GOD AND ETHICS

A STUDY IN MORAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Arts

and Sciences in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

1971

71-23,953

VAN WYK, Robert Nicholas, 1940-
    GOD AND ETHICS: A STUDY IN MORAL PHILOSOPHY
    AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION.

    University of Pittsburgh, Ph.D., 1971
    Religion

University Microfilms, A XEROX Company, Ann Arbor, Michigan

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## UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

### FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

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It was defended on

March 31, 1971

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# GOD AND ETHICS

## A STUDY IN MORAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Robert N. Van Wyk, Ph.D.

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After illustrating the practice of Christian ethical writers
of inferring that men ought to do something on the gounds of some
belief about the character, commands, or purpose of God, this disser-
tation then raises the fundamental question with which it deals, that
is, whether, in the light of Hume's observations about the impossibility
of inferring an 'ought' from an 'is', theological beliefs can legitimately
be considered to be relevant to basic moral convictions. After consid-
ering some other attempts to overcome the 'is'-'ought' dichotomy
(those of Foot, Searle, and Toulmin) attention is directed to G. E.
Moore, the "naturalistic fallacy" and the attempt to overcome this
dichotomy by means of definitions. With the aid of recent discussions
of the analytic-synthetic distinction it is concluded that what Moore's
open question argument shows is neither that moral terms refer to
non-natural properties, nor that they are cognitively meaningless,
but that they represent cluster concepts. In the light of regarding
a moral system in terms of a Quinian field of beliefs a system of moral
reasoning similar to Richard Brandt's "qualified attitude method" is
seen to be plausible.

While the morally right cannot be defined in terms of God's will
any more than it can be defined in terms of any other single criterion

there may in fact be some good reason to put some principle that refers
to God or His will at the center of one's moral beliefs, and the reasons
offered by such writers as P. T. Geach, Dewi Z. Phillips, and John Hick
are considered. But if and only if God is understood to be morally good
can we say that a life that acquiesces in His purpose would definitely
be ultimately vindicated and not brought into question by other moral
criteria. The meaning of 'God is good' is analyzed in such a way that
it is not necessary for us to judge that God is good for us to know
what such an assertion means. Neither is it necessary for us to judge
God's individual commands to be good in order for it to be rational for
us to believe in His goodness. This is not because efforts to justify
the belief in God's goodness on linguistic grounds (Burton F. Porter)
or metaphysical grounds (Aquinas, James Ross, Charles Hartshorne) are
adequate, but because once an individual has some initial reason to
hold to a certain belief the rationality of his continuing to hold it
depends not on his ability to justify it, but in its ability to with-
stand critical attack. For the believer to have some reason to adhere
to such a belief the purported will of God must at some point correspond
to his own judgment as to what is right--otherwise how could he be some-
one who trusts in God,--but this need not be the autonomous judgment of
the secular man, but it may be that of the man who under the influence
of religious experience or worship "sees" things differently than he
would have otherwise. The possibility of falsifying his belief comes
when on other occasions his autonomous judgment conflicts with God's
purported will and so leads him to question either the goodness of God
or his criteria for knowing the will of God, but, contrary to what would

seem to be the position of some proponents of the autonomy thesis, it is in no way irrational or immoral, given the believer's set of beliefs, for him to allow his belief in God's goodness, and his belief that God wills a particular action, to override and discredit his autonomous judgment on many particular occasions.

# PREFACE

I would like to express my gratitude to my dissertation advisor, Dr. Walter Wiest of the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and to the other members of my doctoral committee, Dr. George Kehm of the same school and Dr. Nicholas Rescher and Dr. Miles Brand of the Philosophy Department of the University of Pittsburgh, for serving in this capacity and for offering helpful criticisms of earlier drafts of this dissertation. Mr. Robert Schultz of the University of Pittsburgh also read the first two chapters of an earlier draft and offered valuable suggestions. The application to ethics of the discussion of the analytic-synthetic distinction and of the nonjustificational approach to rationality, which is perhaps the dissertation's main claim to originality, was first set forth in a seminar paper written for Dr. William W. Bartley III and was partially stimulated by the views he expressed on these two subjects, although with no reference to their applicability to moral philosophy. Some of the theological positions found in Chapter V, Part B, were originally set forth by Dr. George Kehm in one of his courses at Pittsburgh Seminary.

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# I. THE PROBLEM OF DERIVING 'OUGHT' FROM 'IS'

## A. Theological Ethics and the Problem of 'Ought' and 'Is'

It is a common practice of Christian theologians to try to jus-
tify moral beliefs and practices by referring to the nature, the will,
or the activity of God. This practice is deeply imbedded in the Biblical
teaching itself. "Thus says the Lord" is the sole justification given
for some of the directives found in the prophetic literature and in the
Old Testament law. The Gospels portray Jesus as sometimes giving pru-
dential reasons for the practices he advocates, but often as simply
proclaiming, "You have heard that it was said . . . , but I say unto
you . . . ."[1] The Apostle Paul advocates certain practices because
they "please the Lord."[2] Moral imperatives are also justified in the
New Testament literature by reference to the divine nature or action:
"As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."[3] "By this we
know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down
our lives for the brethren. . . . If God so loved us we also ought to
love one another."[4] "Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has wel-
comed you."[5] In many places the connection between beliefs about the
nature and activity of God and the moral demand is not so clearly and
explicitly stated, but nevertheless it is there.[6] The moral demand is

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[1] Matthew 5:27, 28, 33, 38.          [2] Colossians 3:22.

[3] Colossians 3:13.                    [4] I John 3:16, 4:11.

[5] Romans 15:7

[6] See below, ch. III, part C, for further discussion of ways in
which Biblical and early Jewish writers relate moral teaching to God.

often regarded as being reducible to one or a few basic precepts, as is

the case, for example, when the Apostle Paul writes, "For the whole

law is fulfilled in one word, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"[1]

Similarly the divine activity which men's lives are to advance, or witness

to, or reflect, is often seen as the accomplishment of one single redemp-

tive purpose culminating in the Kingdom of God.[2] Christian ethics, accor-

ding to Paul Lehmann,is concerned with doing what is appropriate to "what

God is doing in the world."[3] Some would stress doing what is appropriate

to the one purpose which holds together God's action and accordingly

would emphasize the Biblical witness to Christ; others, more confident

of their ability to discern the work of God in the events of the world,

would stress doing what is appropriate to what God seems to be doing in

some particular historical circumstances.[4] Sometimes the Christian

ethic is understood as one form of _historicist_ ethics which can be con-

trasted to other forms, such as Marxism, or to forms of naturalistic

ethics, such as some of those based on evolutionary theory.[5] Which of

these ethical views is correct is sometimes seen to depend on which

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[1] Galatians 5:14; see also Matthew 22:37-39 and I John 3:23.

[2] Directives concerning the proper relationships between groups
of men are derived, for example, from such a statement as this: "For he
has made know to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose
which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite
all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Ephesians 1:9-10).

[3] _Ethics in a Christian Context_ (New York: Harper and Row, 1963),
pp. 74ff.

[4] Although this distinction is not absolute, Karl Barth and Paul
Ramsey exemplify to some extent the former tendency while Harvey Cox,
Richard Schaull, and "theologians of revolution" exemplify the latter.
See _The Church Amid Revolution_, ed. Harvey Cox (New York: Association
Press, 1967).

[5] See Gordon Kaufman, _The Context of Decision_ (Nashville: Abing-
Press, 1961), pp. 24ff. Also see below, ch. III, part E.

view of history or of reality is correct. The effort to base ethics on

what God has done or is doing and the attempt to base ethics on what God

wills for men to do are brought together in much contemporary theology

in the belief that God's will for man is primarily or exclusively that

man's actions reflect and so bear witness to the activity, purpose, or

nature of God. A passage which Karl Barth, for example, refers to a number

of times is Matthew 5:44-48:

> But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who per-
> secute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in
> heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good,
> and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love
> those who love you, what reward have you? . . . You, therefore,
> must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Some who work in the field of Christian ethics, such as Reinhold

Niebuhr,[2] base their moral views not so much on Christian beliefs about

what God is doing in the world but rather on the Christian understanding

of human nature which is contrasted to humanistic, Marxist, and other

views. Karl Barth also devotes a great deal of attention to ethical con-

clusions derived from his doctrine of man, although this doctrine in

turn is based on his doctrine of the covenant which is grounded in his

understanding of God's purpose and nature.[3] Similarly Roman Catholic

natural law philosophers also seek to base moral conclusions on a

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[1] *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. II, *The Doctrine of God*, Part II,
translation edited by G. W. Bromily (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, New York:
Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), pp. 521, 567, 578.

[2] *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York: Charles Scribner's
Sons, 1941), Vol. I, ch. 1, Voll II, ch. 9; *The Children of Light and the
Children of Darkness* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), ch. 2.

[3] *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. III, *The Doctrine of Creation*, transla-
tion edited by G. W. Bromily (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, New York: Charles
Scribner's Sons), Part II (1960) and Part IV (1961).

conception of human nature.[1] All of these attempts seem to presuppose
that particular ethical beliefs follow from particular beliefs about
reality, in this case about the nature of man, and that if one could
decide which of these beliefs were correct one would then know which
moral beliefs were correct.

British and American philosophers in the empiricist tradition,
however, have argued that on the contrary nothing about what one ought
to do logically follows from knowing or believing that certain propo-
sitions about reality are true, nor can one settle the question of what
one ought to do by deciding which, if any, of the conflicting beliefs
about history, the nature of man, sociological laws, or what God wills
or does, are true, without appealing to other moral principles which
themselves do not follow from these beliefs. It would be difficult to
find any passage more often quoted or referred to in recent writings of
moral philosophers than that passage in Hume's _Treatise_ in which he is
understood to be arguing for this position. He writes:

> I cannot forbear adding to these reasonings an observa-
> tion, which may, perhaps, be found of some importance. In
> every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I
> have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in
> the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a
> God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a
> sudden I am surprised to find, that instead of the usual copu-
> lations of propositions, _is_ and _is not_, I meet with no proposi-
> tion that is not connected with an _ought_, or an _ought not_.

[1] Thomas Aquinas, _Summa Theologica_, I-II, Q. 94, _Summa Contra
Gentiles_, Book III, Part I; Jacques Maritain, _Man and the State_ (Chicago:
University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp. 85ff.; John Courtney Murray,
S. J., _We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Propo-
sition_ (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960), pp. 329ff. Also see below,
ch. III, Part D.

> This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last con-
> sequence. For as this _ought_, or _ought not_, expresses some new
> relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be ob-
> serv'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason should
> be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new
> relation can be a deduction from others which are entirely dif-
> ferent from it. But as authors do not commonly use this pre-
> caution, I shall presume to recommend it to the readers; and am
> persuaded, that this small attention wou'd subvert all the vul-
> gar systems of morality, and let us see, that the distinction
> of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relations of
> objects, nor is perceiv'd by reason.[1]

The standard interpretation of this passage is "that no set of nonmoral

premises can entail a moral conclusion,"[2] or that "no imperative conclu-

sion can be validly drawn from a set of premisses which does not contain

at least one imperative."[3] This has even become known as "Hume's law."[4]

Such writers as R. M. Hare,[5] Antony Flew,[6] and P. H. Nowell-Smith[7] agree

that this is the correct interpretation of Hume and that Hume is correct

in what he maintains. The upshot of all of this is that the common

method of reasoning in ethics, which was discussed above in reference to

theological beliefs, but which is also used with other sorts of psycho-

logical, sociological, or metaphysical premises, is regarded as being

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[1] David Hume, A _Treatise of Human Nature_, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge
(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888) Book III, Part I, Section I, pp. 469-470.

