’s uses of such terms and the relevant natural properties.
Conjoined with what David Brink has to say about the nature of moral properties, the ‘Brink/Boyd view’ represents the best of new wave realism. As Horgan and Timmons write,

This constellation of views — moral functionalism, a holistic moral epistemology, and causal semantic naturalism — together make up what we take to be the most plausible and complete version of new-wave moral realism to date. It is a species of what we call synthetic ethical naturalism, to be distinguished from its predecessor, analytic ethical naturalism. And certainly (this version of) synthetic ethical naturalism, with its many similarities to psychofunctionalism in philosophy of mind, has a lot going for it (124).

Such realism is often touted as able to answer both the metaphysical and epistemological constraints of naturalism.

Adams himself acknowledges the view as a “shrewdly and subtly articulated position that has important attractions, some of which I would like to appropriate, in part, for my own position” (Adams 1999, 61). Adams cites four major advantages to a view like Boyd’s. One is its realism, another the important space it accords natural properties in the value of things. Third, Adams notes that Boyd not only emphasizes the role of experience in moral knowledge, but also integrates his moral philosophy into a sophisticated philosophy of science richly deserving great attention among contemporary minds. Finally, Adams is fond of the way Boyd avoids a naturalistic analytic definition of the good.

Despite such agreements between Adams and Boyd, Adams himself offers a critique of Boyd’s view, a critique that won’t be dwelled on here. But in brief, he expresses the worry that allowing empirical reasoning of the causal
explanatory sort to have the last word is incompatible with a stance that is essential to ethical thinking. The reason this won't be dwelled on here, however, is that a critique of Boyd or naturalism goes beyond the confines of this dissertation. I am also, for present purposes, more interested in what Adams and Boyd hold in common than where they differ. For that aspect of Boyd's view with which Adams wholeheartedly concurs is its semantics of moral terms, and this is considered by Horgan and Timmons to be the "glass jaw" of new-wave realism. Thus, despite the differences and disanalogies between Boyd's view and Adams's, they seem to share in common what may be the most vulnerable aspect of Cornell realism. How this criticism goes and whether Adams's view succumbs to it will occupy our attention for the remainder of this section.

Again, this point needs a little nuancing. Horgan and Timmons are critiquing Boyd's principle of causal semantic naturalism (CSN): Each moral term \( t \) rigidly designates the natural property \( N \) that uniquely causally regulates the use of \( t \) by human beings. Adams himself would not exactly endorse this principle, of course. Adams thinks the relevant good-making property is resemblance of God, who is a nonnatural being; and he thinks the relevant right-making property is the property of being commanded by God, again not exactly a natural property. Adams also expresses doubts about the causal regulation of our moral language by such moral properties, endorsing a more general thesis about the connection between semantics and metaphysics. However, with those qualifications in place, it remains true that Adams, like Boyd, entertains the hypothesis that our moral locutions rigidly designate those properties, if there are any, that best fit the semantically indicated role of our moral language. Since it's this aspect of rigid designation that Horgan and Timmons are about to call into
question, it's not immediately obvious that their criticism of someone like Boyd doesn't apply equally well to Adams.

Their argument exploits Putnam's Twin Earth scenario, except now enters Moral Twin Earth. They argue that if 'good' purports to designate rigidly the unique natural property (if there is one) that causally regulates the use of 'good' by humankind in general, then it should be possible to construct a suitable Twin Earth scenario with the following features:

(1) reflection on this scenario generates intuitive judgments that are comparable to those concerning Putnam's original scenario; and

(2) these judgments are accompanied by the more general intuitive judgment that 'good' does indeed work semantically as CSN says it does (Horgan and Timmons 1993, 127).

Of course, if the appropriate scenario lacks such features then this will imply that in all likelihood CSN is false.

In the scenario as they depict it, we are to suppose that investigation into Twin Earth moral discourse and associated practice reveals that their uses of twin moral terms are causally regulated by certain natural properties distinct from those that (as we are already supposing) regulate English moral discourse. Further, suppose there's much similarity between the functional moral properties on Earth and Twin Earth, except those functional properties' essence is characterizable on Earth by a consequentialist normative moral theory and on Twin Earth by a nonconsequentialist moral theory.

What would the right interpretation of such differences be? Are they analogous to Putnam's original example, featuring Earthlings and Twin Earthlings referring rigidly by their moral terms to two different sets of phenomena, analogous to H2O and XYZ? Or rather would we say that moral and twin moral
terms do not differ in meaning or reference, and hence that any apparent moral disagreements would be genuine disagreements – that is, "disagreements in moral belief and in normative moral theory, rather than disagreements in meaning?" (Horgan and Timmons 1993, 130) Horgan and Timmons insists that our intuitions ought to declare the latter option as preferable, since reflection on the scenario doesn't generate "hermeneutical pressure to construe Moral Twin Earthling uses of 'good' and 'right' as not translatable by our orthographically identical terms" (130).

They argue that this challenge to Cornell realism can be generalized:

For any potential version of synthetic naturalism that might be proposed, according to which (1) moral terms bear some relation \( R \) to certain natural properties that collectively satisfy some specific normative moral theory \( T \), and (2) moral terms supposedly refer to the natural properties to which they bear this relation \( R \), it should be possible to construct a Moral Twin Earth scenario suitably analogous to the one constructed above – i.e., a scenario in which twin moral terms bear the same relation \( R \) to certain natural properties that collectively satisfy some specific normative theory \( T' \), incompatible with \( T \). The above reasoning against CSN should apply, mutatis mutandis, against the envisioned alternative version of semantic naturalism (133).

I am less interested in defending Boyd than I am Adams, of course. The real issue here for present purposes is whether this Moral Twin Earth scenario offers a compelling argument against Adams's version of realism.

For one matter, Adams's account does not lend itself to the construction of a Moral Twin Earth nearly so well as Boyd's view. Suppose that Adams is right...
in thinking that moral terms find their synthetic foundations in an Anselmian God's nature and commands in this world. Presumably if this is the case, then such a God's existence would be ensured in every possible world. If morality, at least in its necessary features, is connected up with God in this world, it is difficult if not well-nigh impossible to conceive of a different world in which they are connected with something else. In other words, a modally robust Anselmian theistic ethics and an Adamsian version of DCT feature for one of their greatest strengths a quite strong version of moral realism that lends itself to intuitions about rigid designation arguably better than any version of merely naturalistic ethics does. My point isn't meant to mount an attack against Cornell realism, but to underscore that Adams's account is not vulnerable to this particular criticism.

To show that the ED does not pose an intractable objection to theistic ethics, all I really need to argue is that the case has yet to be made that God can be the standard of morality in no world. The primary benefit gleaned from the direct reference theorists is insight into the relation between semantics and ontology, so we do not have to relativize theory to linguistic communities. To the extent that unpalatable consequences accrue from an application of such insights to naturalistic ethics, Adams's view escapes untainted.

I think naturalism is more vulnerable to Horgan's and Timmons's criticism, since naturalism raises more prominently the spectre of possible overdetermination by naturalist mechanisms. If one set of naturalistic properties can adequately be thought to undergird morality, then why not some other? I see little principled reason to reject such a possibility. Personally I remain unconvinced that any naturalistic account can provide adequate undergirding of moral prescriptions and the sacred value of certain intrinsic goods and such, but if I'm wrong then it seems not unlikely that there could easily enough be
naturalistic overdetermination, making those criticisms of Cornell realism against it indeed work. Now, if Adams is right, we ought to look to the realm of supernaturalism for the real foundation of ethics. And if an Anselmian God exists in every possible world, then the story of ethics, my intuitions declare, would be the same in every metaphysically possible world. And it would be a story, I suspect, at least close to that provided by Adams and this dissertation.

