Introduction

Is Goodness without God Good Enough? A Debate on Faith, Secularism, and Ethics

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Introduction

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Dostoyevsky is reported to have written, "If God does not exist, then everything is permitted." This claim expresses a belief that has been widely held throughout the history of Western culture. The belief is that unless God exists, ethics is in serious trouble. This idea has seemed so obvious to some that it has been deployed as a premise in so-called moral arguments for the existence of God. In general, moral arguments have the following form:

1. If God does not exist, then some apparent and important feature F of ethics or the ethical life is illusory.
2. The apparent feature F of ethics or the ethical life is not illusory.
3. Thus, God exists.

Arguments of this form can be grouped into families in terms of the different features of morality for which God is alleged to be necessary. Some moral arguments, for instance, aim to show that the apparent *objectivity* of ethical claims requires a theistic foundation. Other arguments focus on the apparent fact that moral reasons for action *override* all other kinds of reasons, and argue that there is no such fact if God does not exist. And, according to a third kind of moral argument, God's existence is needed to ground the apparent fact that the moral life is not futile. Many other kinds of moral arguments can be found in the literature.[1]

Moral arguments have occupied a relatively prominent place in the history of Western philosophy. Such arguments are part of a larger project—often called "natural theology"—that aims to support theistic belief by appeal to premises that are knowable via human reason or observation (and independent of special revelation from God). This project involves the articulation

and defense of various arguments for the existence of God, such as design arguments, cosmological arguments, ontological arguments, and moral arguments. Natural theology was widely regarded as an intellectually viable project prior to the Enlightenment, and the arguments for God's existence are currently a topic of much discussion.[2]

The popularity of moral arguments, in particular, has likely been due to a widespread assumption that morality depends upon God. In keeping with this assumption, some have thought that nonbelievers cannot be trusted to act morally. The following comment by John Locke (1632–1704) is typical:

> [T]hose are not to be tolerated who deny the being of a God. Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist. The taking away of God, though but even in thought, dissolves all.[3]

As we can see, Locke was suspicious about the moral trustworthiness of atheists. Although this suspicion may have been historically popular, it seems to be rejected by most contemporary philosophers. Indeed, each contributor to this volume rejects Locke's view on the matter. According to some, moreover, the widespread acceptance of a God-based morality has actually *impeded* moral and philosophical progress. When such a moral theory is firmly in place, one might find little incentive to search for a nontheistic foundation for ethics. Thus Derek Parfit writes, "Belief in God, or in many gods, prevented the free development of moral reasoning."[4]

During the Enlightenment, belief in God waned while moral reasoning flourished. Moreover, the idea that God plays an essential role in ethics was subjected to serious critique. It is fair to say that in the wake of the Enlightenment, belief in God was widely taken to be unsupportable by reason. Theism was defrocked, in no small part, by numerous published critiques of the traditional arguments for the existence of God; the impact of such objections is still with us today.[5] As a result, many thinkers concluded that God was either unreal or unknowable—and in either case, unavailable to play a role in an ethical theory.

In view of this, many Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinkers took themselves to have two options: either find a suitably adequate alternative to God, or deem certain apparent features of ethics illusory. Those whom we might call pessimists picked the latter option. They accepted the premise— that is, premise (1)—according to which, without God, ethics is in serious trouble. But they also took the Enlightenment critique of theism to provide sufficient reason to think that God was, in some way or another, no longer available to play a role in an ethical theory. And since by accepting (1) they in effect accepted the claim that nothing else can play that role, they drew the conclusion that ethics is in trouble. The following remark by the atheist-existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre is representative:

> Existentialists find it extremely disturbing that God no longer exists, for along with his disappearance goes the possibility of finding values in an intelligible heaven. There could no longer be any a priori good, since there would be no infinite and perfect consciousness to conceive of it. Nowhere is it written that good exists, that we must be honest or must not lie, since we are on a plane shared only by men. Dostoyevsky once wrote: "If God does not exist, everything is permissible." . . . Indeed, everything is permissible if God does not exist, and man is consequently abandoned, for he cannot find anything to rely on—neither within nor without.[6]

Referring back to our syllogism, pessimists like Sartre took (1) to be true and (3) to be false; they thus inferred the falsity of (2).[7]

Other philosophers—call them optimists—took (2) to be true but (3) to be false. They accordingly inferred the falsity of (1)—that is, the claim that ethics depends upon God. Thus, the optimists bore the burden of finding a nontheological foundation for ethics. We may better understand the optimists' project by contrasting it with the Ancient and Medieval ethical theories that preceded it. A crucial feature of these theories is the notion of a *telos*, an ultimate end, purpose, or goal, which is essential to and shared by all things of a certain kind. In the Ancient and Medieval view, a thing's *telos* determines what it is to be a good thing of that sort. For example, the purpose of a knife is to cut things, and a knife can cut well only if it is sharp. Thus, a knife fulfills its *telos* only if (and to the extent that) it is sharp.

For much of the history of Western thought, it was believed that not only artifacts, but also living things, have a *telos* in the sense described above. In particular, such important thinkers as Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas unite in claiming that human beings have a *telos*. The latter two thinkers believe that humans have the *telos* they do in virtue of God's having created human beings and given their lives a specific purpose—chiefly, to know God himself. On some interpretations, the Platonic and Aristotelian accounts of human teleology, though perhaps not fully theistic, are nevertheless theological in the sense that they link the human *telos* to the divine in substantive ways (for more on these theories, see John Hare's essay in this volume). In any case, the notion of a human *telos* plays a crucial role in all four thinkers' ethical theories.