[2] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Hume on 'Is' and 'Ought'," The _Philosophical Review_, LXVIII (1959), 452.

[3] R. M. Hare, The _Language of Morals_ (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), p. 28.

[4] R. M. Hare, _Freedom and Reason_ (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 116.

[5] The _Language of Morals_, p. 28, _Freedom and Reason_, p. 116.

[6] "On the Interpretation of Hume." _Philosophy_, XXXVIII (1963), 178-182; "'Not Proven'--At Most," in _Hume_, ed. V. C. Chappell (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Co., 1966), pp. 291-294.

[7] _Ethics_ (Baltimore and Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1954), p. 37.

invalid. As Nowell-Smith puts it, reaching moral conclusions on the basis of such premises must involve "illegitimate reasoning since the conclusion of an argument can contain nothing which is not in the premises, and there are no 'oughts' in the premises."[1] This interpretation of Hume has been challenged by some writers, most notably by Alasdair MacIntyre, but the arguments against it are unconvincing.[2] In any case our concern is not with the proper interpretation of Hume but with the position he is usually understood to be maintaining and with the arguments used to support it.[3] This position and similar ones have been

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[1] *Ethics*, p. 37.

[2] MacIntyre's position as presented in his paper, "Hume on 'Is' and 'Ought'," is that Hume is only attacking a certain way in which the transition from 'is' to 'ought' had been attempted, i.e., the way characteristic of the "vulgar" or popular (religious) morality of his day. He will, however, propose another way, a way which MacIntyre compares with the position of Stephen Toulmin (see section B of this chapter) and which bases morality on the need to have rules which are for the benefit of everyone's long term interest. MacIntyre's interpretation, however, is implausible for a number of reasons. First, Hume criticizes not only the "vulgar" morality but all systems which he has hitherto encountered. Second, he interprets the passage in question which is found at the end of Part I, Section I (of Book III) in terms of Part II (which deals with justice) as if there were no Part I, Section II, and so he overlooks the fact that Hume regards the issue of what morality is (or, in contemporary terms, of what we are doing when we use moral language), with which Part I deals, as settled before he begins another topic in Part II. This second topic has to do with why men have the moral views which they in fact have. The passages MacIntyre cites in Parts II and III have to do with this topic and not with the former one. Third, he ignores the difference between natural obligation, which arises from certain facts about our interests, and moral obligation. In Hume's thought a natural obligation only becomes a moral obligation when it is baptized by the moral sentiment. Therefore the connection between facts about interests and moral obligation is only a contingent one and not a logical one as Toulmin and MacIntyre would have it, for our moral sentiment is not confined to approving matters which are related to our interests, nor is the fact that it does approve our natural obligations (making them moral obligations) a matter of necessity.

[3] It is perhaps worth noting that the same sort of argument that is used by Hume and modern disciples of Hume against theological ethics is also used by some theologians against various forms of

called the autonomy thesis, especially when the arguments associated with
them have been directed primarily against the sorts of theological justi-
fications of moral practices considered above. We can initially make a
distinction between what we shall call a weak autonomy thesis and a
strong autonomy thesis. The former simply states that the meaning of
basic terms in the vocabulary of moral discourse does not depend, at
least not completely, on any reference to God or His will, and that we
can make valid moral judgments without reference to God or His will.
What we will call the strong autonomy thesis maintains one or more of the
following assertions: (1) In some sense basic moral convictions must be
prior to basic religious convictions; (2) religious beliefs are there-
fore irrelevant to such moral convictions; and (3) consequently, in so far
as it is possible, in principle, to work out a correct or ultimately justi-
fied system of ethics it is possible to do so without reference to God.
We cannot at this point state precisely what _the_ strong autonomy thesis
is because it can be understood in various ways and its formulations
may have to be changed in response to the counter moves of those who
would attack it, force its adherents to make clarifying distinctions, or
change the general framework in which it is presented. The purpose of
this dissertation is to consider some of the moves and counter moves
that can be made with respect to both types of autonomy theses.

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naturalistic ethics. In his book, _The Divine Imperative_ (Philadelphia:
Westminster Press, 1947), Emil Brunner attacks a form of naturalistic
ethics that asserts that since it follows from the concept of man that all
men are rational, it can therefore be justifiably claimed that men ought
to live in a rational manner. But, as Brunner notes, the word 'rational'
has changed its meaning. So he writes: "The contradiction is glaring. No
sense of obligation can be evolved from the actual constitution of
humanity without some logical sharp practice. It is impossible to define
what man ought to be from what he actually is" (_Ibid._, p. 40). All quota-
tions from Brunner are with the permission of the Westminster Press.

called the autonomy thesis, especially when the arguments associated with them have been directed primarily against the sorts of theological justifications of moral practices considered above. We can initially make a distinction between what we shall call a weak autonomy thesis and a strong autonomy thesis. The former simply states that the meaning of basic terms in the vocabulary of moral discourse does not depend, at least not completely, on any reference to God or His will, and that we can make valid moral judgments without reference to God or His will. What we will call the strong autonomy thesis maintains one or more of the following assertions: (1) In some sense basic moral convictions must be prior to basic religious convictions; (2) religious beliefs are therefore irrelevant to such moral convictions; and (3) consequently, in so far as it is possible, in principle, to work out a correct or ultimately justified system of ethics it is possible to do so without reference to God. We cannot at this point state precisely what the strong autonomy thesis is because it can be understood in various ways and its formulations may have to be changed in response to the counter moves of those who would attack it, force its adherents to make clarifying distinctions, or change the general framework in which it is presented. The purpose of this thesis is to consider some of the moves and counter moves that can be made with respect to both types of autonomy theses.

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B.  Some Attempts to Derive 'Ought' from 'Is'

The 'is'-'ought' dichotomy, insisted upon by such writers as
Nowell-Smith and R. M. Hare, has not gone unchallenged.  Philippa Foot,
for example, suggests that we consider such a word as 'rude'.  To say
that someone is rude is to make a moral judgment and so to say that that
person has done what he ought not to have done.  But in fact we can con-
clude that a person was rude simply from a descriptive account of his
behavior, for example, from "X disregarded the customs of his society
(whatever they in fact were) in such a way as deliberately to hurt  the
feelings of his host."  On the strength of such examples Miss Foot con-
cludes:

> How exactly the concepts of harm, advantage, benefit, importance,
> etc., are related to the different moral concepts, such as right-
> ness, obligation, duty, and virtue, is something that needs the
> most patient investigation, but that they are so related seems
> undeniable, and it follows that a man cannot make his own per-
> sonal decision about the considerations which are to count as
> evidence in morals.[1]

It is clear what sort of reply someone like Hare would make.  We
might take into consideration a description of a person that would lead
most people to conclude that he was courageous.  Miss Foot would claim
that an evaluative and moral conclusion is here derived from purely
descriptive premises.  Hare would insist, however, that this is not the
case because there are conceivable cases in which one person might con-
clude that an individual was courageous and another that he was foolhardy
on the basis of the same description.  To reach either conclusion,
Hare would insist, requires not only reference to a description of the

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[1]  "Moral Arguments," Mind, LXVII (1958), 510-511.

behavior but also to a moral principle such as "All behavior that meets criteria, w, x, and y is courageous (or foolhardy), and so ought (or ought not) to be done." In the case of rudeness it appears that one can reach a moral conclusion from purely descriptive premises because it happens that there are no words in our language which express no moral judgment or a positive moral judgment that are applicable to the appropriate description of behavior. But one could invent such words, and then when one made a choice regarding which one to apply it would become apparent that one was appealing to a moral principle and not only to a description of the facts.[1] So it is not possible, according to this argument, to derive evaluative or prescriptive conclusions from descriptive premises alone in the way that Miss Foot attempts to do. In order to arrive at such a conclusion it is necessary to introduce moral principles about which various people might differ even if it happens to be the case that they do not.

The issue with which we are here concerned is not, however, that easily settled. There may be some descriptions of behavior about which there might be disagreement whether to apply the evaluative word 'courage' or the word 'foolhardy'. But it could be argued that these are borderline cases, even if the border is quite wide, and that there are other cases in which there would be no such disagreement. These other cases would be similar to Foot's rudeness example. Concerning this case it could be claimed that Hare is wrong in suggesting that it just happens that there is no neutral or positively evaluative word which would be

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[1] See Hare, The Language of Morals, pp. 116ff.

appropriate to apply to behavior which people who disapprove of it call

rude. This does not just happen. There are no such words because there

is no reason for there to be any. There is no reason for there to be

such words because our moral concepts are such that none of the reasons

which could be presented for practicing such behavior (e.g.,"I felt like

it") are morally relevant reasons. We have here, built into the language

that people use, a recognition that moral concepts are such that they

are misused if their use cannot be supported with certain sorts of

reasons. Perhaps what is built into our language is a conception of

morality which can be partially expressed in a principle such as "Nothing

which causes harm to one person and benefits no one is morally right," a

principle which allows certain reasons to count as moral reasons and not

others. Against Miss Foot's position it is easy enough to point out the

fact that large numbers of people today do approve of behavior that ful-

fils the descriptive criteria of rudeness when it is practiced toward

members of different races, or representatives of the government, or

people with long hair, or people with particular political ideas, etc.

But a proponent of Miss Foot's point of view could reply that there is a

tacitly recognized need to justify such behavior, usually in terms of

arguing (however unconvincingly) that the recipients of this behavior

have somehow forfeited the right even to be treated with common decency,

or else that there are overriding utilitarian considerations. What

those who seek to justify such behavior are in fact doing, therefore, is

not to say that a certain judgment about behavior does not follow from

a certain description of it, but rather that a fuller description of the

act relates to additional criteria which must be taken into consideration

and that when these are taken into consideration the descriptive criteria

for the application of the word 'rude' are not fulfilled. Cases of this sort suggest that the principle implied by the possibility of inferring that someone is 'rude' from descriptive premises may be, "Nothing which causes harm to a person who has done nothing to merit it, and benefits no one, should be approved." But now the whole matter of deriving 'ought' from 'is' becomes more difficult. Some people would deny this form of the principle and accept the first. Are retributive considerations allowable according to our basic moral concepts? What sort of utilitarian considerations can come into play here? Do we not have to appeal to moral principles to decide which descriptive criteria for the application of the word 'rude' are relevant. The situations in which we seem clearly and distinctly to be able to infer 'ought' from 'is' become more restricted and uninteresting. Our moral concepts may be such that certain reasons cannot be considered to be morally relevant, but which do these include? Is there just one particular kind of reason to which all good reasons in ethics belong?[1] If there are various kinds how do they relate to each other? To proceed fruitfully we need, as Miss Foot proposes, to clarify our fundamental moral conceptions and their relationships to other concepts. We need, in other words, to consider the possibility of arriving at definitions of basic moral concepts. This possibility is what we will consider in chapter II.