The Cornell realists need to argue that they not co-opting a tenuous reason from the direct reference theorists to infer that morality has an essential nature in this and every possible world. My view, in contrast, does not infer that morality must have an essential nature because water does, and that in just the way we can accord primacy to the actual world with water, we can with ethics too. Instead I am positing a possibility. The mere possibility that morality has an essential nature the same in all possible worlds is all I need. Further, I offer an independent reason to think that moral predicates refer rigidly in all possible worlds, rooted as morality is in an unchanging God’s nature and commands.

Conclusion

Before proceeding, a quick summary is in order. On the view that has been presented here, the ED has been divided into two questions: Is something good because God commands it or vice versa? And is something right because God commands it or vice versa? My answers to these questions are quite different. With respect to the value/good/axiological question, I embrace a nonvoluntarist account, according to which the necessary moral truths are just a reflection of God’s unchanging and invariant character. God and the good on this account are ontologically inseparable even if they are conceptually distinguishable. Too often the latter has been assumed in the literature to entail
the former, when it does not. God, on this view, typically commands something because it is good or, if not good, neutral. On a rare occasion he might command the lesser of two evils, which imposes an obligation without making what is commanded less bad. His loving nature and an Adamsian theistic adaptation of social requirement theory makes it possible that on occasion God might render obligatory what was heretofore only morally neutral as an expression of his rightful authority. More typically and interestingly though, what he renders obligatory by a commandment is something heretofore supererogatory.

With respect to the obligatoriness/permittedsness/deontic/right question, this dissertation embraces a voluntaristic conception for a range of moral obligations. Something is obligatory because God commands it, not vice versa. Too often in the literature the distinction between the good and the right is fuzzy. ‘Right’ is used in such cases to indicate something much closer to ‘good’, and ‘wrong’ ‘bad’, but this dissertation insists on a more careful distinction here. Such a distinction is the basis for defending theistic ethics against a range of criticisms. Not all good behaviors are morally obligatory. This is why some acts retain a supererogatory flavor. Similarly, not every bad behavior is wrong, such as when one is forced to choose between the lesser of two evils. This dissertation makes the good prior to the right, but does not assume that the line from the good to the obligatory is always automatic. A social component to a theory of the right helps account for this and explains the potential mechanism more effectively than a simplistic and false isomorphism. In slight contrast to Adams, I am actually willing to concede that human social requirements, together with a clear enough apprehension of certain intrinsic goods, may actually be sufficient to render some good behaviors morally obligatory and their neglect morally blameworthy. The Thomson/Fonda case discussed would be an example. Since I do not construe
divine commands broadly enough to encompass every such apprehension, I am claiming that some but not all moral obligations result from divine commands.

So the question, "Is something moral because God commands it or does God command it because it is moral?" becomes two questions: "Is something good because God commands it or vice versa?" and "Is something right because God commands it or vice versa?" My answer to the axiological question is that God typically commands something because it is good, not vice versa. The answer to the deontic question is that something is typically right because God commands it, not vice versa. This dissertation's theory of value is thus nonvoluntaristic without placing the locus of moral authority external to God, and its theory of obligation is voluntaristic within the constraints imposed by God's nature. Since on my view God is the ultimate Good, arbitrariness and vacuity objections will not stick, as we will see as we now turn to these objections.
V

Why a Good God Issues Bad Commands

1. Terminology

This essay takes the following three propositions to constitute a logically inconsistent set, meaning at least one of them, for the sake of coherence, must be rejected:

(1) There are \textit{de re} necessary moral truths.

(2) Divine command theory is the right theory of moral obligation.

(3) God's issuing of morally reprehensible commands is metaphysically possible.

To affirm each of these propositions, respectively, is to affirm (1) moral realism (MR), (2) divine command theory (DCT), and (3) radical voluntarism (RV).

Simultaneously embracing MR, DCT, and RV is not a coherent option. Any two of the triad are logically consistent, but not all three together. MR and DCT are consistent, until the further claim is made that there are no moral constraints on God's commands. DCT and RV are consistent in at least some possible worlds so long as there are no \textit{de re} necessary moral truths and universal moral possibilism obtains. And MR and RV are consistent so long as DCT is false. Since one of the members of the inconsistent triad has to go, the most common maneuver is simply to reject DCT. Even if neither (1) nor (3) is affirmed, (2) tends to be rejected most
quickly, no doubt a function of how out of vogue DCT tends to be among most contemporary philosophers. Once DCT is rejected, we can think about (1) and (3) without any pressing logical inconsistency staring us in the face. This chapter will rather reject (3), while embracing both (1) and (2).

Moral realism is being characterized here in a particular sort of way — without reducing moral realism just to this formulation. If a theorist affirms the existence of *de re* necessary moral truths, that theorist is a moral realist in the sense of this chapter and is a moral realist in a strong sense. He would be affirming the existence of moral truths that obtain — to employ Leibniz's conception of necessity — in every possible world. His is a more ontologically committed stance than, say, that of a naturalist who thinks that moral properties and relations uniquely supervene on certain properties of human beings in particular or sentient creatures or conative beings in general. However, by calling the proponent of (1) a moral realist I am not committed to denying that our naturalist is a realist according to other conceptions. What seems clear is that if someone affirms (1) then he *is* a moral realist. The realism that will be discussed here is of this kind, but this does not entail that someone who rejects (1) is not a moral realist of some other kind. The moral view of detractors of (1) will not be the focus of this chapter.

My use of the notion of moral realism deviates from that of others in another important sense. Since Plato, realism has often been interpreted to imply both *aseity* and objectivity. For a moral truth to exist *a se* it exists ontologically independently of anyone or anything else. For it to exist objectively is, roughly,
for it to exist as a stable truth, not subject to variation through time or location or from one moral agent to the next. This chapter will not interpret affirmation of (1) as entailing affirmation of moral truths existing a se. It will be argued here that all the objectivity morality requires can be captured in a way that is consistent with a particular kind of mind-dependence. Indeed, it will be argued that this mind-dependence consistent with moral objectivity makes for a quite defensible solution to the ED. Initially posed by Socrates, the classic Dilemma can be reformulated in terms of monotheism and DCT in this way: Is something moral because God wills it (the voluntarist horn), or does God will something because it is moral (the nonvoluntarist horn)? The term ‘moral’ is used intentionally to hold in abeyance the vital distinction between the good (aretaic theory) and the right (deontic theory). The notion of God’s will is also ambiguous between God’s nature and commands; voluntarism is associated only with the latter. In the course of this dissertation, I have criticized the purely nonvoluntarist horn of this Dilemma, and opted for a voluntarist command-centric answer to the deontic version of the Dilemma (for a range of moral obligations) and a nonvoluntarist, divine nature-centric answer to the aretaic version of it. In the process I have attempted to reconcile moral objectivity (thus moral realism) with divine mind-dependence.