On Alasdair MacIntyre's influential account, these theories are structured by a three-part conceptual scheme consisting of (i) human nature as it is, (ii) moral precepts (i.e., principles for moral action), and (iii) human nature as-it-could-be-if-it-realized-its-*telos*. Very roughly, a crucial purpose of moral precepts (second component) is to tutor untrained human nature (first component) in such a way as to move it closer to its *telos* (third component).[8] On MacIntyre's view, the concepts comprising this structure are mutually interdependent—each concept is intelligible only when taken together with the

other two. Thus, cutting out one part of this conceptual structure renders the remaining parts unintelligible conceptual fragments.[9]

So, ethical theorizing in the Ancient and Medieval periods was substantially teleological. Moreover, as we saw above, some important philosophers during these periods considered teleology to be essentially bound up with theological premises. With the advent of the Scientific Revolution, however, the teleological view of the world was called into question. This trend unfolded first in the downfall of Aristotle's physics and biology, and gradually found its way into thinking about human nature. Physicists began to center their attention on *efficient* or *push causes* instead of *final causes*. (To see the difference between efficient and final causes, consider a billiards player hitting the cue ball so as to send the eight ball into the corner pocket. The collisions between the cue stick and the cue ball, and the cue ball with the eight ball, are examples of efficient causation. The player's intention of landing the eight ball in the corner pocket fixes the final cause of his action, namely, the ball landing in the pocket.) Purpose-oriented, teleological explanations of physical phenomena became less and less prominent in physical theories; similar developments in biology led many to expunge even the notion of a human *telos.* These trends, coupled with the above-mentioned crisis in theology, led many traditional ethicists to seek an ethical theory that was both nontheological and nonteleological.[10] This search has been called the "Enlightenment Project,"[11] and its proponents include those we have dubbed optimists above.

Both Modern and contemporary attempts to carry out the Enlightenment Project divide into several branches, resulting in numerous competing ethical theories.[12] Some of these account for moral norms in terms of rational norms—on such views, to be immoral is, at root, to be irrational. Others account for the moral status of an action in terms of its empirical consequences. Utilitarianism, for example, says that an action is immoral if, relative to other possible acts, it produces an overall disfavorable proportion of pain to pleasure in society as a whole. Still other prominent accounts could be mentioned. What is notable, however, is the widespread disagreement as to which account, if any, provides an adequate nontheological and nonteleological account of ethics. Nor, on the other hand, is there agreement as to whether an updated theological and/or teleological account would be adequate.

Not surprisingly, some have declared that we have a crisis on our hands. This crisis, moreover, is no longer quarantined inside the academy walls. According to John Rist,

> The *effects* of this crisis in ethical theory are already visible in the world outside the universities as well as inside: in reassessments of our responsibility for the poor in Western states (not to speak of those in the Third World), in arguments over the "ethics" of the market economy or of modern warfare or arms trading,

in debates about what, if any, public policies should be adopted to control re-search in genetics and about the increasing number of "quality of life" issues which arise in the practice of medicine.[13]

It seems, then, that Western culture is to a significant extent confused about the structure and content of morality, even as lively discussion of these issues continues.

Concurrent with the crisis in ethics has been a series of interesting devel-opments in the philosophy of religion. By the middle of the twentieth century, much of Western culture remained under Judeo-Christian influence. The same was not true of philosophy as an academic discipline. To be sure, there were many theistic philosophers about in those days, particularly at Catholic universities. But philosophy as practiced in the world's most prestigious de-partments was markedly nontheistic.

Nontheistic philosophers typically fell into one of two groups. In the first group were those who claimed that there is no God— that is, who claimed that the statement "God exists" is *false*. Prominent among those belonging to the first group were the philosophical descendents of Marx, Freud, and Niet-zsche. The latter's (1882) declaration "God is dead" had already gained wide-spread influence by mid-century.[14] The second group consisted of those who believed that such statements are neither true nor false, but rather, *meaning-less*.[15] Belonging to the second group were the proponents of *logical posi-tivism* and its infamous *verifiability criterion* of meaning. According to an im-portant version of this criterion, a statement is cognitively meaningful if, and only if, it is either empirically verifiable or true by definition. And, so it went, because statements about God are neither empirically verifiable nor true by definition, such statements fail to carry cognitive meaning. This is not to say that religious statements are unimportant. Perhaps such statements can be used to express deep emotions or commend certain attitudes or behaviors. Rather, the point is that religious claims are just not the *kind of thing* that can be true or false. And if not—if talk about God is meaningless in this sense— then questions about his existence and nature are nonstarters.[16]

Theism floundered in philosophical exile for much of the 1950s and 1960s. News of the exile began to appear in popular culture. More accurately, the news was not so much of theism's exile as of its *death.* A 1966 cover story in *Time* magazine asked, "Is God Dead?" and reported an affirmative answer, at least as far as many philosophers and theologians were concerned.[17]

But things change. In an ironic twist, the very next year confirmed the death, not of theism, but of logical positivism. The verifiability criterion of meaning was now widely thought to be self-defeating.[18] Thus, in 1967 John Passmore announced that "Logical positivism . . . is dead, or as dead as a philosophical movement ever becomes."[19] While Passmore rightly went on to

note that logical positivism had left a philosophical legacy, the demise of the view nevertheless made room for serious philosophical discussions of theism. Talk of God was not at this point in the philosophical mainstream, but it was no longer regarded as *meaningless*.