Another attempt to derive 'ought' from 'is' is presented by John R. Searle. He proposes for consideration the following series of statements:

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[1] See below, chapter II, part E.

(1) Jones uttered the words "I hereby promise to pay you, Smith, five dollars."
(2) Jones promised to pay Smith five dollars.
(3) Jones placed himself under (undertook) an obligation to pay Smith five dollars.
(4) Jones is under an obligation to pay Smith five dollars.
(5) Jones ought to pay Smith five dollars.[1]

He maintains that the transition from each step to the next is legitimate so that we have a clear case of deriving an 'ought'-statement from an 'is'-statement. There is a reply, however, that a defender of the 'is'-'ought' dichotomy can make. It has been pointed out that an 'is'-statement is employed here which refers to something other than a "brute fact". It refers to an institutional fact, that is to something which is a fact only because a certain institution or practice exists in a society. If there were no such practice as promising the argument would not go through. But as Hare maintains, the existence of such a practice as promising and, for another example, such an institution as property, depends on a prior acceptance of certain moral principles by the people of a particular society, and it is possible to reject the conclusion of an argument of the sort that Searle presents by rejecting the practice and the moral principle on which it is based. Hare writes:

> If the institutions do exist, we are in a position to affirm certain institutional facts (for example, that a certain piece of land is my property) on the ground that certain "brute facts" are the case (for example, that my ancestors have occupied it from time immemorial). But from the 'institutional facts' certain obviously prescriptive conclusions can be drawn (for example, that nobody ought to deprive me of the land). Thus it looks as if there could be a straight deduction on two steps, from brute facts to prescriptive conclusions via institutional facts. But the deduction is a fraud. For the brute fact is a ground for the prescriptive conclusion only if the prescriptive principle which is the constitutive rule of the institution be accepted; and this prescriptive principle is not

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[1] "How to Derive 'Ought' from 'Is'," _Philosophical Review_, LXXIII (1964), p. 44.

a tautology. For someone (a Communist for example) who does not accept this non-tautologous prescriptive principle, the deduction collapses like a house of cards--though this does not prevent him from continuing to use the word 'property' (with his tongue in cheek).[1]

So as long as the basic institutions of a society and their related moral codes are not challenged it may appear that we can derive an 'ought' from an 'is', but how do we decide whether or not such institutions and codes are good and ought to be supported.

One answer to the preceding sort of question is given by Stephen Toulmin. What, he asks, is the function of ethics? The function of ethics, as he sees it, is to achieve as harmoniously as possible the satisfaction of various desires and interests.[2] So here we have a concrete proposal for the explication of how one can begin to relate non-moral concepts such as harm, benefit, interest, importance, etc., to moral concepts. The descriptive judgment, 'This practice would involve the least conflict of interests attainable under the circumstances,' although not meaning the same as 'This would be the right practice,' is a good reason for making such a judgment.

> If the adoption of the practice would genuinely reduce conflicts
> of interest, it is a practice worthy of adoption, and if the way
> of life would genuinely lead to deeper and more consistent hap-
> piness, it is one worthy of pursuit. And this seems so natural
> and intelligible, when one bears in mind the function of ethical
> judgments, that, if anyone asks me <u>why</u> they are "good reasons",
> I can only reply by asking in return, "What better kinds of
> reasons could you want?"[3]

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[1] "The Promising Game," Revue Internationale de Philosophie, No. 70 (1964), reprinted in Philippa Foot, ed., Theories of Ethics (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 126.

[2] An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), p. 223.

[3] Ibid., p. 224; used by permission of Cambridge University Press.

There are perhaps two ways in which Toulmin's position could be criticized. Toulmin believes that the "function" of ethics provides one with a rule of inference which permits valid moral arguments of this form:

> X reduces conflicts of interest to a greater extent than any alternative.
>
> X is right.

Looked at in another way, however, this so-called rule of inference can be seen to be simply another moral principle which forms the major premise of an argument which uses only ordinary deductive logic.

> Whatever reduces conflicts of interest to a greater extent than any alternative is right.
>
> X reduces conflicts of interest to a greater extent than any alternative.
>
> ∴ X is right.

According to Hare this is the correct way of looking at it and Toulmin is presenting a moral principle under the guise of telling us what the "function" of ethics is.[1] It does seem to be true that what is obscured by Toulmin's way of putting the matter is the fact that people do have principles which they consider to be moral principles which could in certain cases, even though the same facts were being considered, lead to results which would differ from Toulmin's results. Toulmin could reply that one could perhaps put the inference the way that Hare does but that in so doing the fact is obscured that the principle or rule of

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[1] See Hare's review of Toulmin's _The Place of Reason in Ethics_ in the _Philosophical Quarterly_, I (1951), 372-375; George C. Kerner, _The Revolution in Ethical Theory_ (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 102-107, 122; and Morton White, _Toward Reunion in Philosophy_ (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), pp. 285-287.

inference in question is generatiod by the very function of ethics, or, which seems to be the same thing, is part of the very concept of moral goodness.[1] Now the second sort of criticism of Toulmin's position could procede like this. Suppose that the achievement of social harmony is a function of ethics or an element in the concept of moral goodness. On what basis can it be maintained that it is the only function of ethics or the only element in moral goodness? One could claim that it is neither of these. The exclusion of such claims indicates that although Toulmin contrasts his own position with those that offer definitions of 'good' or 'right' he is in effect offering such definitions by presenting a definition of morality which includes a specific concept of moral good- ness and so generates specific moral principles and excludes others.

Toulmin's way of inferring 'ought' from 'is', like Foot's seems to have the possibility of success only by reference to what amounts to a definition of moral goodness. In the next chapter we will duscuss the attemut to overcome the 'is'-'ought' dichotomy by means of introducting definitions of basic moral concepts which include only purely descriptive concepts. If this is a possibility for naturalistic ethics uerhaps it is a possibility for theological ethics. We need to ask whether it is possible to reach conclusions about what we ought to do from uremises which state only facts about historical laws, pscyhological develooment, the way conflicts of interest can be minimized, the way to maximize hap- piness, or the nature, ourpose, or activity of God.

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[1] There is no intention here of suggesting that a rule of in- ference can always be transformed into a premise, for without at least one rule of inference that is not a premise in a particular argument there would be no way of reaching a conclusion.

## II. ARE FUNDAMENTAL MORAL TERMS DEFINABLE?

### A. God and the Definition of 'Good'

We have seen that it is often claimed that it is impossible to derive moral or evaluative conclusions from any set of purely descriptive premises, that is, from a set of premises which does not contain any moral, evaluative, or prescriptive statements, and that if one introduces such a statement into his set of premises then he can no longer claim to be basing his moral conclusions solely on descriptive premises, whether they be scientific, metaphysical, theological, or of some other sort. In order to conclude, for example, that we ought to do X because God wills it, we need to introduce a premise to the effect that we ought to do whatever God wills, but such a premise itself cannot be derived from the will of God without arguing in a circle. We have also seen that those who challenge this claim do so with arguments which openly or surreptitiously appeal to some sort of definition which states the meaning of some basic ethical term, such as 'good' or 'right', in non-ethical terms. We need to consider the validity of this approach, especially since it is one which theological ethics might take. A. C. Ewing writes:

> Now the simplest and most radical way of making all ethical
> principles dependent on God would be to say that their validity
> just depends on their being decrees fixed by the will of God.
> In that case it would naturally follow that 'I ought to do A'
> was to be defined as 'it is God's will that I should do A'.[1]

Many theologians have made statements which either may be or must be interpreted in this way, although many of these same writers make other

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[1] "The Autonomy of Ethics," in Ian T. Ramsey, ed., _Prospect for Metaphysics_ (London: Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1961), p. 39; used by permission of Allen and Unwin, Ltd.

statements that are not easily reconcilable with these.  Perhaps the

contemporary theologian who comes closest to making the good equivalent

to God's will by definition is Emil Brunner.  Brunner has written:

> There is no such thing as "the Moral" in itself--as the "autono-
> mous" ethic says there is--that is, something which is "Moral" in
> and for itself, that which is "morally good," understood as inde-
> pendent of the will of God.  That which is morally "good" is iden-
> tical with that which is determined by the will of God.  The only
> "good" will is one that wills--uterly and entirely--only what God
> wills, and one that wills this--simply and utterly--because God
> wills it. . . .  To will the good of our neighbour is a Moral
> Imperative because the God to whom we belong wills the good of
> our neighbour.  The will is good not because it wills the good of
> our neighbour, but purely and simply because, and in so far as,
> it wills the good of our neighbour as that which God wills.  The
> truly good will is the holy will, that is, the will which is
> wholly controlled by the will of God.[1]

In the Nineteenth Century the principal spokesman for American Calvinism,

Charles Hodge, wrote similarly as follows:

> The question on this subject is, Whether things are right or
> wrong simply because God commands or forbids them?  Or, does He
> command or forbid them because they are right or wrong for some
> other reason than His will? . . .  The common doctrine of Chris-
> tians on this subject is, that the will of God is the ultimate
> ground of moral obligation to all rational creatures.  No higher
> reason can be assigned why anything is right than that God
> commands it.  This means, (1) that the divine will is the only
> rule for deciding what is right and what is wrong, (2) that this
> will is that which binds us, or that to which we are bound to be
> conformed.[2]

William of Ockham is noted for holding a similar position, but whether in

fact this is the common doctrine of Christians is another question.

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[1] The Christian Doctrine of God, Vol. I of Dogmatics, trans. by
Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1949), p. 166.  This and
other quotations from Emil Brunner are used with the permission of the
Westminster Press.

[2] Systematic Theology (London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and
Sons; New York; Charles Scribner and Co., 1880), Vol. I, pp. 405-406.
On the other hand Hodge also wrote that "it is not conceivable that God
should will right to be wrong, or wrong to be right.  The will of God
. . . makes known what infinite wisdom and goodness demand" (p. 406).
Certainly 'right' and 'goodness' cannot here mean 'what God wills'.

### B  Why Does God Will What He Wills?

Perhaps the first writer to point out difficulties in this position was Plato in the dialogue, Euthyphro. In that dialogue Socrates is enquiring of Euthyphro, a theologian, about the true nature of piety. In answer to Socrates' questions Euthyphro gives various examples of actions which he considers to be holy or pious. Socrates replies that he does not want a list of pious acts, but rather he wants to know what these various acts have in common which makes them holy or pious. Euthyphro answers that "what is dear to the gods is holy and what is not dear to them is unholy."[1] Socrates restates Euthyphro's position in this way:

> The thing and person that are dear to the gods are holy, and the thing and the person that are hateful to the gods are unholy, and the two are not the same, but the holy and the unholy are exact opposites of each other. Is not this what we have said?[2]

In order to take account of possible disagreements between the various gods of the Greeks eventually the definition is altered.

> But shall we now emend our definition and say that whatever all the gods hate is unholy and whatever they all love is holy, and what some love and others hate is neither or both?[3]

Socrates then asks, "Is that which is holy loved by the gods because it is holy, or is it holy because it is loved by the gods?"[4] Socrates gets Euthyphro to admit that what is holy is loved by the gods because it is holy and not for some other reason and he also gets him to agree that "that which is dear to the gods is dear to them and beloved by them

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[1] Euthyphro 7A. The translation is that of H. N. Fowler from the Loeb Classical Library edition (Cambridge, Massachussetts; Harvard University Press, 1947). All quotations are used with the permission of Harvard University Press.