The theorist who embraces de re and synthetic necessary moral truths will be characterized as a realist here, and this shows I am not as concerned with the notion of moral necessity arising from a semantic or definist meta-ethical analysis of moral terms. Antiquatedly beholden to a Humean conjoining of analyticity and
necessity, definist accounts of moral terms paradigmatically represent the sort of *de dicto* necessity that, in the realm of value theory, seems irremediably shallow taken in isolation. To say ‘wrong’ just *means*, for instance, ‘that which thwarts human flourishing’, to take a simple example, and to think that such an analysis gets us very far in ethics seems a shade naïve, not to mention ill-informed and unconditioned by the insights of the direct reference theorists. The view has the dubious benefit of according well with the contemporary aversion to predicate ethics on too rich an ontology, but like William James I find myself fearing desiccation more than superstition. To say of an attitude, action, or intention that it is morally reprehensible seems intuitively to be doing more than classifying it as belonging to a man-made category that, in principle, could have been defined quite differently from what it has actually been defined. It is saying something important about an object, not just a proposition. Such moral evaluations by design project substantive assessments of the action, attitude, or intention in question, not just what we mean by our moral terms. As partial explications of our moral linguistic practices, *de dicto* moral necessities and analytic insights can be helpful. However, pretending nothing is lost by an exclusive emphasis on the linguistic import of moral locutions apart from their signification almost seems disingenuous. Such a view has an appearance of workability only because of moral locutions’ remnants of prescriptivity inherited from an earlier era that lacked the contemporary aversion to moral ontology. Considerably more could be said about the decidedly non-definist analysis of morality on which this chapter is predicated, but for now suffice it to say that a reader who lacks this same intuition
about the way morality ought to be discussed will find some of what follows proportionately less persuasive.

This chapter will assume that the necessity attaching to, say, the wrongness or badness of gratuitous torture is not merely *de dicto*, not the mere necessity of a proposition’s truth that affirms the immorality of such an action, based on something like what we mean by ‘wrong’. Necessity *de dicto* would be expressed with this sentence: Necessarily (If X is an instance of gratuitous torture, then X is wrong). It is rather necessity *de re* this chapter is after. Such morally atrocious behavior is necessarily or essentially wrong. This is to say the following: If X is an instance of gratuitous torture, then it is necessarily wrong. The modal ambiguity in the practically universally accepted truth that “Of course gratuitous torture is immoral” accounts for the appearance of deeper agreement on ethical issues than there sometimes is. If the theorist who affirms only the necessity of moral propositions based on definist analyses or an aversion to ontology remains a moral realist, then he is at the least a quite different sort of realist than the one who affirms *de re* and synthetic moral necessities.

By way of concluding preliminaries, a few more words are in order about propositions (2) and (3). DCT will be taken here as a theory for a range of moral obligations, an account according to which some, but not all, moral obligations result from the issuance of divine commands. The variant of DCT to be discussed, therefore, is more deontic than aretaic, though it is largely built on a theory of the good that will serve as background for much of what I have to say. In short, my account of goodness shares in common an important strand of Anselmian and
Thomistic thought that God and the ultimate Good are ontologically inseparable. Even if God and the ultimate, transcendent, and intrinsic Good are conceptually distinct, they remain ontologically inseparable, on my view. It is important to bear in mind that much of what I have to say depends on such a view.

Finally, a few points are in order pertaining to radical voluntarism and the metaphysical possibility of God's issuing morally reprehensible commands. By "metaphysical possibility" here I mean what Alvin Plantinga is getting at with his notion of "broadly logical possibility." This sort of possibility is contrasted with merely epistemic possibility (not knowing something is false), bare conceivability, or narrowly logical possibility. All of these may be necessary conditions for metaphysical possibility (though conceivability would have to be relativized to an ideal cognizer), but I take it that they are not sufficient, either individually or collectively. For a state of affairs to qualify as a genuine metaphysical possibility, there must be some possible world in which that state of affairs obtains. A similar point could be made with respect to propositions since I will treat propositions and states of affairs as isomorphic. Nothing is metaphysically possible that fails to be featured in any possible world. Further, by "reprehensible commands" here is not simply meant a command of something morally bad in one sense or another, but all-things-considered morally odious or unjustified or, to employ an old-fashioned theological category, sinful. It's not difficult to envision a circumstance in which God issues a command for one people (say, A) to be the instrument of God's judgment on another people (B) without the command being morally reprehensible. B might be a people who
systematically engage in the torture of innocent children for fun. The execution of the judgment would, nevertheless, no doubt feature morally bad components, such as the possible loss of innocent lives, or perhaps the loss of any lives at all, even among the guilty. That something can be in some sense bad without being wrong is one of the many reasons to stress the important distinction between badness and wrongness (or goodness and obligatory nature) on which this chapter will depend. A more precise way to put the notion of morally reprehensible commands, then, is like this: commands to violate de re necessary moral truths. What would pose an intractable objection to a strongly moral realist version of DCT, then, is the genuine metaphysical possibility that God could issue a command violative of a de re and synthetic necessary moral truth.

2. Concrete Arbitrariness Objection to DCT

The problem of morally reprehensible commands constitutes for the DCT'ist a concrete arbitrariness objection when the question arises whether or not God in fact has ever issued such commands. If God has issued such commands, then obviously he can. If he can, then God's issuance of morally reprehensible commands is metaphysically possible, and if so then, as already argued, DCT or de re necessary moral truths have to go.

2.1 Conquest Narratives and the Binding of Isaac

The concrete aspects of the arbitrariness objection to DCT find expression in specific biblical stories in which God is portrayed as commanding, say, wars of
genocide against Canaanites that include the killing of innocent children. Entire populations are destroyed, with no exceptions, in accord with divine command. Ask most thoughtful traditional theists – such as Jews, Moslems, or Christians, all of whom ostensibly look to the Old Testament as a source of theological authority – to explain and justify such practices, reconciling such commands with their moral intuitions. One will be met by a number of grimacing visages and furrowed brows. These passages are difficult, and no matter what may be said about them, mystery will not be entirely dispelled at the end of the day. A paradigmatic passage from Deuteronomy captures the radical essence of the conquest commands:

When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations – the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you – and when the Lord your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them utterly (emphasis added). Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy (7:1-2).

Elsewhere we discover what complete destruction and the absence of mercy involve. Altars are to be broken down, sacred stones smashed, idols burned. When the Israelites battled Jericho, they “devoted the city to the Lord and destroyed
with the sword every living thing in it—men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep, and donkeys” (Joshua 6:21).

According to the most strongly voluntarist versions of DCT, there is no problem reconciling such commands with the constraints of morality, since God is the source of moral goodness and rightness and what he says goes, no matter what. What do we say, however, if we do not wish to espouse an Ockham-like version of voluntarism, and intend to allow substantial room for our moral intuitions in the determination of whether or not a particular command was really uttered by God? To avoid charges of utter divine transcendence, inscrutability, and caprice, enough considerations need to be brought to bear to blunt the force these charges derive from such passages. How many considerations will be enough is a hard call, and intuitions on that question may vary. There is bound to be some disagreement over how many considerations are enough to prevent the conquest narratives from posing an intractable arbitrariness objection to DCT.

This is especially true since what this chapter will also resist is the opposite accusation against or criticism of DCT based not on arbitrariness and transcendence, but on immanence and anthropomorphism. Sometimes the DCT’ist is accused of believing in an inscrutable divinity or, echoing a concern of John Stuart Mill, embracing a notion of the good or right utterly different from our common-sense conceptions. At other times the DCT’ist is accused of just draping the cloak of divine authority over principles of distinctly human morality. What seems clear is that DCT, in fairness, cannot simultaneously be guilty of both. It seems unlikely, to say the least, that my conception of divinity can rightly
be accused of being both inscrutable and anthropomorphic, both transcendent and
unlike us on the one hand, yet overly intimate and immanent and just like us on
the other. That this chapter concedes the difficulty of handling passages like the
conquest narratives and allows room for some remaining mystery at the end of the
discussion makes it a little more vulnerable to concerns of arbitrariness than to
concerns of anthropomorphism. Not every rational person is bound to concede the
adequacy of my treatment of such passages. Nonetheless, I will try to show that
enough possible overlap exists between such passages, rightly understood, and
our considered moral intuitions that the concrete arbitrariness objection can be
seen not to pose an intractable problem after all.