In the same year that Passmore wrote his obituary for logical positivism, Alvin Plantinga published the book *God and Other Minds*, a carefully argued work advancing the claim that design arguments for God's existence are at least as strong as arguments for the claim that other minds exist.[20] This work marked the beginning of an unexpected renaissance in the philosophical treatment of several important religious topics. In the decades that followed, theistic philosophers used the most powerful conceptual tools available to revamp the traditional arguments for God's existence and to develop sophisticated treatments of the rationality of religious belief, religious experience, religious diversity, the problem of evil, immortality, and the relationship between God and ethics.[21] These developments were of such significance that they were soon detected outside of academic culture. In 1980 a follow-up article in *Time* reported:

> In a quiet revolution in thought and argument that hardly anyone could have foreseen only two decades ago, God is making a comeback. Most intriguingly, this is happening not among theologians or ordinary believers—most of whom never accepted for a moment that he was in any serious trouble—but in the crisp, intellectual circles of academic philosophers, where the consensus had long banished the Almighty from fruitful discourse. Now it is more respectable among philosophers than it has been for a generation to talk about the possibility of God's existence.[22]

The resurgence of theism was further evidenced by the founding of several professional organizations devoted to the philosophy of religion, including the Society of Christian Philosophers and the Evangelical Philosophical Society, along with their respective flagship journals, *Faith and Philosophy* and *Philosophia Christi*. In an article detailing the recent history of the philosophy of religion, atheist Quentin Smith laments that during much of the late twentieth century,

> [n]aturalists passively watched as realist versions of theism, most influenced by Plantinga's writings, began to sweep through the philosophical community, until today perhaps one-quarter or one-third of philosophy professors are theists, with most being orthodox Christians. . . . God is not "dead" in academia; he returned to life in the late 1960s and is now alive and well in his last academic stronghold, philosophy departments.[23]

While Smith's numerical estimate may be a bit generous, it does speak to the felt impact of theism's return to the academic scene.

The point of the above story is *not* that the theists are "winning" the debate. Despite recent trends, naturalism remains the dominant view. On this score, a notable counterpart to the resurgence of philosophical interest in theism is the institution of *Philo*, a professional journal founded by Paul Kurtz in 1998 and published by the recently established Society of Humanist Philosophers. The express purpose of the journal is to define and defend philosophical naturalism and secular humanism (more on secular humanism below). The real point of the above story is that, regardless of whether they have religious commitments, many contemporary philosophers treat questions about God and religion with great seriousness. This is a good thing—such questions are too important to pass over. And if this is the case for questions about *God*, then it is more obviously the case for questions about *God and ethics*.

[An important aside here: One can ask important questions about "God and ethics" *without assuming that God exists*. We can appreciate this point by considering the sorts of questions that bear on the relationship between God and ethics. In rough and ready form, here are some of those questions:<bl>

- If God were to exist, would morality depend—whether completely or in part—upon God's commands or nature?
- If God exists and morality depends upon God, can a nonbeliever live a life that is genuinely morally praiseworthy?
- If God exists and morality depends upon God, do we have to consult a sacred text in order to know our moral obligations? And if so, how do we decide *which* sacred text to consult?
- If God exists and morality depends upon God, is the separation of church and state inadvisable?
- If God exists and one believes in God, can one do what is morally right for its own sake, rather than for the sake of reward or out of fear of punishment?
- If there is no God, is morality groundless, arbitrary, relative, or even illusory?
- If there is no God, do we lack a sufficient reason to do what is morally right, especially when doing so is not in our own self-interest?
- If there is no God, does it follow that morality is merely a human convention or by-product of natural selection? Would that implication be problematic?

Notice that all of the above questions are *hypothetical* in nature. Their conditional (if-then) form provides us with an invitation to suppose, *for the sake of argument*, that God exists (or does not exist), and to consider what follows from such suppositions. Many of the questions discussed in this volume are

of just this sort. And as the essays in this volume make clear, "yes" and "no" answers to such questions do not always divide along the line between theists and nontheists.]

The main point at present is that answers to questions about God and ethics impact our lives in ways that our answers to other philosophical questions may not. For some of these questions, one's answers will naturally affect one's daily decisions, one's vote, and one's pocketbook. Thus, news headlines during recent elections have been abuzz with talk of "religion and morality," "faith-based initiatives," and "the separation of church and state" (where the latter is often glossed as "the separation of religion and law"). The outcomes of these elections have been largely shaped by the substantial views lying behind such buzzwords. Moreover, a glut of best-selling books has ensured that these terms and the discussions that attend them will remain in the popular consciousness for the foreseeable future.[24]

It should therefore be clear that we cannot address properly the great issues of our day without careful reflection on the connections, if any, between God and ethics. It was the importance of such reflection, together with the resurgence of theism and the continued prominence of secular humanism, that prompted this book. Created for the benefit of students, laypersons, and professionals, the book has three parts. Part I contains an edited version of a debate on the topic between Paul Kurtz and William Lane Craig. Part II contains seven new essays in which prominent philosophers comment on the debate and provide their own perspectives on the issue. In Part III, Craig and Kurtz respond to the essays in the second part of the book. In what remains of this introduction, we sketch some of the main arguments that occur in Parts I and II, presenting several important concepts along the way. Though our remarks are nowhere near comprehensive, they provide a map of the material in these parts of the book. The professional scholar may wish to skip these summaries, but may also find them useful in planning research, or in determining the order in which students should read.

SUMMARIES

The touchstone for the debate is the question "Is goodness without God good enough?" This question can be interpreted in several ways. Interpreting the question as pertaining primarily to human behavior, Kurtz argues for the affirmative position. One of his central claims is that belief in God is not a necessary condition for morally good behavior or character. On the contrary, many morally exemplary men and women throughout history have been nonbelievers. Moreover, religious belief often *impedes* moral progress and rea-

soning. This is evidenced both by the historical pervasiveness of evils committed in the name of religion and by the conflicting moral imperatives issued by competing religious traditions. Against Craig, Kurtz argues that morality requires no ontological foundation—and, indeed, putative reference to such a foundation is of no help in solving concrete moral problems. Kurtz therefore proposes to replace religion-based views of morality with what he calls *secular humanism*:

> What do I mean by secular humanism? I submit that first of all it expresses a set of ethical values and virtues. Humanists wish to enhance the intrinsic qualities of joyful and creative experiences, and to realize some measure of happiness in this life. . . . Humanists focus on temporal and secular values. They believe that their primary ethical obligation is to enrich life for ourselves and others. . . . Humanist ethical principles are autonomous, in the sense that they do not derive from theological or metaphysical premises.[25]</ext>

Particularly important for ethical decisions, Kurtz says, is reflection upon the consequences of one's actions. The good for mankind is "happiness in the here and now," and morally correct actions are those whose consequences promote this good. Finally, Kurtz notes, secular humanists acting in accordance with this ethic have produced much good in Western culture.