[2] Euthyphro 7A.   [3] Euthyphro 9D.   [4] Euthyphro 10A.

because they love it."[1]   He then draws the conclusion that 'what is holy' cannot be equivalent in meaning to 'what is dear to the gods', because the former is loved because it is holy, that is, because of something logically antecedent to the gods' attitude toward it, and the latter is dear to the gods because it is loved, that is, because of the gods' attitude toward it.  So Socrates claims that he still does not know what holiness is.

The argument moves to the relationship between what is right and what is holy.  The conclusion is reached that everything that is holy is right but not everything that is right is holy, rightness being the more extensive concept.  Socrates then asks concerning that characteristic of what is holy which distinguishes it from what is right but not holy.  Euthyphro answers:

> This is my opinion, Socrates, that the part of the right which has to do with attention to the gods constitutes piety and holiness, and that the remaining part of the right is that which has to do with the service of men.[2]

Socrates then attacks the concept of attention as applied to the gods. He gets Euthyphro to recognize that since the gods have no needs they cannot be benefited by any service men can render them and that therefore the idea of attending to the gods must be reduced to doing that which is pleasing to them.  The argument then concludes as follows:

> Euthyphro: Why you don't suppose, Socrates, that the gods gain any advantage from what they get from us, do you?
> Socrates: Well then, what would those gifts of ours to the gods be?
> Euthyphro: What else than honor and praise, and, as I said before, gratitude.

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[1] *Euthyphro* 10D.          [2] *Euthyphro* 12E.

> Socrates: Then Euthyphro, holiness is grateful to the gods, but
> not adventageous or precious to the gods?
> Euthyphro: I think it is precious, above all things.
> Socrates: Then again, it seems, holiness is that which is
> precious to the gods.
> Euthyphro: Certainly.[1]

Socrates points out that the previous line of argument concluded by
showing that that which is precious to the gods was not identical in
meaning with holiness. The dialogue ends without the discussion ad-
vancing any further.

For the most part Christian theology does not think of those
things which are holy or willed or loved by God as a subset of all
things that are morally right. Depending upon how broadly the word
'moral' is understood theology may sometimes regard the matter in pre-
cisely the opposite way, that is, that some things that are commanded by
God, e.g., baptism, worship, etc., are not part of what is morally right,
but that everything that is morally right is willed by God and thus is
holy. For the present, however, we are primarily concerned with those
things which one wishes to classify both as right or wrong, and as willed
or not willed, or forbidden by God. Here we are faced with Socrates'
question, "Is that which is holy loved by the gods because it is holy,
or is it holy because it is loved by the gods?", or, to rephrase it,
"Is that which is right willed by God because it is right, or is it
right because it is willed by God?" Among the theologians and theistic
philosophers who have dealt with this question, Ockham, Descartes,
possibly Duns Scotus, and probably Brunner and Hodge have chosen the
latter alternative, while Plato, Aquinas, Leibniz, and most other

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[1] _Euthyphro_ 15A, 15B.

philosophers have chosen the former alternative or something like it.
Many theologians have either failed to face the question or have not
given an unequivocal answer. Perhaps those who have equivocated have
done so because they felt, perhaps correctly, that there were other
distinctions which ought to be made and therefore other alternatives
to be considered.

If there is such a _thing_ as the good, a property which the
word 'good', as used in moral contexts, denotes, and God loves or wills
that property because it is good, then in principle at least, ethics
or morals is autonomous and independent from religion and theology.
It is argued that if one believes in God this is what he must affirm
because the alternative position involves insurmountable difficulties.
The particular difficulty with which we are concerned in this section is
one presented by A. C. Ewing. If we define 'good' or 'right' as that
which God wills we are faced with the question of why God wills one
thing rather than another. To say that God commands a certain act
because it ought to be done is translatable, according to this defini-
tion, into "God commands it because it is commanded by God."[1]  But this
tells us nothing. One might say that we ought to obey God's commands
because they are good or because obedience to them accomplishes good.
If we define 'good' in a way that does not refer to God we again have
an autonomous ethic. But if what is good is determined solely by God's
will then we are in the situation of there being no reason for God to
command one thing rather than another. Ewing continues:

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[1] A. C. Ewing, "The Autonomy of Ethics," in _Prospect for Meta-_
_physics,_ ed. by Ian T. Ramsey (London: Allen and Unwyn, 1961), p. 39.
Quotations are with the permission of Allen and Unwyn.

His commands would become purely arbitrary, and while the idea
of God as issuing arbitrary commands has sometimes been wel-
comed as a tribute to his omnipotence, omnipotence without
goodness is surely an idea of no religious value whatever, and
the idea of God would be deprived of all ethical content. For
to say that God was good would be just to say he was God; he
would be good by definition whatever he should do. Since there
was no ethical reason for his commands, God might in that case
just as well command us to cheat, torture, and murder, and
then it would really be our duty to act like this.[1]

There are two questions that appear in Ewing's discussion which
are thought to present difficulties to the attempt to define the good
in terms of God's will. One has to do with what reason we would then
have to obey God, the other with what reason God would have to will one
thing rather than another. We shall return to the former question, but
it is with the latter that we are concerned in this section. Now it is
worth while to see how a theologian actually proceeds here. Karl Barth,
for example, speaks of the goodness of God when he is discussing why
God is to be obeyed, but in discussing the attributes of God himself
which characterize what he is and therefore what he wills Barth does
not refer to God's goodness, at least not in any ordinary moral sense.
He speaks of God as the perfect Being, but by this he means the being
"which is self-sufficient and thus adequate to meet every real need;
the being which suffers no lack in itself and by its very essence fills
every real lack."[2] This certainly does not refer to the perfect ful-
filment of some moral obligation. God loves, but not because he recog-
nizes a moral obligation to love. "But God loves because He loves:

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[1] A. C. Ewing, "The Autonomy of Ethics, p. 39.

[2] Church Dogmatics, Vol II, The Doctrine of God, Part I, trans.
ed by G. W. Bromily and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark; New
York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), p. 322. Quotations used with the
permission of Charles Scribner's Sons.

because this act is His being, His essence, His nature. . . . God's loving is necessary for it is the being, the essence, and the nature of God."[1] Barth speaks of six perfections or attributes of the divine loving: grace and holiness, mercy and righteousness, and patience and wisdom. 'Grace' designates the characteristic of God's love by which it is "unconditioned by any merit or claim in the beloved, /and/ also unhindered by any unworthiness or opposition in the latter."[2] God's being holy "means that God in his grace does not surrender Himself to the one to whom He is gracious,"[3] that is, that God is not manipulated by others. "The mercy of God lies in His readiness to share in sympathy the distress of another, a readiness which springs from His inmost nature and stamps all His being and doing."[4] God's righteousness is the faithfulness with which He is faithful to Himself.[5] Barth also speaks of God's righteousness as being really righteous only in that it is good, i.e., benevolent, and of the perfection of this righteousness.[6] It is perfect, however, not in the sense of conforming perfectly to some ideal, but in its being all encompassing.[7] The patience of God describes His granting space and time to the creature for the development of His own existence and for the opportunity to respond to

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[1] Church Dogmatics, II, I, p. 279.    [2] Ibid., p. 353.

[3] Ibid., p. 361.    [4] Ibid., p. 369.

[5] Ibid., pp. 380, 387.    [6] Ibid., p. 379.

[7] Ibid. This is from Matthew 5:43-48 where the disciples are called upon to act in a way that will make them sons of their Father in heaven because they will be perfect as God is perfect. But God is here described as the one who "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (v. 45).

grace.[1]  The wisdom of God is that He "not only wills but knows that
He wills" and "why and wherefore He wills it."[2]

To ask the question, "Does God will the good becuase it is
good, or is it good because God wills it?" in precisly this form is
make several presuppositions.  In order to avoid these presuppositi-
ons so that the question can be answered from the point of view of
Christian theology, it is necessary that the question be broken down
and reformulated.  First we will deal with the question, "Does God
will what he wills because it is good?"  In the light of Barth's posi-
tion presented above it can be seen that this question can be inter-
preted in two ways and the plausibility of Ewing's argument that if
God did not will the good because it is good his will would be arbi-
trary depends on a failure to distinguish between these two ways.
First of all it might mean, "Does God have what to Him are good
reasons for willing and doing what He does?  Does He act consistently
according to some rational purpose or is His will capricious and ar-
bitrary?"  Barth's emphasis on God's particular nature  (love) which
generates a particular purpose, his righteousness by which he is
faithful to that nature and purpose, and his wisdom by which he acts
rationally in accordance with it, assure that he would  support the
view that God's will is not arbitrary or capricious and that he has
good reasons for what he wills, and in this he would be in agreement
with the Scriptures and with what most theologians wish to maintain
in their often imprecise statements about the whole question at hand.

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[1] _Church Dogmatics_, II, I, p. 409.     [2] _Ibid._, p. 423.

The second thing that Plato's and Ewing's question can be
asking is whether God wills what He wills because it corresponds to
what is referred to in human discourse by such words as 'good', 'right',
and 'morally obligatory'. To this Barth's answer is "No." This does
not mean that what God wills does not correspond to what men judge to
be good, but it says that He does not will it because it so corresponds.
If moral words are to be understood according to how they function in
human discourse and so also according to how they arise out of human
experience, then it would seem very strange indeed to suppose that
God wills the good, so understood, because it is good, for God's will
and purpose must be understood as temporally and logically prior to
human existence, and so also to all human experience. Rather it would
seem that if there is in fact a correspondence between God's will and
what men judge to be good, or even what they mean by 'good' (for it
could be that men could know what they mean be 'good' and yet be mis-
taken in their judgments about what is in fact good), it must be
because human nature out of which human experience and so also moral
language arise is created in the light of and for the sake of God's
purpose. The alternative becomes especially absurd if one wishes to
maintain a completely non-cognitivist understanding of moral lan-
guage. Whether or not "God is good" is to be understood as "God is
the sort of God whom I'd choose to be God if it were up to me to make
the choice," as a philosopher told P. T. Geach,[1] it would certainly
be absurd to think that God wills the good because it is good if that

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[1] Cited by P. T. Geach in his God and the Soul (London: Rout-
ledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 127.

were to mean that God wills that toward which I have a pro attitude because I have a pro attitude toward it, or even if it were to mean that God wills that toward which mankind has a pro attitude because mankind has a pro attitude toward it. If such were the case God would not be holy, that is, He would not be be the God who "in His grace does not surrender Himself to the one to whom He is gracious."[1]

Suppose we consider a proposal to define 'morally right' as 'that which God commands'. What follows from this concerning the arbitrariness of God's willing? Patterson Brown writes:

> It does indeed follow from my analysis that there could be no moral obligation on God to will one thing rather than another, but this certainly does not imply that God's will is capricious. For God is also defined as perfect in knowledge, justice and love. He would thus by definition will in accord with these several attributes, and the result would be anything but arbitrary.[2]

So it does not follow from defining 'morally right' as 'that which God commands', that God would have no reason at all to will one thing rather than another or that His will would be arbitrary. Whether or not we would want to, or have reason to, define 'morally right' in this way, however, depends on answers to other questions. Would we have to judge God's reasons to be morally relevant according to some independent conceptions in order to have a good reason to propose such a definition and to live in accordance with it? Would this be a recognition of the validity of the autonomy thesis? Or would God's position of authority, or power, or the content of His will, give us

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[1] Barth, Church Dogmatics, II, I, p. 361.