Before reflecting on the conquest narratives, allow me to identify an even
more dominant concrete case inviting the arbitrariness objection, namely, the
binding of Isaac. Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling* is responsible for having
made this passage about Abraham the focal point of much discussion of DCT. In
this account from Genesis 22:1-19, God tests Abraham by commanding him to
sacrifice his only son, Isaac, through whom God’s blessing to Abraham and his
progeny has been promised. God speaks to Abraham, commanding him to
sacrifice his beloved son as a whole burnt offering, and Abraham sets out to
comply. At the climax of the story, Abraham binds Isaac on the altar and takes a
knife to kill him, but is stopped by the voice of an angel declaring that the
willingness he has evidenced to make such a sacrifice at God’s behest is enough.
As instructed, Abraham then finds and sacrifices a ram instead. The angel
declares that God will bless Abraham’s descendants because he has not withheld his son.

2.2 Adams’s solution

In *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (Oxford 1999), Robert Adams distills and crystallizes much of his previous work on DCT (from which I have gained immensely) into an expansive, integrated, and sophisticated ethical theory that merits great attention. Unfortunately, as I will argue, his arduous efforts to square biblical revelation with ethical conviction result in hasty traversals of the hermeneutical gap and in indifference to important scriptural passages or points of theology. Although Adams’s exegesis can be questioned at points, his book’s philosophical contribution is remarkable. Summing up where I think he went wrong only takes a few paragraphs; summing up what he did right would take a book.

Adams’s effort to deal with the binding of Isaac strikes me as the least satisfying part of his otherwise excellent treatment of DCT. In short, he solves the problem of morally reprehensible commands and concrete arbitrariness problems associated with the binding of Isaac by denying that the event happened. He does not deny that if such a command had been issued that it would have represented the issuance of a morally reprehensible command. He rather seems to presuppose that it would be a command that violates a necessary moral truth, so he avoids the problem this would pose for his theory by denying its occurrence. In an effort to bolster his case theologically, he writes, “I agree in fact with Jeremiah that the
true God never commanded any such thing — never even thought of doing so, as Jeremiah put it” (Adams 1999, 279). The passage Adams refers to is Jeremiah 7:31: “They have built the high place of Topheth...to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind.” By denying that this event (and presumably other troublesome ones like it) took place, Adams thereby avoids the entailment of RV that such an occurrence would have yielded: morally reprehensible divine commands are metaphysically possible.

Besides RV’s inconsistency with the conjunction of MR and DCT, Adams has other motives to discount such problematic passages as the binding of Isaac or the conquest narratives. For his theory roots moral obligations in the commands of a loving God, and as a Christian he also wants to reserve room for the authority of Christian scriptures, so long as they are creatively and sensitively interpreted. A command to sacrifice one’s only and beloved son for seemingly no justifiable reason save divine whim is difficult to reconcile with love. Adams apparently takes such a reconciliation to be well-nigh impossible, thus accounting for his classification of this command as morally reprehensible, presumably in the strong sense stipulated above. Comparing scripture with scripture, Adams decides to confer primacy on the passage from Jeremiah, from which he seems to derive a general prohibition against child sacrifice admitting of no counterexamples, which then precludes a literal interpretation of the Genesis narrative. Adams insists that God never issued such terrible commands and never would. Adams’s theory is also set up such that if God were to begin uttering morally reprehensible
commands then our moral language would break down rather than caprice reign when it comes to morality. (And we would have to set ourselves to the task of finding a better theory.)

2.3 Concerns about Adams’s solution

Adams’s easy avoidance of the challenge posed by such passages seems to come at the expense of solid biblical exegesis. The Jeremiah passage to which Adams refers, for instance, featuring the high places or altars of Topheth, hearkens back to the altars set up in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, where debris and rubbish from the city were thrown away. The altar was used to worship Molech, a god who required child sacrifice (2 Kings 23:10). At this place where the people had killed their children in sinful idol worship, they themselves would be slaughtered by the Babylonians. Note how the Israelites too were vulnerable to harsh divine judgment for sinful behavior, even as their enemies were. Adams’s use of this passage, written 1400 years after the Genesis narrative, to discount a literal interpretation of the binding of Isaac, is a dubious exegetical move about which right-thinking biblical scholars would undoubtedly express the gravest qualms. Adams’s philosophy tends to be premier, but perhaps his theology and biblical exegesis at this point are not of the same quality.

Adams’s failure here reflects the problems that arise when religious ethics is attempted without enough dialogue with biblical scholars. An adequate response to the concrete arbitrariness objection to DCT will not be so clean as Adams’s sanitized philosophical effort, which
(1) neatly cuts away inconvenient passages and thus hurdles the hermeneutical gap too hastily,
(2) neglects some of the rich theological resources by which we can begin to make better sense of such passages,
(3) views God's love apart from the awe-inspiring aspects of his holiness,
(4) ignores differences in agenda between contemporary analytic philosophy and historical Hebraic story-telling, and
(5) fails to maintain tensions between
(a) the arbitrariness and epistemic objections,
(b) voluntarism and anthropomorphism,
(c) moral intuitionism and the noetic effects of sin, and
(d) scriptural interpretation and evaluation.

Unless a DCT'ist is willing to dirty his hands by allowing such complexities to texture his theory, the result will be an artificial version of theistic ethics featuring discontinuities with the biblical picture.

Even if we were to suppose that Adams is right and the binding of Isaac (or the conquest stories) did not happen historically, there is still an important literary problem to confront. Whether or not they really happened, they are still depicted in the scriptures and so there remains a problem. Genuine concern with what the Bible teaches in such passages leaves little room for Adams's interpretation, and his bringing his moral intuitions to bear at the merely interpretive (rather than evaluative) phase is a questionable maneuver anyway.

Placing emphasis on the literary question, a considerably stronger exegetical argument can be constructed, where the conquest narratives are concerned, to suggest that the "holy war" traditions in Joshua, for instance, are presented with the aim of turning battle into a metaphor for obeying the Torah, and that the text is neither inviting nor legitimizing warfare. On this interpretation, it becomes imperative not to interpret the wars of extermination in terms of God presenting
permanent ethical norms. The commands to exterminate the Canaanites were limited geographically to the promised land and to a unique soteriological context, and were never generalized into any kind of permanent ethical principle, save specific implementations of theological and liturgical purity. As such, they were more "means" than "end." Ethical exegesis of the Old Testament, moreover, should be based on materials that clearly intend to inculcate ethical living, e.g. the apodictic series of commands and the wisdom material.

Speaking generally, a problem many philosophers often have with scripture is that they have little sense of story, or of the progressive way in which Israel's religion distanced itself from that of its neighbors. They read the narratives as though they are a logarithm table when they are intended to be grasped mainly on the imaginative and intuitive level. Little wonder so many bona fide biblical scholars have qualms about DCT'ists who handle narratives this way. The genre of the material has got to be taken into account in the interpretation. Kierkegaard no doubt has pushed many philosophers to personalize the narrative of the binding of Isaac to ask themselves what they would personally do if they thought themselves commanded by God to do something like that, except now, "something like that" has been shorn of nearly all its unique theological and historical significance. The philosophical quest for universal principles and generalized rules of conduct simply stands at cross purposes with the particularistic, gradualist, and narrative-driven Hebraic manner in which much of the Christian scriptures were written. The hermeneutical gap is not traversed so
recklessly by anyone who wishes to read the scriptures with a genuine openness to their potentially revelatory nature.