In contrast to Kurtz, Craig takes the debate's key question to concern moral *ontology* rather than moral behavior, psychology, or epistemology. For Craig, the relevant question is not whether one can behave morally without *belief* in God. Rather, the question is whether there would *be* objective moral values, duties, or accountability in an atheistic world. Craig aims to establish two conditional theses. First, if theism is true, then we have a solid foundation for morality. Second, if theism is false, then we do not have a solid foundation for morality. With respect to the first thesis, Craig argues that God's holy and loving nature grounds objective moral values, while God's commands constitute our moral duties. Likewise, God's providential justice guarantees moral accountability—God ensures that, ultimately, evil persons will be punished and that righteous persons will be vindicated. As to the second thesis, Craig argues that the atheistic view cannot account for objective moral values or duties, or for moral accountability. Though he refrains from arguing for God's existence directly, Craig does claim that if his second thesis is correct, then the atheistic position leads not to humanism, but to nihilism. In other words, given this thesis, the consistent atheist is forced toward the view that moral values are ultimately illusory—thus, goodness without God is not good enough. In Craig's view, the atheist must therefore either embrace nihilism or find a way to undermine his second thesis.

In the volume's first essay after the debate, C. Stephen Layman offers a moral argument for the existence of God. Layman does not affirm Craig's claim that if theism is false, then there are no objective moral truths. In this respect, Layman stops short of fully endorsing Craig's position. In another respect, however, Layman goes *beyond* Craig's conditional claims in arguing that certain commonly held beliefs about morality support the claim that God exists. A central feature of morality, Layman says, is that whenever moral requirements are concerned, moral reasons for action always override other reasons. For example, an action might be morally required but performing it might be very unpleasant for the agent (think of protesting an injustice). Nevertheless, whenever moral duty is concerned, the moral reasons to perform the act outweigh or override any reasons one might have not to perform it. Our common moral beliefs, then, support the following thesis:

- Overriding Reasons Thesis (ORT): The overriding (or strongest) reasons always favor doing what is morally required.

ORT is widely accepted by both theists and nontheists. However, Layman argues, ORT is not a necessary truth. Indeed, ORT is true only if either God exists or there is life after death (or both). This latter claim is equivalent to the following thesis:

- Conditional Thesis (CT): If there is no God and no life after death, then the Overriding Reasons Thesis is not true.

Layman argues that certain thought experiments provide CT with significant intuitive support. And when conjoined with ORT, CT entails that either God exists or there is a life after death in which virtue will be rewarded (or both). This claim leaves open the possibility that there is no God, but there is nevertheless a life after death in which virtue is rewarded. However, Layman argues, the notion of a life after death in which virtue is rewarded is itself most plausibly accommodated by theism.

In her essay "Atheism as Perfect Piety," Louise Antony agrees with Kurtz that belief in God is not necessary for living a moral life. She takes this a step further, however, by arguing that one can achieve perfect contrition for one's moral failings only if one does *not* believe in God. The reason is that a person who *does* believe in God will find it difficult, if not impossible, to remove thoughts of God's recompense from his or her contrition. Central to this line of thought is the principle that an all-good God who loves what is good will be more pleased with creatures who do what is good *because it is good* than with creatures who do what is good *in order to curry God's favor or avoid*

God's wrath. According to Antony, this principle implies that God cares more about our doing what is right than our doing what is in accord with his will. As she puts it, "It's the right and wrong he cares about, not that he said do it or don't" (XXX). But this difference in what God cares about only makes sense if *that which is right* isn't simply constituted by *that which God commands*. In other words, it makes sense only if, contrary to what Craig thinks, morality isn't dependent upon God's commands.

Antony finds support for this line of thought in a famous dilemma found in Plato's *Euthyphro*.[26] The dilemma presents the theist with two options. Either (A) God commands us to do *x* because *x* is morally right, or (B) *x* is morally right because God commands us to do *x*. If (A) is the case, then *x* is morally right independent of what God commands, which suggests that morality isn't dependent upon God. Thus, for example, God commands us not to rape because rape is—independently of and prior to his command—morally wrong. Antony calls a theory that adopts (A) a divine independence theory (DIT). If (B) is the case, then an act *x*'s moral status depends upon God's will: *x* is wrong if and only if (and because) God commands us not to do *x*; *x* is permissible if and only if (and because) God does not command us not to do *x*; and, *x* is obligatory if and only if (and because) God commands us to do *x*. Thus, if God commands us not to rape, then rape is wrong; and if God commands us to rape, then rape is obligatory. A theory that adopts (B) is called a divine command theory (DCT). On Antony's view, the trouble with DCT is twofold. First, DCT implies that is it *possible* for any kind of action, such as rape, to not be wrong. But it seems intuitively impossible for rape not to be wrong. So, DCT is at odds with our commonsense intuitions about rape. And second, it suggests that the moral status of an action (such as rape) is arbitrary—merely due to what God happens to command. Given these objections to DCT, Antony argues that a theist should adopt DIT. But DIT is directly at odds with Craig's contention that moral values are dependent upon God.

Antony goes on to argue that many theists evince a rejection of DCT in their interpretive approach to certain biblical passages. The passages Antony has in mind are those that appear to represent God as commanding an act that we ordinarily would take to be immoral. A standard example is Samuel 15:1–3, where God commands an action that we would normally call genocide. As Antony notes, the interpretive principle that theists typically *don't* use is "God commanded it, so it's good!" Instead, the theist usually looks for an interpretation that is both adequate to the passage and consistent with both (i) the fact, known independently of the passage, that genocide is wrong and (ii) the doctrine of God's goodness. The soundness of this interpretive strategy aside, Antony's claim is that this pervasive strategy is incompatible with DCT. As she says, if DCT is correct, that is, "if there is nothing more to moral

goodness than God's preferences, then there can be no rationale for seeking alternative readings of morally troubling texts" (XXX).