[2] "Religious Morality," Mind, LXXII (1963), 241.

a good reason to accept such a definition apart from any autonomous

moral judgments of God's will or His reasons for it? These questions

in fact are the major issues with which we are attempting to deal and

can be seen as corresponding to the second half of Ewing's and Soc-

rates' question, "Is what is good good because God wills it?" The

major problems then are not with the first half of the question which

asks about God's reasons for willing what He wills, but with the

second half which asks about our reasons for accepting or rejecting

statements about what is morally good or about what we ought to do.

It is to this matter that we turn in the rest of this chapter and in

the following one.


C. G. E. Moore and the Naturalistic Fallacy


If the most radical way of making ethical principles dependent

on God is by means of such a definition as "X is right if and only if

X is willed by God," the most radical way of replying to such a pro-

cedure is to maintain, not only that no such theological definitions

of 'right' or 'good' are correct, but that there cannot be any correct

definitions of such words at all, and that to think otherwise is to

be guilty of a fallacy. G. E. Moore, whose name is most intimately

connected with this point of view, called this alleged fallacy the

"naturalistic fallacy"[1] since his primary targets were naturalistic

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[1] *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903),
pp. 9ff. Arthur Prior has pointed out that there were many moral philos-
ophers before Moore who made objections similar to Moore's against the
procedures which Moore considered illegitimate. See Arthur Prior, *Logic
and the Basis of Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), pp. 95-107.

ethical theories. It would actually be more proper to call it the
"definist fallacy" since Moore believed that his arguments were equally
applicable in the case of metaphysical and theological theories.
According to Moore 'good' can be used in two senses. Something can be
instrumentally good, that is, it can be an effective or efficient
means to an end. Something, however, can also be intrinsically good.
'Good' or 'goodness' when used in this sense, according to Moore, is
indefinable. 'Ought', however is definable in terms of goodness. One
ought to do that which produces the most intrinsic goodness. Other
authors have claimed that other terms such as 'right' or 'ought' are
indefinable. According to the advocates of this sort of position
there must be at least one fundamental moral term which is indefinable,
but in reference to which other such terms may be defined.

There are various ways in which Moore tries to state what the
fallacy is that he sees in definist ethical theories and why the pro-
cedure used is fallacious. After acknowledging that it may in fact be
the case that whatever is good also has certain other properties, he
goes on to try to identify the naturalistic fallacy in this way:

> But far too many philosophers have thought that when they
> named those other properties they were actually defining
> good; that these properties, in fact, were simply not
> "other", but absolutely and entirely the same with good-
> ness. This view I propose to call the naturalistic fallacy.[1]

In naturalistic ethics the procedure which Moore considers to be
fallacious "consists in substituting for 'good' some one property ·

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[1] Principia Ethica, p. 10.

of a natural object or of a collection of natural objects; and in
thus replacing ethics by some one of the natural sciences."[1]  Illus-
trations of this are supplied by such definitions as "X is good if
and only if it is pleasureful," or "X is good if and only if it is
in accordance with nature."  In theological ethics this method is
one that defines 'good' as meaning 'being in accordance with God's
will".  It is certainly a fallacy to begin with two different
things and then to confuse them and call them onething.  If there are
two properties, even if they are always found together, to say that
they are one is a simple confusion.  But it seems that Moore has
begged the question by stating the case in this way.  He has already
assumed that good is an indefinable property distinct from all
others and this assumption has led him to present the matter in this
way.  But as William Frankena writes:

> If the properties really are two, then they simply are not
> identical.  But do those who define ethical notions in non-
> ethical terms make this mistake?  They will reply to Mr.
> Moore that they are not identifying two properties; what
> they are saying is that two words or sets of words stand for
> or mean one and the same property.[2]

Moore, however, has other ways of stating his case.  He writes
that philosophers have given different definitions of 'good'.  Now
suppose that one philosopher wants to challenge the definition of
another.  How can he do it?  One says that pleasure is good because
'good' is equivalent in meaning with 'pleasure'   Another says that
what is desired is good because the word 'good' means "what is desired."

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[1] Principia Ethica, p. 40.

[2] "The Naturalistic Fallacy," Mind, XLVII (1939), 472.

"If good is _defined_ as something else, it is then impossible either to prove that any other definition is wrong or even to deny such a definition."[1] It becomes impossible to ask significantly whether X really is good if one claims that what 'good' means is 'X'. Perhaps the argument is put more clearly by R. M. Hare. Hare asks if it would be possible to define 'good' as used in aesthetic contexts in this way: a picture is good if and only if it tends to arouse admiration in the members of the Royal Academy.[2] But that makes it impossible for us to ask whether the members of the Royal Academy have good taste in pictures. To affirm that they do have good tast is to offer a truism and to deny it is to make a contradiction. But since in fact it is possible to ask significantly whether the Royal Academy has good taste in pictures the proposed definition cannot be correct. But any proposed definition would face the same difficulty, and not only in aesthetics but in ethics as well. This is the so-called "open question argument" against the possibility of defining basic ethical terms. Moore writes:

> The hypothesis that disagreement about the meaning of good is disagreement with regard to the correct analysis of a given whole, may be most plainly seen to be incorrect by consideration of the fact that, whatever definition be offered, it may be always asked, with significance, of the complex so defined, whether it is itself good.[3]

Theologians, who very likely never heard of Moore, have used this "open question argument" against the same sort of naturalistic ethical theories against which Moore used it. Barth discusses a number of such theories:

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[1] Moore, _Principia Ethica_, p. 11.

[2] _The Language of Morals_, p. 84.      [3] _Principia Ethica_, p. 15.

Morality in the sense of the ethical question is some-
thing other than the congruence of an action with a demonstrable
natural law of human volition and action. . . .

Again, morality in the sense of the ethical problem is
not merely the conformity of human behavior with a more or less
widespread and prevalent usage, custom, culture or civilization.
. . .

And morality in the sense of the ethical question is not
at all the same as the congruence of human behavior with the
existing laws of the state. . . .

Finally, in the sense of the ethical question a particu-
lar human action is not moral just because it agrees with what
is perhaps a demonstrable law of general development or of a
specific historical development. There may well be a philosophy
of history, and therefore a law of historical development, e.g.,
that which was proclaimed by Karl Marx in application of Hegelian
theory, or that which was more recently proclaimed in words and
acts by Neo-German Nationalism. But obviously the establishment
of these laws is one thing, the active affirmation which is so
stormily demanded another. . . . The question of the validity
of this other law, the ethical question, is still open. . . .

If we try to equate the ethical question unequivocally
and consistently with the psychological, or the historico-
morphological, or politico-juridical, or philosophico-histori-
cal question--to which the actuality of human behaviour may
also be subject--this means that we have not yet put to our-
selves the ethical question, or have ceased to put it. And
the strange thing is that while there is apparently a desire to
make this equation, no one is able to do it. The strange thing
is that in all these identifications the fact is only too
apparent that they are actually only predications. The ethical
question can no doubt be translated into all sorts of other
questions. But this does not stop it from being put in its
original language. To declare that any one of these laws is
valid in the sense of daring to demand subjection to this law
is consciously or unconsciously to work with a presupposed
ethic. The only thing is that it has obviously been decided
to avoid the scrutiny of ethics by not putting the question of
its law, the question of the moral law, and therefore the ques-
tion of the authority and force of the demands made in its
name. What cannot be avoided, however, is that the ethical
question remains open in face of every arbitrary ethic and its
demands and the corresponding human actions. . . . The ethical
question transcends those other questions. For it asks con-
cerning the genuiness and rightness and value of the constants
which are at issue in those other questions, and to which
genuiness and rightness and value are all too uncritically
attributed. The ethical question asks concerning the validity
of the laws of human behaviour ascertained on the basis of
these other questions. It raises, then, the fundamental ques-
tion. Only an answer to this question makes it possible to
regard the conformity of human behaviour with those other laws
as good, and nonconformity as evil. But conversely, the

answer to it may make it necessary to regard the same conformity
as evil, and the same nonconformity as good.[1]

The language is very different from Moore's but there is the same concern
to insist that it is not possible, by means of a definition, to reduce
the moral question to a psychological, sociological, historical, or sci-
entific question, that any definition that identifies the good with the
presence of some feature discernable by these disciplines, or good action
with that which conforms to the laws which exemplify or tend to produce
some feature, and which are discoverable by one of these disciplines,
depends on a fallacious maneuver. According to both Barth and Moore, to
discover, for example, what gives pleasure, or in what direction and
according to what laws history is moving, does not tell us what is good
or what we ought to do. For it remains an open question whether what is
pleasureful is necessarily good, or whether the ends toward which his-
tory may be moving are good, and because these questions are substantive
questions, they cannot be avoided by arbitrary definitions of 'good' as
pleasure or as what is in accordance with historical processes.[2]

One can quickly see that Barth's arguments can be extended and
turned against theological definitions of 'good'. The open question
argument is equally applicable to theological ethics. Barth can be
asked why he does not add one more paragraph to his discussion as
follows:

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[1] Church Dogmatics, II, II, pp. 514-515. Quoted with permission
of Charles Scribner's Sons.

[2] Brunner is perhaps making the same point when he refers to
those who would define the good as "that form of action by means of
which we share in the cultural development of the history of the race,"
and poses the question, "Supposing man decides against instead of for
this universal process?--what then?" (The Divine Imperative, p. 41).

And again, morality in the sense of the ethical problem
is not merely the conformity of human behavior with the purported
will of some omnipotent being. There may be such a being who has
a certain will and is seeking certain objectives, but the estab-
lishment of these objectives is one thing, the active affirmation
of them another. The question of the validity of this will or
these objectives, the ethical question, is still open.

If we try to equate the ethical question unequivocally
and consistently with the theological, this means that we have
not yet put to ourselves the ethical question, or have ceased to
put it. And the strange thing is that while there is apparently
a desire to make this equation, no one is able to do it. To
declare that the will of some being is valid in the sense of
daring to demand subjection to this will is consciously or un-
consciously to work with a presupposed ethic. The only thing
is that it has obviously been decided to avoid the scrutiny of
ethics by not putting the question of the authority and force
of the demands made in its name. What cannot be avoided, how-
ever, is that the ethical question remains open in the face of
every arbitrary ethic and its demands. The ethical question
asks concerning the validity of the laws of human behavior
attributed to the will of God. It raises, then, the fundamen-
tal question. Only an answer to this question makes it possible
to regard the conformity of human behavior with the will of God
as good, and nonconformity as evil. But conversely, the answer
to it may make it necessary to regard the same conformity as
evil, and the same nonconformity as good.[1]

This paraphrase of Barth does not put the open question argument against

theological definitions of 'good' much differently from the way it is

put by numerous philosophers including emotivists, intuitionists and

others, and including both theists and atheists.[2]  C. B. Martin, for

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[1]
Paraphrase of Barth,Dogmatics, II, II, pp. 514-515; Brunner can
also be asked, "Supposing man decides against instead of for what God
wills?--what then?"