Specific theological resources can be brought to bear to provide insight into passages like the conquest narratives. The Christian story of the depth of sin and reality of God's judgment, for instance, makes it entirely possible that God's destruction of cities or peoples was a result of their sin and disobedience. Injustice, impurity, and idolatry are often cited by biblical scholars to be important reasons for such judgment. It is instructive to note that people's moral sensibilities are not typically violated so strongly when reading accounts like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as when reading accounts like the destruction of Ai. The relevant difference between such passages seems to be the human agency involved in the latter. Perhaps what bothers us less than that people are killed is that God asked Joshua to do it at Ai, but the point is doubtless the same from the view of God's character. Human agency may well be of only secondary importance here. If God can be thought of as able to dispose of life and still be good, then we have at least made some progress in reconciling such *prima facie* horrific accounts with our moral intuitions. But here Christian teachings seem clear: mortal life is not an absolute value, an intuition shared by many people when, say, discussing whether or not it is morally incumbent on us to prolong life at any cost in every situation. It is understandable that thinkers with a worldview according to which there is no afterlife would be more inclined to treat the cessation of mortal life (without a clearly understandable justification) as an
irredeemable wrong, but for many religious persons it is spiritual death that is far more likely to count as the ultimate disvalue.

A picture of God as purely loving according to a particular conception of love (inconsistent with harsh judgment, for instance) can lead to difficulties reconciling such deity with the God of the Bible. Oftentimes readers are tempted to contrast the picture of deity as found in the Old Testament with that found in the New. The Old Testament God is wrathful and vengeful, whereas the New is loving and gracious, such readers suggest. This is a huge debate in itself, but considerably more consonant with the traditional Christian view is that there is a deep resonance and consistency between the Testaments, and the same God depicted in each. The New Testament also has war issues, for instance, and we create a false dichotomy between the Testaments by contrasting Yahweh and Jesus too much. A close reading of scripture provides a complete package of God’s nature as loving but not exclusively, simplistically, or exhaustively so. God is much more than only or always love simplistically construed. Adams’s characterization of the transcendence of God’s goodness and historical Christianity’s teachings about God’s ineffability, inscrutability, and terrifying holiness make the God of orthodox Christianity anything but a mild-mannered, gentlemanly Grandfather. Despite Adams’s recognition that God’s transcendent features are not easily captured or even in principle always capturable by currently truncated human perspectives, he seems to neglect these features of God in assigning such primacy to our moral intuitions. The resulting weakness of his view is not so much a philosophical liability as it is a theological deficiency,
precluding the sort of historical commitment to the authority of Christian scriptures exhibited by the orthodox.

When we direct our attention to the literary problem of the conquest narratives we can actually find within the book of Joshua itself contextual help with resolving the ethical difficulties of holy war. In his tremendously insightful piece "Ethical and Apologetic Tendencies in the Redaction of the Book of Joshua," Old Testament scholar Lawson Stone augments both a tradition-historical apologetic and an historical-reconstructive apologetic in his attempt to contend with the ethical difficulties. He thinks each of these other approaches succumbs to a fatal flaw: assuming the text of Joshua unreservedly endorses Israel’s extermination of the Canaanites, “that the ancient writers cared little for the ethical question and therefore that the contemporary reader must look beyond or beneath the text for assistance” (27). Stone instead argues that

One important, but generally unnoticed effect of the interpretive reshaping of Joshua is a disquiet with “holy war,” directing readers to modes of appropriation other than the martial and territorial. Several passages in Joshua explain, mitigate, and reinterpret the portrayal of Israel’s slaughter of the Canaanites and play an intriguing role in the redactional development and final literary structure of the book. Perhaps the offense, however intractable on the historical level, has already been neutralized for the reader on a redactional and literary level (28).

The textual clue Stone follows is a set of six passages that display consistency in content, formulation, and diction. By analyzing them under their structural, thematic, and redactional functions, Stone shows that they frame the
notoriously problematic Jericho-Ai section with events focussing on Israel’s presence in Canaan as an action of Yahweh to which the Canaanites must respond. The Israelites are depicted, Stone asserts, not as a savage, unstoppable war machine blazing over Canaan, but as reacting to the Canaanite kings’ opposition to Yahweh. “Our six passages therefore shift the level of the material perceptibly and significantly, so that they become object lessons in responsiveness to Yahweh’s action and warnings against resistance” (34). Stone concludes that in the book of Joshua itself

Clear moves were made to guide the reader to a nonmilitaristic, nonterritorial actualization of the text in which the conquest first illustrated the necessity of an affirmative response to Yahweh’s action, then became a paradigm of obedience to the written Torah. Long before the NT or early Christian and Jewish allegorists touched the text, its bearers had already transformed the historical tradition of the conquest into a gigantic metaphor for the religious life (36).

The ultimate theological resource and revelation from God, for the Christian, that helps reconcile the wars of extermination and expressions of God’s wrath in the Old Testament and New with our moral intuitions is the redemptive life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Christians read the Old Testament as the precursor to the New, as involving the selection and purification of a particular people through whom God would send his provision of salvation that would then be available to all. Rather than disregarding the terrifying aspects of God’s
holiness in the Old Testament and the absolute demand for purity, Christians see these as mercifully satisfied in Jesus. Such drastic demands from God seem more congruent with our moral intuitions when we come to see that God himself provides the means for their satisfaction. According to the Christian story, Jesus took upon himself the payment and penalty for our sin, the wrath of a holy God, so that we might be spared of it and instead offered the chance for spiritual life, communion with God, and deliverance from sin. This story is rife with mystery, strikes many as implausible, and will hardly be found compelling by those incorrigibly outside the Christian worldview. But to a Christian few things could seem truer, more important, or more deeply consonant with the recognition of God as the source of the deepest good and morally authoritative commands.

The binding of Isaac takes on new significance in this light. Genesis 22:1 clearly states that God was testing Abraham, so that the reader knows in advance that it is not really the will of God for Abraham to do this anyhow. Abraham, of course, does not know it, and so the point of the test is to see the extent of Abraham’s obedience. For the reader, the dramatic tension is not the content of the command, but with whether Abraham will obey it, and what God will do to stop it. In addition, for Abraham in the history of revelation, this was a much more powerful way to show that God does not, in fact, want child sacrifice than just to say so. The practice was prevalent, and it took such a near-trauma to demonstrate that God desires, in fact, the contrary. But in Jesus, God the Father really did allow his son to be sacrificed, for the redemption of creation. And Jesus went willingly, taking on himself a penalty he did not deserve, out of his
inestimable love for us. Catching a vision of such an expression of love has assured many believers through the centuries, and rightly so, that they need not allow the conquest narratives to strike fear in their heart. The concrete arbitrariness problem, for them, is not intractable, this side of the cross.

Adams is right to detect the tension between moral realism, DCT, and morally reprehensible commands. The case has yet to be made, however, that the biblical passages he goes out of his way to deny as authentic events represent morally reprehensible commands in the relevantly stipulated sense. If those commands, as troublesome as they may be, do not after all constitute genuine commands to violate *de re* necessary moral truths, then Adams’s theologically dubious effort to exclude them results in a lamentable thinning of theology that renders his version of DCT, otherwise excellent, a bit suspicious in this respect. Adams is right in thinking that morally reprehensible commands are inconsistent with a strongly realist version of DCT, but wrong in thinking that the case has already been made that the paradigmatic scriptural passages in question stand among such commands.