In his contribution to the volume, John Hare addresses an important question that also serves as his title: "Is Moral Goodness without Belief in God Rationally Stable?" In the first half of the paper, Hare identifies two fundamental commitments of traditional morality that, in his view, cannot be defended adequately without appeal to theological premises. Hare devotes the second half of the paper to cataloguing the crucial role theological claims have played in historically prominent ethical theories.

An important premise in Hare's argument is the so-called Ought Implies Can principle (OIC). This principle is widely accepted in ethical theorizing and is roughly the idea that if I cannot possibly do something, then the question whether I ought to do it does not in normal circumstances arise. More simply: if I *ought* to do *x*, then I *can* do *x*. With OIC in hand, Hare draws our attention to two fundamental moral principles, both of which state that we ought to do something. For the sake of convenience, we have labeled these "Ought1" and "Ought2", respectively:

(Ought1) We ought to be good in a way that is consistent with our own and others' happiness.
(Ought2) We ought to become good *internally*.

Given OIC, from (Ought 1) and (Ought 2) we can infer the following claims about what is *possible* for us:

(Can1) It is possible for us to be good in a way that is consistent with our own and others' happiness.
(Can2) It is possible for us to become good *internally*.

Crucial to Hare's argument, then, is the claim that we are rational in accepting Ought1 (or Ought2) only if we are rational in accepting Can1 (or Can2). According to Hare, a person is rationally unstable if he or she accepts Ought1 without good grounds for accepting Can1. The same goes for Ought2.

But what, precisely, are the claims that Can1 and Can2 express? And what grounds do we have for believing these claims? On Hare's reading, Can1 says that there is no fundamental incompatibility between our own happiness and that of others—the universe is the sort of place in which it is possible for us to pursue our own happiness without precluding others' well-being. But how is this possible? What reason do we have for thinking that the universe is this sort of place? Hare argues that the theist can defend his belief in this possibility via appeal to "the agency of Providence." The atheist, on the other

hand, does not (*qua* atheist) have a good reason for thinking that this alignment of justice and personal advantage is possible. Because belief in this possibility is a fundamental commitment of morality, the atheist who is also a traditional moralist occupies a rationally unstable position.

Whereas Can1 concerns the coordination of one's own (morally permissible) ends with the (morally permissible) ends of others, Can2 expresses a commitment to the possibility of "achieving a morally good ranking of ends within oneself"—chiefly, to ranking our affection for our own advantage *under* our affection for what is good in itself, independent of its relation to our advantage. However, says Hare, this sort of ranking does not come naturally for us. There is a "moral gap" between our actual (and preferred) ways of acting and those that morality requires. The traditional religious solution to this problem is that God can close this gap through regeneration—that is, through reordering our desires. Hare explores a handful of nontheistic attempts to explain how the gap might be filled (or to explain away the gap itself). If all such attempts fail and no others are forthcoming, he suggests, then we are left with a choice: either abandon Can2 and traditional morality along with it, or accept the theistic solution to the problem of the moral gap.

In the second part of the paper, Hare examines the three predominant moral theories in the teaching of ethics in Western universities—virtue theory, duty theory, and utilitarianism. He argues that the original versions of these theories were structurally dependent on theism, so that theological claims played a crucial role in the theories. For example, in Platonic and Aristotelian versions of virtue theory, the character traits most worthy of pursuit are those of divine beings. In Kantian duty theory, the supposition of God's existence is required to ensure the possibility that human virtue and happiness align. Similarly, in Mill's utilitarian theory, the hope that morality and happiness (pleasure) will coincide cannot be grounded apart from hope in divine providence and man's destiny after death. Thus, philosophers who advance versions of these theories that delete their theistic elements must consider whether something besides God can play the relevant conceptual role. If no such substitute can be found, then the resulting theories will be incoherent.

In "Why Traditional Theism Cannot Provide an Adequate Foundation for Morality," Walter Sinnott-Armstrong raises a number of objections against Craig. We will mention only a few of these. Sinnott-Armstrong argues that the traditional theistic doctrine of God's transcendence undermines Craig's thesis that God's nature can supply an absolute standard for moral judgments. He argues as follows: In the course of making moral judgments, we clearly use *something* as a standard. But if something transcends our cognitive grasp, then we cannot use it as a standard. According to traditional theism, however, both God and his nature transcend our cognitive grasp. Thus, if traditional

theism is true, then although God exists, we can use neither God nor his nature as a moral standard. But, again, we are using *something* as a standard in our moral judgments. So whatever it is that we are using as a standard, it cannot be God or his nature. On this point, Sinnott-Armstrong is in agreement with Kurtz that belief in God is not necessary for making moral judgments.

With respect to objective moral duties, Sinnott-Armstrong argues that Craig fails to explain how we have anything more than *prudential* reasons for obeying God's commands. Why, in other words, are we *morally* obligated to obey God's commands? Sinnott-Armstrong also challenges Craig's resolution of the *Euthyphro* dilemma. To avoid the charge that God's commands are arbitrary, Craig claims that such commands "flow from his nature." God's command to not rape, for example, is grounded in God's essential goodness. In response, Sinnott-Armstrong argues that this grounding holds *only* on the assumption that rape is morally wrong on independent grounds—i.e., grounds that are independent of God and/or his nature. But if rape is wrong on independent grounds, then the command not to rape is superfluous. Sinnott-Armstrong concludes that the moral status of rape (or anything else) cannot be constituted by God's commands. Instead, Sinnott-Armstrong suggests that a harm-based morality—one that is free of reference to God—can suffice to provide reasons for acting morally. On this score, he is in agreement with Kurtz that there are sufficient nontheistic reasons for living a moral life.