[2]
See W. D. Falk, "Moral Perplexisty," Ethics, LXVI (1956), 125-
129; Kai Nielsen, "Some Remarks on the Independence of Morality from
Religion," Mind, LXX (1961), 175-186; Nielsen, "God and theGood," The-
ology Today, XXI (1964), 47-58; A. C. Ewing, "The Autonomy of Ethics,"
in Prospect for Metaphysics, pp. 39-41; R. W. Hepburn, Christianity and
Paradox (London: C. A. Watts & Co., 1958), pp. 129-133; Richard Brandt,
Ethical Theory (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1959), pp.
66ff.; John Hospers, Human Conduct (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World,
1961), pp. 32-34, 545-546; C. B. Martin, Religious Belief (Ithica, New
York: Cornell University Press, 1959), pp. 17-32; Richard Robinson, An
Atheist's Values (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), pp. 130ff.

exemple, gives several accounts of people in situations of moral per-

plexity relying on what "father" wants or would have wanted.[1]   But even

if father is dead he is not secure enough from discredit for the other

people involved to treat "X is right if and only if Father wants us

(or would have wanted us) to do X" as true by definition.   Justifying

a moral decision on the basis of what father wants depends upon one's

judgment of father's wisdom in the past.   But in the case of God, "if

anything could count as evidence against his righteousness, then the

justification of ethical statements in terms of God's will is not abso-

lute."[2]   As we might wish to ask if the members of the Royal Society

really have good taste in pictures, so we might wish to ask if God and

His will are really good .   If we answer in the negative then certainly

God's will cannot be identified with the good as a matter of definition.

If we answer affirmatively, then our answer is a truism.

> The good is defined in terms of God's will.   Yet this is not
> enough, for it must be added that God's will is perfect.   Being
> perfect, it cannot but be good.   This is how moral values are
> established in the ultimate constitution of things.   But what
> have we come to?   Absolute justification and absolute perfec-
> tion; circularity and logical vacuity.   The Good is defined in
> terms of God's will; God's will (as perfect) is defined in
> terms of the Good.[3]

William Frenkena, viewing this matter as an issue between intuitionists

and definists writes:

> The definists are all holding that certain propositions in-
> volving ethical terms are analytic, tautologous, or true by
> definition, e.g., Mr. Perry so regards the statement, "All
> objects of desire are good."   The intuitionists hold that such
> statements are synthetic.[4]

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[1] C. B. Martin, _Religious Belief_, pp. 23ff.

[2] _Ibid._, p. 21.                    [3] _Ibid._, p. 25.

[3] "Naturalistic Fallacy," p. 474.

One approach Moore is taking is accusing various philosophers of treating their assertions that "Good is X" as both analytic statements and as synthetic statements at the same time. Although he does not use this vocabulary, that is one way of stating Barth's case against the various naturalistic theories he mentions. Moreover this is exactly what Martin accuses the theologians of doing.

> That we do and must judge God's will as good makes empty the claim that somehow our moral judgments depend upon God as the Perfect Good. First we _judge_ God to be good, and then we try to _define_ him as good.[1]

It does seem that if one were to do this, overtly or covertly, he would indeed be vulnerable to the charge of committing a fallacy.

## D. Moore and His Critics

Two questions need to be asked about this line of reasoning. The first question is whether it is really applicable to those against whom it is directed. Such writers as Alasdair MacIntyre and Mary Warnock have claimed that Mill and Spencer, Moore's favorite examples of philosophers who were guilty of the naturalistic fallacy, were not really definists at all and so are immune from this particular charge.[2] Moore seems to have misunderstood and misrepresented them. It is not necessary to discuss whether the writers whom Barth had in mind are vulnerable to his charges, and it is not easy to determine what theologians are susceptible to similar charges. It is doubtful that Barth is, although Brunner may very well be. Those who press the attack on

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[1] Martin, _Religious Belief_, p. 26.

[2] Alasdair MacIntyre, _A Short History of Ethics_ (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 251; Mary Warnock, _Ethics Since 1900_ (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 20ff.

"theological naturalism" very seldom specify individual theologians whom they consider to be guilty of such fallacious procedures and it is often difficult to determine whether the theologians themselves are defining the good in terms of God's will or merely taking God's will as the criterion of the good. The open question argument is used against the latter procedure as well, as we shall see, but here we are concerned with the effort to offer a definition of goodness in terms of God's will, a procedure which tends to lead one into the practice of treating the same statements as both analytic and synthetic.

The second question is whether being a definist necessarily involves one in a fallacy. If the definist treats a sentence such as 'the good is X' as both analytic and synthetic at the same time, then it may be that he is engaged in a fallacious maneuver.[1] But it is not immediately apparent that he must do this. In attempting to evaluate the cogency of the open question argument and the naturalistic fallacy accusation we need to look more closely at what sort of thing Moore has in mind when he talks about a definition and concludes that such a definition cannot be given for the word 'good'. He claims that he is not talking about a stipulative definition.

> I should, indeed, be foolish if I tried to use it /the word
> 'good'/ for something which it did not usually denote, if, for
> instance, I were to announce that whenever I used the word
> 'good', I must be understood to be thinking of that object
> which is usually denoted by the word 'table'. I shall, there-
> fore, use the word in the sense in which I think it is ordi-
> narily used.[2]

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[1] The analytic-synthetic distinction will be dealt with more fully in the next section of this chapter.

[2] _Principia Ethica_, p. 6.

Yet on the other hand he claims that when he asks about the definition

of 'good' he is not asking a purely linguistic or verbal question that

might be the object of lexicographical study.

> If I but my business is not finition I should have to consider in the ~~~~~ ~~~~~ ~~~ ~~~~~le generally use the word 'good'; but my business is not with its proper usage as established by custom.[1]

We need to ask what other alternative or alternatives there might be.


While some definist moral philosophers might claim to be making

a purely stipulative definition, although a justifiable one, and others

might claim that they are reporting common usage, many would agree with

Moore that what is of interest to them is something which is not the

same as either of these. A definist might claim to be performing some

sort of rational reconstruction, perhaps using the often vague and con-

tradictory moral judgments and notions of men as data to discover facts

about men's moral experience of which he wishes to take account in his

analysis and reconstruction of moral language. G. C. Field puts the

matter this way: The moral philosopher

> has to discover as much as he can of what is implied by the
> ways in which the chief moral notions are or have been used.
> This is a sort of definition. But it is not a sort of defini-
> tion with which he can rest content. For, as has been sug-
> gested, he will find when he has made these implications ex-
> plicit they seem flatly to contradict each other. They, there-
> fore, have to be subjected to progressive examination and criti-
> cism, until we finally reach an answer that satisfies us to the
> main question of ethics. This main question may be formulated
> thus: What sort of facts must we suppose there to be in order
> to account satisfactorily for human beings having these ideas
> about them?
> Thus the whole of this stage of our investigations con-
> sists in a very real sense, in arriving at definitions.[2]

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[1] *Principia Ethica*, p. 6.

[2] "The Place of Definition in Ethics," *Proceedings of the Aris-
totelian Society*, 1931-1932, p. 88.

Moore seems to be concerned with the same sort of procedure. After eliminating stipulative and reportive definitions as that with which he is concerned he writes:

> My business is solely with that object or_idea, which I hold, rightly or wrongly, that the word /¯good¹/ is generally used to stand for. What I want to discover is the nature of that object or idea, and about this I am extremely anxious to arrive at an agreement.[1]

Moore's answer to Field's question about what sort of facts we must suppose there to be in order to account for human beings having the ideas they have is that there is one such fact, namely, "a simple, indefinable, unanalysable object of thought."[2] Field's question did not specify what sort of relationship any such facts that might be discovered might have to our moral language. The fact that Moore believed he had discovered is related to our moral language by being denoted by the word 'good' and by no other word that is not an obvious synonym for 'good'. Field was interested in discovering such facts in order to reconstruct a definition of 'good', but for Moore, to attempt to offer such a definition is to fail to see what sort of fact is involved and so to commit the naturalistic or definist fallacy.

How does Moore argue for this conclusion. As George Nakhnikian points out, Moore has two distinguishable conceptions of analysis which we have up till now allowed to remain somewhat intertwined even has he did. The first is the "phenomenological-atomistic" one which proceeds by asking one to hold before his mind certain objects or attributes

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[1] *Principia Ethica*, p. 21.

[2] "On the Naturalistic Fallacy," *Morality and the Language of Conduct*, ed. by Hector-Neri Castaneda and George Nakhnikian (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963), p. 147.

such as the "fact" he has discovered to be denoted by the word 'good'.

Moore writes:

> But whoever will attentively consider with himself what is ac-
> tually before his mind when he asks the question, "Is pleasure
> (or whatever it may be) good?" can easily satisfy himself that
> he is not merely wondering whether pleasure is pleasant. And
> if he will try this experiment with each suggested definition
> in succession, he may become expert enough to recognize that in
> every case he has before his mind a unique object, with regard
> to the connection of which with any other object, a distinct
> question may be asked.[1]

Furthermore one is to see that this unique object is simple. Some of

the objections that can be raised against this procedure are pointed

out by Nakhnikian. First it is unclear what one is supposed to do when

he takes a phenomenological "look" at this object which the word 'good'

is supposed to denote, and secondly, it is not true that objects are

simple absolutely, but they are simple or complex with respect to certain

other things. William Frankena evaluates Moore's claim as follows:

> What underlies this difference of opinion is that the intui-
> tionists claim to have at least a dim awareness of a simple
> unique quality or relation of goodness or rightness which
> appears in the region which our ethical terms roughly indicate,
> whereas the definists claim to have no awareness of any such
> quality or relation in that region, which is different from all
> other qualities and relations which belong to the same context
> but are designated by words other than 'good' and 'right' and
> their obvious synonyms. The definists are in all honesty
> claiming to find but one characteristic where the intuitionists
> claim to find two. . . .
> No logical fallacy need appear anywhere in the pro-
> cedure of the definists. Even fallacies in any less accurate
> sense cannot be implemented to decide the case against the de-
> finists; at best they can be ascribed to the definists only after
> the issue has been decided against them on independent grounds.
> But the only defect which can be attributed to the definists, if
> the intuitionists are right in affirming the existence of unique
> indefinable ethical characteristics, is a peculiar moral blind-
> ness, which is not a fallacy even in the looser sense.[2]

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[1] *Principia Ethica*, p. 16.

[2] "The Naturalistic Fallacy," pp. 476-477.

It certainly seems that Frankena is right in claiming that there need
not be any logical fallacy involved in a definist's denying that he has
before his mind some unique object different from what he wishes to
equate with goodness (whatever Moore has before his mind), nor conse-
quently need there be any in his claiming that he has no reason to ask
concerning the definiens in his definition whether that to which it
refers is really this unique object.