3. The Achilles’ Heel of Arbitrariness and Vacuity Objections

3.1 Problems stated

Deontic versions of DCT affirm conditionals like, “If God commands X, then X is morally obligatory.” Specific instances of this generalization conjoined with the thesis of RV – the thesis that God can issue morally reprehensible
commands like the command to torture innocent children for fun – raise the hideous prospect that such torture could become morally obligatory. Here the issue is not so much whether God has issued evil commands, but whether he can. The issue is more theoretical than concrete.

The proponent of MR (moral realism) would simply deny that such a heinous deed could ever in principle become morally obligatory, given what we mean by value terminology and what its signification is thought to entail. If God were to command such a deed, then he would have to be able to, obviously enough. RV would be true. The moral realist would then have to reject DCT. Otherwise he would be affirming the inconsistent triad with which this essay began. That is,

(4) If DCT is true and God commands torturing innocent infants for fun, then it is obligatory to torture infants for fun. (DCT)
(5) It is possible that God commands this (RV), so
(6) If DCT is true, it is possible that it is obligatory to torture infants for fun.
(7) It is not possible that such torture could become obligatory (it is not even possible that it is permissible). (MR)
(8) Therefore, DCT is false.

Moral realists consider the consequent of (6) to be at most what Saul Kripke would call the analogous possibility that gold has an atomic number other than 79 (before its microstructure is known), namely, a merely epistemic possibility. This Kripkean or actualist account of counterfactuals of this nature, conjoined with the reasonable assumption that the wrongness of child torture for fun is an excellent candidate for a de re necessary moral truth, results in the rejection of DCT on the grounds that it yields a conclusion that is necessarily false. After all, what could
be less probable than the view that if God were to command child torture for fun, then such torture would become morally obligatory?

This outright rejection of OCT rests on the grounds of the arbitrariness objection to theistic ethics, since such ethics could call even hatred of God right so long as God commands it. Even so staunch a theist as C. S. Lewis expressed horror at such entailments of DCT when he wrote that such a view makes God a mere arbitrary tyrant and that it would be better and less irreligious to believe in no God and to have no ethics than to have such an ethics and such a theology as this. Sometimes the arbitrariness objection is expressed less in terms of the “divine tyrant” possibility and more in terms of the lack of moral reasons on the basis of which God issues his commands. As Eliot Sober writes, “If the only thing that makes an action right or wrong is God’s say-so, then God has no reason, prior to his pronouncement, to decide one way or the other. This means that God makes an arbitrary decision about what to say...” (Sober 2001, 424). Both variants express the same basic concern, namely, that there are no constraints on God’s behavior consistent with DCT precluding morality’s content from fluctuating according to divine whim. On DCT God is thought to be arbitrary, potentially even downright evil, so DCT is thought to be false.

Possibilism is another account of counterfactuals. Suppose a possibilist comes along who is willing to consider the metaphysical possibility of this presumed entailment of DCT that the torture of innocent children may become morally obligatory. Such possibilism would be an approach in the realm of ethics akin to David Chalmers’s effort to characterize the possible world in which water
is XYZ as a possible actual world (based on a conceivability of such a state of affairs deriving from water’s “primary intension”). Suppose such possibilism here countenances, for the sake of argument at least, the metaphysical possibility of a world in which morality’s content diverges wildly from this one. On the basis of such fluctuation of meaning, moral language would lose its determinate content. For suppose God were to command torture for fun and such torture were to become obligatory. God would still be good on such a view, no matter how hideous his commands may be. But since God’s goodness would be affirmed irrespective of content, such attributions would have become empty. If DCT entails such vacuity in moral language (given its potentially wildly fluctuating propositional content, despite its stable linguistic meaning), then by reductio we can be thought justified to reject it. That is,

(4) If DCT is true and God commands torturing innocent kids for fun, then it is obligatory to torture infants for fun. (DCT)
(5) It is possible that God commands this (RV), so
(6) If DCT is true, it is possible that it become obligatory to torture infants for fun.
(9) Let’s assume that it is possible that it is obligatory to torture infants for fun. (Possibilism)
(10) If it’s possible that infant torture become morally obligatory, then moral language is vacuous.
(11) DCT entails vacuous moral language.
(12) No moral theory entailing vacuous moral language ought to be accepted.
(13) So, DCT ought to be rejected.

The possibilist premise together with DCT and RV entail the vacuity of moral language, which is an unpalatable conclusion. Among other things it would make ascriptions of goodness to God altogether devoid of any stable propositional content. So we may be thought to have little recourse but to reject DCT.
Definist analyses of DCT like Ockham's notoriously fall prey to such vacuity objections by establishing the necessity of God's goodness at the price of evacuating the claim that God is good of its determinate content. A couple of variants on this objection are discernible here too. DCT is thought to entail the emptiness of the claim that God is good. That is the first variant. But that is just a specific instance of the broader variant, according to which morality's content per se is lost. Again, each variant is predicated on the same worry, namely, that entertaining the metaphysical possibility of something so hideous as child torture for fun becoming morally obligatory results in the meaninglessness of value terminology. If morality can include everything, it includes nothing. If it does not preclude anything in principle, it countenances everything in principle. If it is impossible to say that God is evil because divine fiat reigns irrespective of content or because 'God is good' is just taken to be an analytic truth no matter what, then the affirmation that God is good is empty. For value terminology itself has become vacuous, lacking determinate content.

Either arbitrariness or vacuity or both of these criticisms (despite their being based in conflicting accounts of counterfactuals) might be thought effective criticisms of DCT. I consider definist accounts of DCT defeated. In fact, arbitrariness and vacuity objections have been said to be probably the two most important criticisms of DCT. Both are predicated, interestingly, on the possibility of God's issuing a command such as torturing innocent children for fun, then both infer from that premise conjoined with DCT that it is possible that child torture is morally obligatory. The actualist/realist/arbitrariness objector then insists that
there is no such possible world, so DCT is false. For presumably it is the questionable premise in the valid argument yielding such a possibility. Such an objector would sooner say that God is evil in such a world than that child torture is right, and understandably so. The vacuity objector assumes for purposes of *reductio* at least that there might well be a metaphysically possible world in which child torture is obligatory, but then concludes that if morality's content can thus fluctuate then DCT empties value terminology of its determinate content. God would continue to be called good in such a world, but the attribution would simply no longer hold its traditional significance. Whereas the arbitrariness objection is rooted in the possibility of God's being evil, the vacuity objection is designed to show that it is just as bad for DCT if it entails the impossibility of God's being evil in the context of universal possibilism.

### 3.2 Toward a Solution

It should be obvious that this dissertation's commitment to MR means that only the arbitrariness objection poses much of a concern. This essay's moral realism stands in diametric opposition to an account of counterfactuals on which vacuity objections rely predicated on the metaphysical possibility of the entertainment of child torture for fun being morally obligatory.

The deeper problem is that each argument is predicated on the real metaphysical possibility of God's issuing commands like the torture of innocent children for fun or, more generally, commands violative of *de re* necessary moral truths. Each criticism is based on RV. Without this premise DCT does not
automatically imply the metaphysical possibility of such a hideous activity as child torture for fun becoming morally obligatory. And, to put it simply, no right-thinking DCT’ists need ever think of endorsing it. Contrary to the insistence by some, DCT’ists can reject such a premise in a way entirely consistent with their theory, so long as their theory’s operative conception of deity is of an essentially good God. A Thomistic-Anselmian conception of God and goodness as ontologically inseparable is just the solution.