Finally, Sinnott-Armstrong considers Craig's claim that theism can provide a basis for moral accountability. Mere theism—simply the existence of an all-good, all-powerful, all-knowing God—does not entail that wrongdoers ultimately will be punished, since mere theism is consistent with God simply *forgiving* people for some or all of their sins. Mere theism is consistent, for instance, with the nonexistence of hell. And, while there *is* a hell on traditional Christian theism, not *all* wrongdoers are ultimately held accountable, since some wrongdoers (those who turn to Christ) have their sins forgiven and are thus not punished for their sins. Thus, mere theism isn't *sufficient* for ultimate accountability and Christian theism denies the *universality* of ultimate accountability.

In "Theism, Atheism, and the Explanation of Moral Value," Mark Murphy begins by noting that nobody except a "few cranks" would disagree with Kurtz's thesis that atheists can live morally admirable lives. The more interesting question—one not discussed by Kurtz—is this: Can atheists live *fully* admirable lives? According to Murphy, it is not obvious that Craig and Kurtz would agree on the answer to *this* question.

Murphy sets this question aside and devotes the bulk of his essay to evaluating Craig's arguments for the claims that theism can ground moral values, duties, and obligations, and atheism cannot. To this end, Murphy attempts to

clarify two key notions operative in Craig's arguments—the notion of a *grounding* or *foundation*, and the notion of *morality* itself. Let us take these in turn.

Murphy notes that the sort of grounding Craig has in mind is *ontological*. In other words, Craig is addressing questions of the following sort: What kinds of things exist? And in what ways are these things related to one another? Murphy construes Craig's account of grounding as follows: To show that some entity *x* is grounded in some other entity *y* is to say that *y* is a more basic feature of reality than is *x*, and that *y* explains *x*'s existence. In Craig's view, then, God is more ontologically basic than moral values, and God explains the existence of those values. Moreover, for Craig, *only* God can ground moral values in this way.

On Murphy's reading, Craig's account of morality consists of four features. Morality is (i) *universal* (it applies to everyone), (ii) *objective* (moral facts do not depend upon what we think), (iii) *normative* (moral values provide reasons for action), and (iv) *other-directed* (at least some morally valuable actions or states of affairs concern persons other than the agent).

Given these accounts of grounding and morality, Murphy sets out to evaluate Craig's arguments. Recall Craig's argument for the claim that atheism cannot ground morality. A chief shortcoming of this argument, Murphy says, is that Craig fails to exclude the possibility that in an atheistic universe, moral values can be grounded in prudential values. *Prudential value*, roughly, is what is *good for* a subject. Murphy thinks that this sort of value can be objective, universal, and normative, even in an atheistic universe—and he thinks that Craig will agree. Prudential value, then, shares features (i) to (iii) of Craig's account of moral value. The sticking point is over whether prudential value is sufficient to ground the fourth feature of Craig's account: the other-directedness of morality. Here Murphy offers the atheist the idea that we should care about the well-being of others because we possess *reflective* and *objectivizing* intelligence, a faculty that enables its possessor to call his or her inclinations into question, and to see himself or herself "as one person among others" (XXX). If Craig's argument is to succeed, he must show not only that this faculty (taken together with prudential value) is insufficient to ground morality's other-directedness, but also that Craig's own theistic account is sufficient on those points where the nontheistic account falls short.

Toward the end of his paper, Murphy draws on recent work by Robert Adams in developing an argument that is more amenable to Craig's position. He argues that, plausibly, theism and only theism can ground moral *obligations*. On Adams' view, all obligations (moral and otherwise) have a feature that goes *beyond* Craig's (i) to (iv)—namely, an "irreducible social element, involving actually made demands by one party in the social relationship on

the other" (XXX). Morally obligatory actions are those actions such that if one fails to perform them, one properly incurs guilt. But at least one feature of one's being in a state of guilt is that one has damaged one's relationship(s) with some other person(s). Thus, morally obligatory actions are those actions such that, by failing to perform them, one puts oneself at odds with others, and renders oneself properly subject to punishment, rebuke, censure, or ill thought on the part of the offended party. But to account for this social element of obligation, "we need to know who it is that has the power to hold humans (universally!) subject to censure for failing to perform their moral obligations" (XXX). Plausibly, God is the only good candidate for such a being. If so, then it appears that at least one moral phenomenon—moral obligation—requires a theistic explanation. However, Murphy adds, such a conclusion needn't serve as an insurmountable obstacle to those who wish to build a secular ethic. For, such ethicists can simply develop an ethical system that does not include the notion of moral obligation. If Murphy's earlier arguments are correct, secular ethicists can still talk about morally good states of affairs, morally good persons, moral reasons for action, and even obligations of a nonmoral sort.

In his essay "Empty and Ultimately Meaningless Gestures?" Donald C. Hubin raises an objection to Craig's views about the ethics of self-sacrifice. One of Craig's central theses is that there is moral accountability if and only if God exists. According to Hubin, if Craig is right about this, then the existence of God entails the thesis of "eschatological moral compensation" (EMC). According to EMC, in the afterlife God will ensure that each person is perfectly and justly compensated for his or her deeds. As Craig says, "evil and wrong will be punished and the righteous will be vindicated. Despite the inequalities of this life, in the end the scales of God's justice will be balanced" (XXX). The lesson Craig draws is that if God does not exist, then acts of genuine self-sacrifice are "empty and ultimately meaningless gestures." In response, Hubin argues not only that Craig is mistaken about this implication, but also that if God exists then it is *impossible* for any action to count as an act of morally laudable, altruistic, genuine self-sacrifice. As Hubin says, "[s]uch acts are possible only if righteous self-sacrifices sometimes go unrewarded" (XXX). Hubin is thus in agreement with Kurtz's claim that altruistic behavior is consistent with naturalism.