The part of Moore's position that has found favor with more
recent anti-definists does not have to do with distinguishing ideas
phenomenologically, but with his more purely linguistic method  and the
open question argument which is a part of it.  In presenting the open
question argument Moore continues to use some of the language of his
"phenomenological-atomistic" method of analysis, but he is basically
using a type of linguistic analysis which includes appeals to ordinary
usage.  Many of those who continue to support this argument are not
intuitionists, or what Morton White calls "analytical platonists"[1] as
far as ethics is concerned.  Here the point is that 'pleasure is good',
for example, cannot be analytic but must be synthetic because there is
no X such that X is synonymous with 'good', that is, such that X is
equivalent to 'good' in the way that 'father' is equivalent to 'male
parent'.  So Moore writes that "propositions about the good are all of
them synthetic and never analytic."[2]  The open question argument

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[1] Toward Reunion in Philosophy, p. 3 et passim.

[2] Principia Ethica, p. 7.

is that which is supposed to show that they are all synthetic and never analytic. Kai Nielsen states the argument with reference to theological definitions:

> That something is good is not entailed by God's willing it, for otherwise it would be redundant to ask, "Is what God wills good?" But this question is not redundant. 'God wills x' or 'God commands x' is not equivalent to 'x is good', as 'x is a male parent is equivalent to 'x is a father'. 'God wills it but is it good?' is not a senseless self-answering question like 'Fred is a male parent but is he a father?' The moral agent must independently decide that whatever God wills or commands is good.[1]

'Whatever God wills is good' must be a synthetic and not an analytic statement.

For Moore himself it would seem that the cogency of the open question argument is related to his answer to the question (which, of course, he himself does not pose in just this form), "What sort of facts must we suppose there to be in order to account satisfactorily for human beings having the ideas about them which are implied or presupposed by their use of moral language?" But someone who answers this question differently is likely to see the whole open question argument differently. Field, whose question it is, goes on to write:

> There is the well-known argument in Principia Ethica which argues that good must be indefinable, because whenever a definition is attempted, we can always ask with significance of the complex so defined whether it is in fact good. I have never been able to find any plausibility in this argument. It is not clear what sort of significance such a question is supposed to have. It may mean that we can never be quite sure of the correctness of any definition that we offer, that the possibility of its being wrong is always in our minds, and that therefore we can still raise questions about it. This is no doubt sometimes true. Indeed if the process of definition is as we have described, it seems the right and proper attitude to take. But it obviously does not exclude the possibility that the definition may be correct.[2]

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[1] "Some Remarks on the Independence of Morality," p. 175.

[2] "The Place of Definition in Ethics," p. 92.

Moore, however, insists that to ask the question whether something which we call good or even equate with goodness really is good, as in fact we do ask, we must have some concept before our minds corresponding to goodness which is not identical with the concept of which we ask the question. The conclusion is that no definition of 'good' can be correct. But one can accept Moore's claim that to ask about the goodness of something one must have some concept before his mind and still not reach Moore's conclusion. For one thing we can have the vague unreconstructed idea of good or right from which the definist started on his task of analysis and definition. As Frankena points out, the definist can claim that since 'good' and 'right' as we ordinarily use them are unclear, it cannot be expected that if a clarifying definition is offered, it will retain everything originally associated with the vague imprecise term. Thus the substitute cannot seem to be the same as the original, and yet may turn out to be an acceptable definition."[1] G. C. Field continues his argument as follows:

> It is also true, however, that even if we are certain that the definition is correct we can still ask the question /whether what it defines as good is good/ significantly, in the sense that we can have something before our minds in asking it. For whenever the definition is not immediately self-evident, we can still retain a memory in our minds of what we originally meant by the term, namely, our first vague general idea, and, as we have seen, the idea expressed in the subsequent definition. So we can always put a question about their relation to each other. This, however, applies in many cases in which a definition is admittedly possible. Though I know, for instance, that part of the zoological definition of a fish is that it is cold-blooded, I can still attach a meaning to the question, "Is a fish a cold-blooded animal?"[2]

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[1] Ethics (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 82.

[2] "The Place of Definition in Ethics," pp. 92-93.

Similarly, Mary Warnock writes:

> If I can succeed in giving a correct analysis of a complex notion,
> then it cannot plausibly be said that I have only one notion be-
> fore my mind; I must necessarily have at least two, and probably
> more. It is doubtful whether the method of counting the notions
> before the mind is a good or even possible method in fact. But
> if Moore requires that we use it, then for what it is worth, it
> must be admitted that it fails to prove what he wants it to.[1]

Moore claims that the definist moral philosopher is committing
the naturalistic fallacy by confusing two properties. The definist
philosopher can reply that he is not identifying two properties, but
pointing out that "two words or sets of words stand for or mean one and
the same property."[2] An advocate of Moore's position could then ask why
there are so many different definitions of 'good' that philosophers have
offered. The definist could claim that the various definitions are more
or less successful attempts to describe this particular property. But
the supporter of Moore could reply that the definitions differ so radi-
cally that this in fact does not seem to be the case, as one would ex-
pect it to be if the above explanation of why one would have more than
one concept of goodness before his mind were correct. Rather, he could
argue, it seems that one philosopher has noticed that many things which
are good have property X, another that many seem to have property Y,
and yet another that they seem to have property Z, and each of these
philosophers has come up with a different definition of 'good' because
each one has identified the property which seemed to him to be present
when the object was such that we would call it good with goodness itself.
And what happens when philosophers do this? Suppose one philosopher

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[1] _Ethics Since 1900_ (London: Oxford University Press, 1960),
p. 18.

[2] William Frankena, "The Naturalistic Fallacy," p. 472.

> affirms that good is pleasure, another, perhaps, that good is
> that which is desired; and each of these will argue eagerly to
> prove that the other is wrong. But how is that possible? One
> of them says that good is nothing but the object of desire, and
> at the same time tries to prove that it is not pleasure.[1]

The philosopher who thinks that 'good' means 'the object of desire' can

show that pleasure is not the object of desire and therefore is not

the same as goodness. Another who thinks that 'good' means 'pleasure'

can show that pleasure is not the object of desire and therefore can

claim that the object of desire is not the same as goodness.

> Well that is one alternative which any naturalistic ethics has
> to face; if good is _defined_ as something else, it is then im-
> possible to prove that any other definition is wrong or even to
> deny such a definition.[2]

The other alternative is to reduce the argument to a discussion about

how most people use the word 'good'.

The definist, however, has several possible replies to Moore. He

could agree that it is true that the definitions of 'good' philosophers

have offered do differ so radically that they could not all be different,

more or less successful, efforts to zero in on the correct definition.

Moore's explanation for why there are these vastly different definitions

may also be correct. But this does not prove that none of the definiti-

tions are correct, or more or less close to being correct, rather it

only shows that some of them are wrong. In deciding which ones are wrong

the philosopher is not limited to the two alternatives Moore recognizes

of either appealing to statistics about ordinary usage or of showing that

someone else's definition is inconsistent with his own and therefore

wrong. Rather he can use ordinary language as a basis for arguing that

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[1] _Principia Ethica_, p. 11.          [2] _Ibid._

his answer to the question, "What sort of facts must we suppose there to
be in order to account satisfactorily for human beings having the ideas
about them which are implied or presupposed by their use of moral lan-
guage?", is correct, and he can argue that his definition is in accord-
ance with those facts. This attempt to show that in spite of the con-
flicting definitions of 'good' offered by philosophers there are ways of
arguing for the correctness of one of them may not be very helpful, how-
ever, to the theological definist. Since many people who make no refer-
ence to God use moral language it is unlikely that any definition that
is arrived at by a process which begins with analyzing ordinary language
could end up with a theological definition of 'good'. In addition, many
theologians who might tend to define the good in terms of God's will are
those who would not claim that their definitions were reached in any
such way, who would not insist that they conform to ordinary usage taken
as a whole, and who might even strenuously object to the idea that the
good as known through revelation could have anything in common with the
ordinary usage of corrupt and sinful mankind.

There is, however, a different sort of reply the definist might
give. An advocate of Moore's position might continue to argue in this
way. It is possible of course, that we have such a great discrepancy
between some definitions of 'good' and others because some of them are
simply wrong-headed while others are close to being correct or are cor-
rect. And it may be true that it is possible to argue in more subtle
ways than Moore envisioned for the correctness of one rather than an-
other. But even after such arguments are presented from various sides
it seems that some widely different definitions still remain with about
equal claims to plausibility. So perhaps Moore was right after all

and these various proposals really confuse properties which good things
often or even always have with goodness itself. And even if one does not
wish to talk about goodness as a property the open question argument is
still applicable. If a particular sentence of the form 'Something is
good, if and only if X is the case' were really analytic rather than
either false, or true but synthetic, one would not be able to ask sig-
nificantly, "Is X really invariably good?" Now the second reply that
the definist can give is this. In fact the open question argument may
prove something. It does not prove that the word 'good' is indefinable
or that goodness is a simple unanalyzable property, but it does show that
there is no one correct definition of 'good'. This does not mean that
there is no correct definition of 'good', rather the reason that the open
question argument works is just because there is more than one correct
definition of 'good'. Many terms have a number of different meanings
and this is true of ethical terms as well. Suppose a definist says that
"'Good' means X." One can still significantly ask whether it is really
true that X is good if one has before his mind a concept corresponding
to a different meaning of 'good'. Arthur Prior quotes John Stuart Mill
in this way:

> . . . a name not unfrequently passes by successive links of re-
> semblance from one object to another, until it becomes applied
> to things having nothing in common with the first things to
> which the name was given; which, however, do not, for that
> reason, drop the name; so that it at last denotes a confused
> huddle of objects, having nothing whatever in common; and con-
> notes nothing, not even a vague and general resemblance.[1]

Then Prior goes on to write:

And this, a naturalist may say, is precisely what has happened

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[1] System of Logic, I, viii, quoted by Prior, Logic and the Basis
of Ethics, p. 10.

with the word 'good'. . . . At present, when we call a thing
good we may mean that it is pleasant, or that it is commanded
by someone or that it is customary, or that it promotes survival,
or any of a number of things; and because we use the same terms
to connote all these characteristics, we think there must be
some other single characteristic which they all entail, but in
fact there is not. When it is said that being good means promot-
ing survival, we are dissatisfied; we feel that it is still sig-
nificant to say that promoting survival is good; and the same
thing happens with every identification that is suggested; but
this is just because, in each case, the other meanings are still
hovering in our minds--to say that promoting survival is good is
significant because it means that to promote survival is what we
desire; to say that what we desire is good is significant because
it means that what we desire promotes survival; and so on.[1]

This preceding approach is accessible to one who wishes to define

'good' in terms of God's will as Prior himself shows by using the theolo-

gical ethics of Paley as his primary example. Paley had defined 'right'

as 'consistency with the will of God,' but then he raised the question

himself of how it can then be meaningfully said that God acts rightly.

The case is thus; by virtue of the two principles, that God
wills the happiness of his creatures, and that the will of God
is the measure of right and wrong, we arrive at certain conclu-
sions; which conclusions become rules; and we soon learn to
pronounce actions right or wrong, according as they agree or
disagree with our rules, without looking any further; and when
the habit is once established of stopping at the rules, we can
go back and compare with these rules the divine conduct itself;
and yet it may be true (only not observed by us at the time)
that the rules themselves are deduced from the divine will.[2]

Prior goes on to suggest that if Paley were a Cambridge philosopher

today he might answer his question in this way:

"We can intelligibly ask whether what God does and commands is
right, and we can intelligibly ask whether what produces happi-
ness is right. But this does not mean that in each case we are
asking whether the subject possesses some possible 'non-natural'
predicate distinct from both 'conforming to God's will' and

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[1] _Logic and the Basis of Ethics_, pp. 10-11.