One of the criticisms of a Thomistic equation of God and goodness, understood in terms of God being the same as his properties, is that it seems implausible to suggest that God could be identical to some abstract object or property like the Good. Adams’s account makes better sense of the equation by first noting a recurring debate among Plato scholars as to whether the Forms are best understood as properties or universals on the one hand, or standards, paradigms, or exemplars on the other. Adams opts for predicating the equation of God and the Good on God functioning as the exemplar of goodness. Thus understood, we can make better sense of the person of God constituting the Good, in the sense of being its perfect exemplar, standard, ultimate paradigm, and final source. The tension between person and universal, or substance and property, is thus avoided. Although I mainly just critiqued Levin’s contribution earlier, I think his work instructive in reminding us that we need not commit to making the standards of morality into universals before they acquire sufficient evaluative and binding prescriptive force.¹

¹ Borrowing some themes from Plato, Adams insists that a natural move for a theist to make is to take God as best filling the role played by the Beautiful in Symposium or the Good in the Republic.
Arguments that God can sin – *contra* this dissertation’s commitment to divine impeccability - come in about three main varieties, which are basically these: (1) God’s sinning is conceivable, so possible; (2) God’s freedom and praiseworthiness (for not sinning) require his ability to sin, so it’s possible; and (3) God’s omnipotence requires that he be able to sin, so it’s possible. As we saw in Chapter 2, the conceivability argument is predicated on the questionable notion that conceivability entails metaphysical possibility. However, theistic activism of the type explicated by Thomas V. Morris paints the picture of an Anselmian God responsible for the entirety of existence, encompassing truths both contingent and necessary. God’s nature, on this view, delimits the range of what possible actual worlds there are. Some may be conceivable that are not possible.

Even supposing we allow this conceivability principle, the fact remains that we are altogether unable to conceive of an essentially sinless being sinning anyway. At most we can conceive of something in the vicinity, like some distinctly non-Anselmian deity sinning, but of what relevance is that to one who subscribes to perfect being theology? Besides, Goldbach’s conjecture countercexamples of pseudo-conceivings (of, say, the falsehood of something

Adams takes intimations of an ultimate Good or ultimate paradigm of Beauty as veridical, akin to beatific visions of God among theists, and thinks it only natural a theist would take God himself as ultimately that which we apprehend in those moments. On Adams’s view, the infinite and transcendent Good, understood as God himself, is central and foundational to the right moral theory. On this basis, noting that Kantian, Aristotelian, and utilitarian approaches in ethics flourish, Platonic theories are often neglected. His is a theistic Platonic account, though he admits more theistic than Platonic. For while he tries to think through the whole area of ethics from a theistic point of view, he does not agree with everything in Plato, key points of resonance notwithstanding. Importantly, too, Adams, following Christian theology, does not view badness or evil as a commensurate contrast with the Good. Badness, though real, is not so deeply rooted in reality as the Good. Satan on a Christian view is not the ontological grounding of evil the way God is of the Good. Satan is instead a mere created entity dependent for his existence on the sustaining activity of God. Badness tends to be a privation or perversion of the Good, on a Christian understanding, not its equal and opposite paradigm.
necessarily true or vice versa) reveal that we are unable to distinguish between a real conceiving and a fake one apart from an appeal to the actual realm of modalities into which these conceivings or alleged conceivings are supposed to shed light. So the conceivability argument fails.

The freedom and omnipotence arguments suffer a similar fate. The latter can be dispatched most easily. If omnipotence is the ability to do anything metaphysically possible, then God's omnipotence isn't challenged by his inability to act contrary to his nature. For his doing so, given his nature, is metaphysically impossible. But does this make him less free, divinely determined by his own nature? It would seem that God is somewhat constrained, but not by anything external to himself. The notion of constraint and surface grammar of sentences affirming impeccability are subtly misleading too, because they make it sound like God's willing are stultified, that God is bucking up against his own limitations. But there's an important sense in which God is completely unconstrained if, as traditional theology would have it, there is perfect correspondence and consonance between God's nature and willing.

Robert F. Brown illustrates the pitfalls in portraying God as free to sin. Lacking the power to sin is not praiseworthy, he insists, only being able to sin and choosing not to. Brown is following Nelson Pike's now famous piece on God's omnipotence, in which impeccability was recast in purely de dicto terms. Brown extends Pike's account and espouses that God indeed can sin, but at least usually chooses not to. Morality, he says, was legislated by God in a timeless moment and now won't change. This is the actualist constraint in Brown's model. But God
himself can occasionally deviate from such morality and still be praiseworthy for generally choosing to abide by it. Brown takes for potential examples of God’s sinning the conquest narratives, medieval Christian crusades, and the Islamic military *jihad*. Assuming God issued such commands, his doing so didn’t make them right, Brown insists.

In contrast to Brown, I’ve argued that the conquest narratives, from a deeper exegetical treatment, do not pose intractable threats to nonnegotiable moral intuitions. Moreover, Brown’s inclusion of Christian crusades and Islamic holy wars in a similar category as the conquest narratives is precisely the sort of false entailment that comes from missing the unique soteriological context of those passages. Only the neglect of solid theology and proper exegesis results in such reckless hurdles of the hermeneutical gap and in seeing all of these radically varied scenarios as of a piece. Furthermore, his needless departures from orthodoxy suggest that something like the conquests must have been wrong, even if commanded by God, whereas my account of their abiding badness is all that’s required and consistent with impeccability (construed *de re*) and DCT.

The actualism and possibilism of Brown’s theory cannot peacefully coexist. They are in radical and irremediable conflict with one another, and only an artificial, top-down imposition on Brown’s part of his actualist constraint precludes God from radically altering the contents of morality. The vacuity objection is ready to burst through the flimsy lid of Brown’s *ad hoc* actualism at any moment. Rather than rejecting a classical conception of DCT, he ought to jettison his radical voluntarism, anthropomorphic conceptions of deity, deficient
exegesis, artificial synthesis of actualism and possibilism, and his own weak version of DCT susceptible to both arbitrariness and vacuity objections. Brown recognises that Augustine and Aquinas depicted the highest sort of freedom as an utter inability to sin. But he needlessly rejects such a view based on taking our current volitional state, tainted by sin and skewed by our imperfections, as the most exalted kind of freedom there is, erecting a standard to which even God must conform. The central and ineliminable role for character in free will debates and virtue in value debates underscores that even at the level of current finite human perspectives is a hint of the foundational role of one’s nature in the right analysis of the paradigm of meaningful freedom.