According to Hubin, EMC also calls into question the traditional ethic of self-sacrifice, which is arguably a prominent part of theistic ethics. If a theist is "clear-headed" enough to recognize that theism implies EMC and that EMC precludes the possibility of any actions counting as genuinely self-sacrificial, then he or she will be unable to *intend* to engage in such an action (on the assumption that an agent cannot intend to do what he or she believes to

be impossible). Thus, an ethic of self-sacrifice will impose an impossible requirement upon the clear-headed theist.

Hubin concludes by considering Craig's claim that if God does not exist, then acts of self-sacrifice are "stupid." He notes that there must be a normative principle that warrants the judgment that such acts are "stupid." Since such acts are not stupid if EMC is true, Hubin suggests that the principle Craig is assuming must be the principle that a sacrificial action that isn't compensated in this world makes sense only if it is compensated in the next world. But Hubin finds this principle to be "morally troubling": it implies that one would be stupid to act for the *well-being* of another without a good reason for thinking that that one's act would be fully rewarded. But this implication undermines the virtue of altruism itself. After all, "there is manifestly no stupidity in [a father] sacrificing his worldly well-being for that of his children, even in the full expectation that this will result in a long-run, net harm to himself" (XXX). Indeed, Hubin insists, the praiseworthiness of self-sacrificial actions is *precisely* due to the fact that there is no guarantee that those making such sacrifices will receive perfect compensation.

In "What Difference Does God Make to Morality?" Richard Swinburne argues against *both* Craig and Kurtz. Against Craig, Swinburne argues that there are moral truths even if God does not exist. And against Kurtz, Swinburne argues "that the existence and actions of God make a great difference to the content of morality, the seriousness of morality, and our knowledge of morality" (XXX).

Swinburne argues that some (but not all) moral claims are necessarily true, in that those claims are true in every possible world (where a "possible world" is a possible set of circumstances). Thus, such claims are true even in worlds in which God does not exist and regardless of what God commands in worlds in which he does exist. The fact that certain moral claims are necessarily true is based on the so-called logical supervenience of moral properties on nonmoral properties. Nonmoral properties are purely descriptive ones; examples include being a killing, being an act of self-defense, being premeditated, being nonconsensual, being an act of sexual intercourse, being painful, being in such-and-such circumstances, and so on. Moral properties are normative; examples include being wrong, being obligatory, being permissible, being supererogatory, and so forth.

Thus, when Swinburne says that a moral property of an action logically supervenes on the act's nonmoral properties, he is claiming that the type of moral property that an action has is *wholly determined* by the nonmoral properties of the act in question. Why, for instance, does what we call "rape" have the property of being morally wrong? Because it is an act that has the nonmoral properties of being an act of sexual intercourse, being against the will

of one of the participants, being painful, and so forth.[27] The action's moral status is determined by its nonmoral properties.

This determination, Swinburne argues, holds in *every* possible world. In other words, consider two different worlds, W1 and W2, and suppose that action *x* occurs in W1 and action *y* occurs in W2. Swinburne's thesis is that if *x* and *y* have exactly the same nonmoral properties, then it is impossible for them to have different moral properties. For example, acts of sexual intercourse in which one party overrides the will of the other are morally wrong in every world in which they occur. Philosophers often express this by saying that it is a *necessary truth* that such an act is wrong. The important implication is that such an act is wrong even in worlds in which there is no God (on the assumption that there are such worlds). In affirming this, Swinburne rejects Craig's contention that in a Godless world, there wouldn't be such thing as a morally wrong act.

Nevertheless, Swinburne argues, the existence of God in a world does make a significant difference as to the nonmoral properties that obtain in that world. According to Swinburne, it is a necessary truth that "it is obligatory to thank and please benefactors" (XXX). In worlds in which God exists, God is our benefactor. Thus, if God exists it is obligatory to thank and please Him. In this way, the existence of God has crucial implications for the *content* of morality. Similarly, it is necessarily true that "if there is an (all-good) God, then whatever he commands is obligatory" (XXX). Thus, if God exists and issues commands, then we have obligations we wouldn't have in a world in which God didn't exist.

NOTES

1. A useful distinction may be drawn between those moral arguments which focus on a *formal* or *general* feature of ethics and those which focus on the *content* of ethics. An argument of the former sort draws our attention to a feature apparently shared by all or most ethical claims, such as *overridingness* or *objectivity*, and tries to show that if God does not exist, then this feature is illusory. An argument of the latter sort draws our attention to a more specific concept, such as *intrinsic value*, *human dignity*, *equality*, and so on, and tries to show that such concepts are inapplicable if there is no God.

For those interested in gaining greater facility with the literature on moral arguments, or the relationship between God and ethics in general, we recommend the important and recent books listed on the "Further Reading" pages at the end of this volume.

2. Some recent works advancing natural theology are the following: C. Stephen Layman, *Letters to Doubting Thomas: A Case for the Existence of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); James F. Sennett and Douglas Groothuis, eds., *In Defense of Natural Theology: A Post-Humean Assessment* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 2005); Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed. (New York:

Oxford University Press, 2004); Michael Murray, ed., *Reason for the Hope Within* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999); and William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1994).

For a good overview of the literature on natural theology see William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, eds., *A Companion to Natural Theology* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, forthcoming).

Recent works criticizing natural theology include the following: J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and against the Existence of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Nicholas Everitt, *The Non-Existence of God* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Jordan Howard Sobel, *Logic and Theism: Arguments for and against Belief in God* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Graham Oppy, *Arguing about Gods* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

For a popular-level debate, see William Lane Craig and Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, *God? A Debate between a Christian and an Atheist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

3. Ironically enough, Locke says this in his *A Letter concerning Toleration*, 2nd ed. (1689; repr., Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1955), 52.

4. Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 454.

5. Some of the most important and influential of these objections were articulated by David Hume and Immanuel Kant. For a helpful discussion of the impact of these objections on contemporary theology, see Thomas V. Morris, "Philosophers and Theologians at Odds," *Asbury Theological Journal* 44 (Fall 1989): 31–41. It is important to note that Kant did not think that *all* the traditional theistic arguments failed; in fact, he is famous for defending his own version of a moral argument.

6. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2007), 28–29.

7. We are choosing ease of expression over precision here. To be precise, we should speak of "a substitution instance of the form expressed in (1)" being true (or false) and "a substitution instance of the form expressed in (2)" being true (or false).

8. Such tutoring is not, on MacIntyre's view, the *only* purpose of the precepts. Rather, the precepts are themselves partly constitutive of the life of the virtues. Thanks to Mark Murphy for this point.

9. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd ed.(Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

10. There is potential for confusion here, given that utilitarian ethical theories are often referred to as "teleological" theories. While we lack the space to develop the point in detail, it should be noted that the concept of teleology that is deployed in utilitarian theories is different from the Aristotelian concept of teleology. In briefest outline: while both theories construe the human end as *happiness*, one paradigmatic sort of utilitarian thinks of happiness as pleasure (and the avoidance of pain). The Aristotelian concept of happiness includes the goods of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, but adds much else besides. Happiness, for the Aristotelian, requires the holistic *flourishing* of the moral agent, where this includes the actualization and proper orientation of his or her physical, affective, and rational capacities. Of course, some

philosophers question whether the utilitarian concept of happiness differs significantly from that of the Aristotelian. John Stuart Mill, for instance, famously distinguished between higher pleasures (e.g., as experienced by the philosopher while thinking) and lower pleasures such as those enjoyed in food and sex. We cannot here address the extent to which this distinction brings Mill's concept of happiness closer to Aristotle's.

11. See Chapters 1–6 of *After Virtue* for MacIntyre's explication and critique of the Enlightenment Project.

12. For a helpful survey of contemporary ethical theories along with a rigorous but accessible attempt to come to terms with moral diversity, see Robert Audi, *Moral Value and Human Diversity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). For an excellent historical survey of ethical theories, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

13. John M. Rist, *Real Ethics: Reconsidering the Foundations of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1.

14. Nietzsche makes this pronouncement in *The Gay Science* (1882; New York: Random House, 1974), 181.

Nietzsche's name is often mentioned in discussions of God and ethics. Thus, we can imagine someone asking, "Was *Nietzsche* an optimist or a pessimist?" (in the senses of those terms described above). We cannot address this question in detail here, but note the following salient points, which accord with fairly standard readings of Nietzsche. First, Nietzsche did not endorse the claim that if God does not exist, then everything is permissible—for Nietzsche did not think that morality depends upon God. (However, he was keenly aware that many of his contemporaries believed that morality *does* depend on God). Second, Nietzsche disliked many features of traditional morality (in particular, what he perceived to be its overemphasis on moral prohibitions). Thus, he does not seem to fit neatly into the optimist-pessimist schema. Recall: optimists seek a nontheistic account of traditional morality; pessimists mourn the fall of traditional morality, which they take to be a logical implication of atheism. Nietzsche does not meet either description. Third, it is not the case that in rejecting traditional morality, Nietzsche thereby thought that it does not matter how one lives. Nor did he think that all ways of living are equally good. Indeed, he advocated the replacement of traditional morality by what he viewed as a superior, more life-affirming alternative.

For an accessible introduction to Nietzsche's thought, see Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins, *What Nietzsche Really Said* (New York: Schocken Books, 2000).

15. We say that nontheists only *typically* fell into one of these groups in order to make room for *agnostic* nontheists, who neither denied God's existence nor the cognitive meaningfulness of religious language, but who also did not affirm theism. T. H. Huxley famously advocated a kind of agnosticism in the nineteenth century, and there were doubtless many agnostics among twentieth-century philosophers. But there was, during this time, no agnostic movement comparable in prominence to the atheistic and positivistic movements.

16. It is worth noting that several prominent philosophers during this period also took the view that *ethical* statements are cognitively meaningless. See, for example, A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (New York: Dover Publications, 1946), chap. 6.

17. "Toward a Hidden God," *Time*, 8 April 1966.

18. Roughly, the main problem is that the verifiability criterion is itself neither empirically verifiable nor true by definition. Thus, the criterion rules itself out as cognitively meaningless. Of course, this characterization of the problem is overly simple. For a more detailed account see Scott Soames, *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century*, vol. 1, *The Dawn of Analysis* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), chap. 13.

19. John Passmore, "Logical Positivism," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 5:52–57. Our friend David Solomon reminds us that Passmore's announcement was old news by the time it hit the press—logical positivism had been dead for well over a decade prior to Passmore's writing.

20. Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967).

21. For a helpful topical introduction to this body of work, see Michael J. Murray and Michael C. Rea, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). See also Philip Quinn and Charles Taliaferro, eds., *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1997).

For a historical treatment of the resurgence in the philosophy of religion, see Alvin Plantinga, "Christian Philosophy at the End of the Twentieth Century," in *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader*, ed. James F. Sennett (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998); see also Charles Taliaferro, "One Hundred Years with the Gods and Giants: Christians and Twentieth-Century Philosophy," *Christian Scholars Review* 29, no. 4 (Summer 2000): 695–712.

There are also several good anthologies that contain important recent contributions to the field. Among these are Louis Pojman and Michael Rea, eds., *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 2007); William Lane Craig, ed., *Philosophy of Religion: A Reader and Guide* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Michael Peterson, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, and David Basinger, eds., *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); and Eleonore Stump and Michael J. Murray, eds., *Philosophy of Religion: The Big Questions* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1999).

22. "Modernizing the Case for God," *Time*, 7 April 1980.

23. Quentin Smith, "The Metaphilosophy of Naturalism," *Philo* 4, no. 2 (2001): 3–4. This paper is available online at www.philoonline.org.

24. See, for example, Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2006) and Jim Wallis, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).

25. Paul Kurtz, *Skepticism and Humanism: The New Paradigm* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 2001), 145.

26. John Cooper, ed., *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1997).

27. This example is the editors'. However, we take the example to illustrate accurately the supervenience claim that Swinburne advocates.