Rooting moral goodness in or equating moral goodness with God’s nature does not preclude predicating goodness of God synthetically. God’s goodness can be explicated in terms of a conjunction of his ontological goodness and his moral goodness. Aquinas characterized God as good due to his nature, according to which God’s essence is to exist, God alone has the perfection of self-sufficiency, and God is the source at which all things aim and thus is alone his own true end. Together all of this seems to capture this ontological sense of God’s goodness, his freedom from defect, his being the source of all existence, and his ontological completeness. His moral goodness can be explicated in terms of his benevolent acts of supererogation and the way in which duty fulfillment can be at least analogically predicated of him since his behavior, though not externally constrained, necessarily remains functionally isomorphic with the behavior of ideally moral agents in relevantly similar circumstances.
Finally, if a DCT’ist roots moral goodness in God’s unchanging nature (like a Thomist), and roots obligatoriness in God’s commands (like a deontic DCT’ist), then God’s commands can be motivated by his essential nature and thus not be without reasons after all. In fact, God may lament having to issue such commands, much preferring that we care about the good on our own, because we want to, because of a certain tenor of character, instead of being compelled to by law due to our hardness of heart or tendency to rationalize. God invites us to care about the preexisting moral goods involved and to be motivated by a desire to pursue them rather than be motivated by the knowledge that we are supposed to do something. The command might be needed given the current state of the human condition. The importance of this possible and, on certain theistic views, likely scenario underscores the flaw in the tired, misguided criticisms of DCT as featuring inadequate regard for intrinsic moral goods themselves (like persons). To the contrary, theists have deep reasons to believe that reality itself is intimately relational to the core, to believe in the intrinsic value of people and relationships (owing perhaps to their albeit imperfect resemblance to God and his attributes constitutive of the transcendent Good), and to believe God to be inviting us to care about such intrinsic goods, quite apart from his commands, as much as he does. DCT, rightly regarded, sees deontology as penultimate and divine commands as only necessary steps on our way to a better place where supererogation and virtue take primacy over duty-fulfillment.

This dissertation has rejected both the nominalism of Levin’s involuntarism and the radical possibilism of Ockham’s voluntarism, by opting for
something like a Thomistic equation of goodness with God conditioned by a
Reformation reminder of the noetic effects of sin and the consequent need for
divine commands to give us moral guidance not otherwise accessible to the
human intellect alone. I have been mainly arguing for a possibility, the possibility
that God is essentially good – a God who neither has issued commands violative
of necessary moral truths nor who can because of his perfect nature, an
Anselmian God ontologically inseparable from ultimate goodness and responsible
for creating and sustaining the framework of reality, and a God whose commands
can impose moral obligations. This possibility would answer the arbitrariness and
vacuity objections to DCT, thus showing the idea that the Euthyphro Dilemma
poses an in-principle objection to DCT to be mistaken.
CONCLUSION

This dissertation has attempted to provide an intelligent proposal of a way in which morality can be thought of as ontologically rooted in God. I began by suggesting that this dissertation would be a work of Christian philosophy, primarily about a question that is a concern of the theistic community. So by way of a conclusion, I would like to ask what lessons can be taken from this study by the Christian community in particular, or theists in general?

The whole of the Euthyphro Dilemma can be seen as an argument for the claim that there exists an absolute criterion of goodness, such that all that is not goodness itself is to be judged better or worse, good or evil, by comparison with that standard. This goodness is itself the standard of judgment. When we read the argument this way, we can begin to see how big a mistake it is to apply the reasoning of the ED to the God of classical theism. For this God is not subject to whim the way the Athenian gods were. To the contrary, he is better construed as the standard according to which all things are to be judged. What Plato professed to find through reason, the absolute standard according to which everything else is to be judged, Christians profess to find in God. The Christian God is not like the Greek gods, except only fewer in number. He is the being that the philosophers discovered, not the beings the mythologists fantasized about. This is how the Fathers of the Church dealt with Plato, and it is still an effective strategy today. It is far more profound than the intellectually lazy move that simply identifies God with the gods, without considering the vast metaphysical and moral differences between the two species.

The failure of Christians to embrace the invariance of morality plays right into the hands of those who would assume synonymy between God and the
gods. Embracing a malleable conception of the good because of a misguided understanding of what the sovereignty of God entails makes the Christian vulnerable to accusations of relativism. Of all philosophical views this is one by which the Christian should never be even remotely tempted. A robust commitment to necessary moral truths enables liberation from the bankruptcy of relativism. I have argued that a sturdy theistic ontology can make good sense of why and how such synthetic necessary moral truths obtain.

This dissertation has also attempted to demonstrate that there is reason why Christians can pursue the task of philosophizing with vigor and confidence. The Christian tradition represents a formidable worldview with a great number of resources from which to draw to make its voice heard in the public square and academic arena. An historically orthodox Christian faith should serve as among the most inspiring tugs in the direction of intellectual honesty and philosophical curiosity.

That said, it remains to be stressed that the danger ever looms to drape the cloak of divine authority over principles or ideas of purely human devising. Christians need to be vigilant in not presuming to dub every political or ethical position with which they agree as an instance of imaging God. Religious faith should not put a stop to one’s ability and willingness to think hard, but should instead serve as a spur to do so with ever more rigor. If thoughtful Christians and other religionists are truly going to offer a vision of God and religious ethics radically different from those who in recent days have done terrible deeds in the name of God, they must not conflate their complete faith in God with complete faith in their ability to discern God’s voice.

If God does not exist, then Christians are radically wrong. It does Christians good to ponder this from time to time. But if God does exist, I have
submitted that God is not irrelevant to ethics. It is only natural for theists to see the world differently than secularists, and to see ethics and morality differently as well, overlaps of intuitions notwithstanding. Christians have deep reasons to believe in something like the moral importance of human flourishing and deep reasons to think that very strong synthetic prescriptions attach to moral obligations. They often and ought to believe in invariant and necessary moral truths, to reject ethical relativism wholesale, to value intrinsic goods like relationships and people, to see the bankruptcy in reducing ethics to rights talk alone, and to see something like love and relationship functioning at the core of reality.
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ABBREVIATIONS

ERM  Essays on Religion and Morality
MT   The Meaning of Truth: A Sequel to "Pragmatism"
P    Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking
PU   A Pluralistic Universe
VRE  Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature
WB   The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

THEISTIC ETHICS AND THE EUTHYPHRO DILEMMA

by

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My dissertation focuses on the Euthyphro question, from one of the Socratic dialogues, understood in terms of the following dilemma posed against theistic ethics:

1. Either what is good/right is moral because God commands it, or it is not.
2. If what is good/right is moral because God commands it, then the good/right is arbitrary and vacuous.
3. If what is good/right is moral for reasons other than that God commands it, then God is superfluous from the standpoint of morality.
4. So, either the good/right is arbitrary and vacuous or God is superfluous to morality.

The dilemma is really two-fold. In the axiological version I reject premise (3) of this argument, because though I deny that the good is determined by divine command, I argue that there is an intimate connection between God and the necessary moral truths constitutive of the ultimate intrinsic good. Such truths are a reflection of his nature, and God probably best accounts for their existence in
the first place. So even if God's commands typically are commands of what is
good, that does not entail that goodness is independent of God.

In the deontic version of the question I reject premise (2). If God
commands, rendering obligatory, something that is morally good, then his
command is not arbitrary, but predicated on what is morally good. God cannot
make the violation of a necessary moral truth morally obligatory; these
constraints are internal to God's perfect nature. This affirmation of God's (de re)
impeccability is what enables me to reject the premise that God can sin, a
premise shared by versions of both the arbitrariness and vacuity objections to
divine command theory. I also reject premise (3). I do not interpret God's
commands so expansively as to include every clear apprehension of a necessary
moral truth, yet in those cases where obligations result by this alone without
God's commands, there is still an apprehension of a truth rooted in God's nature.

My conclusion is that the Euthyphro Dilemma has yet to be shown to
pose the in-principle objection to theistic ethics for which it is often credited.
I attended the University of Michigan-Dearborn as an undergraduate, majoring in philosophy and minoring in English, graduating in 1988. After teaching at a private high school for one year, I attended Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, earning my Master’s degree in Divinity in 1992. Before starting my doctoral work in philosophy at Wayne State, I began teaching philosophy courses at some local community colleges. I have now taught part-time at two universities, three community colleges, and one private college. My areas of interest include the philosophy of religion, ethics, and philosophical theology. I have published articles in the Asbury Theological Journal and the Journal of Religious Ethics.