[2] William Paley, quoted by Prior, pp. 102-103.

productive of happiness'. There is no such thing as **the** meaning
of 'right'. The acts which we have learnt to describe so are
in fact both done and commanded by God, and productive of hap-
piness. And when we ask whether what God wills is right, we are
asking whether all God's deeds and commands are like these ones
in promoting happiness; while when we ask whether promoting
happiness is good, we are asking whether all felicific actions
are like these ones in being done or commanded by God." And is
this so very different from what Paley actually said?[1]

So it does not seem that appeals to the open question argument and other

similar methods are sufficient to defeat all definist ethical theories.


### E. 'Good', Multiple Criteria, and Analyticity


Here we take up the discussion of the possibility of defining

'good' at another point from which we will return to Prior's illustra-

tions by a somewhat circuitous route. Moore was willing to grant that

it might conceivably be the case that some sentence of the form $(x)(\text{good}_x$

$\equiv Ax)$, that is, 'Something is good if and only if it is also A', might

be true. In such a case 'good' and some other word or phrase would be

extensionally equivalent, that is, where one was applicable the other

would be also. But 'good' and this other word or phrase could not be

intensionally equivalent or equivalent in meaning, just as 'creature with

a heart' and 'creature with kidneys' are, as far as we know, extensionally

equivalent, but they are certainly not equivalent in meaning. Such a

sentence as 'All creatures with hearts and only creatures with hearts

are creatures with kidneys' could be true, but could not be analytic. It

was stated above that the most radical way of dealing with a particular

definist position was to deny, not only that this particular definition

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[1] _Logic and the Basis of Ethics_, p. 103.

of 'good' was correct, but to deny that any sentence with 'good' as its subject could be analytic, and therefore could be a definition. This is not quite correct. A more radical approach would be to deny, not only that there can be any analytic sentence with 'good' as its subject, but that there can be any analytic sentence at all because the concept of analyticity or intensional equivalence is an incoherent one. Such a position is maintained by Willard Van Orman Quine and Morton White. One of the purposes of Quine's paper, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism,"[1] is to attack the distinction between analytic and synthetic sentences. He deals with a number of concepts used to explain intensional language such as analyticity, truth by definition, semantical rules, and inter-changeability in all contexts without loss of truth values. The last of these is insufficient to make a distinction between extensional equiva-lence and intensional equivalence and the others cannot be made intel-ligible, Quine maintains, because the explanation of any one of them requires reference to one of the others. One therefore becomes involved in a vicious circle. Along with this attack on the concept of analyti-city Quine also attacks what he regards as the other dogma of empiri-cism, the verification theory of meaning, on the grounds that "our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experi-ence not individually but only as a corporate body."[2] Quine then re-places the traditional empiricist's picture of the relationship between language and experience with the following one:

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[1] Chapter 2 of his From a Logical Point of View (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 20-46.

[2] Ibid., p. 41. See the similar views of Pierre Duhem in his The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), especially p. 187.

The totality of our so-called knowledge or beliefs, from the most casual matters of geography and history to the profoundest laws of atomic physics or even of pure mathematics and logic, is a man-made fabric which impinges on experience only along the edges. Or, to change the figure, total science /and perhaps we can add, or anyone's total system of beliefs/ is like a field of force whose boundary conditions are experience. A conflict with experience at the periphery occasions readjustments in the interior of the field. Truth values have to be redistributed over some of our statements. Re-evaluation of some statements entails re-evaluation of others, because of their logical interconnections. . . . Having re-evaluated one statement we must re-evaluate some others, which may be statements logically connected with the first. . . . But the total field is so underdetermined by its boundary conditions, experience, that there is much latitude of choice as to what statements to re-evaluate in the light of any single contrary experience. No particular experiences are linked with any particular statements in the interior of the field, except indirectly through considerations of equilibrium affecting the field as a whole.

If this view is right, it is misleading to speak of the empirical content of an individual statement--especially if it is a statement at all remote from the experiential periphery of the field. Furthermore it becomes folly to seek a boundary between synthetic statements, which hold contingently on experience, and analytic statements which hold come what may. Any statement can be held true come what may, if we make drastic enough adjustments elsewhere in the system. Even a statement very close to the periphery can be held true in the face of recalcitrant experience by pleading hallucination. . . . Conversely, by the same token, no statement is immune to revision.[1]

Morton White accepts Quine's point of view but expands the content of the field to include moral beliefs and the boundary to include moral experience.[2] There does not seem to be any _a priori_ reason not to see the theolological beliefs of a person who has such beliefs in terms of part of the interior of such a total field of beliefs and religious experience as a part of the boundary conditions.

Quine's position has been challenged in various ways, probably, successfully, but it does not seem that it has been challenged

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[1] _From a Logical Point of View_, pp. 42-43; ch. Duhem, pp. 183-190.

[2] _Toward Reunion in Philosophy_, pp. 254ff.

successfully in a way that affects the use we wish to make of it.
Jonathan Bennett shows that if the experiences at the edge of our field
of accepted statements are to offer a challenge to any of the sentences
within that field, then there must be "some sentences which are not up
for possible revision in the particular situation concerned"[1] and so are
analytic in the traditional sense. These sentences are ones which serve
as rules of inference used in arguing from a recalcitrant experience to a
needed change within the system. But, Bennett writes, the same sentence
that is treated as analytic in one situation may be a candidate for
revision in another, and so, while Bennett's criticism of Quine seems to
be justified, in the long run his position is not very different from
Quine's. But then it can be further argued that some rules of inference
cannot be part of the set of beliefs that are open for revision in any
situation, for in order to show that any belief ought to be revised we
need to presuppose the retransmission of falsity from conclusions to
premises and thus the law of non-contradition, the basic principle of
logic.[2] But the fact that at least one law of logic must be independent
of one's revisable field of beliefs does not prevent one from accepting
Quine's scheme on  the whole nor does it affect our concerns which are
with ethical principles and not with logical ones.

Another sort of criticism of Quine is presented by H. P. Grice
and P. F. Strawson. They first present Quine's position in this way:

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[1] "Analytic-Synthetic," Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society,
Vol. 59 (1958-59), p. 185.

[2] This point is made, for example by William W. Bartley III in
The Retreat to Commitment (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), p. 170.

> Since it is an illusion to suppose that the characteristic
> of immunity in principle from revision, come what may, belongs
> or could belong, to any statement, it is an illusion to suppose
> that there is a distinction to be drawn between statements
> which possess this characteristic and statements which lack it.
> Yet, Quine suggests, this is precisely the distinction which
> those who use the terms 'analytic' and 'synthetic' suppose
> themselves to be drawing.[1]

Analyticity could be explained in another way, however.

> For, in the first place, two statements might be said to be
> synonymous if and only if any experiences which contribute to,
> or detract from the confirmation of one contribute to, or de-
> tract from, the confirmation of the other, to the same degree;
> and, in the second place, synonymy could be used to explain
> analyticity.[2]

So if any evidence which detracts from or contributes to the confirmation

of 'X is an unmarried man' detracts from or contributes to the confirma-

tion of the sentence, 'X is a bachelor' to an equal degree, 'bachelor'

would be understood as synonymous with 'unmarried man' and $(x)(\text{Bachelor}_x \equiv$

$\text{Unmarried man}_x)$ would be understood as analytic. This point of view can

be restated to meet Quine's objection that no sentences are confirmed or

disconfirmed individually as follows:

> All we have to say now is that two statements are synonymous if
> and only if any experiences which, on certain assumptions about
> the truth values of other statements, confirm or disconfirm one
> of the pair, also on the same assumptions, confirm or discon-
> firm the other to the same degree. . . Quine's doctrine of empir-
> ical confirmation does not, as he says it does, entail giving up
> the attempt to define statement-synonymy in terms of confirmation.[3]

If Grice and Strawson are correct, as they seem to be, one would

have to retreat from Quine's position, but not necessarily very far.

There may be analytic statements such as 'All bachelors are unmarried

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[1] "In Defense of a Dogma," The Philosophical Review, LXV (1953),
155. Quoted with the permission of The Philosophical Review.

[2] Ibid., p. 155.                [3] Ibid., p. 156.

men'. But one can still maintain, with Hilary Putnam, that there are

no analytic statements about anything of philosophical interest. He

writes:

> It is the belief that there are synonymies and analyticities of
> a deeper nature--synonymies and analyticities that cannot be
> discovered by the lexicographer or the linguist but only be the
> philosopher--that is incorrect.[1]

It is just such an analytic statement about goodness that Moore is

after, but his failure to find it would seem to lose a great deal of its

significance if he would also have failed to find any other analytic

statements of philosophical interest. Would he then have wished us to

be flooded with non-natural properties? So Grice and Strawson have not

shown that a modification of Quine's position such as the one given by

Hilary Putnam is not correct. In considering the following quotation

from Putnam we need to keep in mind that we wish to think of such a

position as expanded to include ethical statements within the concep-

tual scheme and moral experience at its periphery. Putnam writes:

> I believe that we have a conceptual system with centralities
> and priorities. I think the statements in the conceptual sys-
> tem--except for the trivial examples of analyticity, e.g.,
> 'All bachelors are unmarried', 'All vixens are foxes'--fall on
> a continuum, a multidimensional continuum. More or less stipu-
> lation enters; more or less systematic import. But any one of
> these principles might be given up, farfetched though it may
> seem, and perhaps without altering the meaning of the constit-
> uent words. . . . With Quine I should like to stress the mono-
> lithic character of our conceptual system, the idea of our con-
> ceptual system as a massive alliance of beliefs which face the
> tribunal of experience collectively and not independently, the
> idea that "when trouble strikes" revisions can, with a very few
> exceptions, come anywhere. I should like, with Quine, to stress
> the extent to which the meaning of an individual word is a

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[1] "The Analytic and the Synthetic," in _Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science_, Vol. III, ed. by Herbert Feigl and Grover Maxwell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), p. 362. Used with permission.

function of its place in the network, and the impossibility of
separating, in the actual use of a word, that part of the use
which reflects the "meaning" of the word and that part of the
use which reflects deeply embedded collateral information.[1]

Let us now return to Prior's illustrations which were meant to

show that one reason the open question argument might seem to work could

be because there is more than one definition of 'good'. These two or

more statements about 'good' could be so important to someone's con-

ceptual system that he would be very reluctant to give any of them up.

He might think of them as analytic in the way suggested by Grice and

Strawson. Any evidence that would tend to confirm or disconfirm that

A was X would tend to confirm or disconfirm to the same extent that A

was good. But it might also be the case that any evidence that would

tend to confirm or disconfirm that A was Y would tend to confirm or

disconfirm to the same extent that A was good. What happens when there

is some experience which seems to indicate that A is X but that it is

not Y? In the case of Prior's modernized Paley, what happens when he

becomes convinced that certain actions willed by God are detrimental to

human happiness?  His conceptual scheme has encountered a recalcitrant

experience. Obviously he must give up one of his "definitions" of

'good', but which one?  It might be said that he should retain the one

that is correct, but until now he had regarded more than one of them as

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[1] "The Analytic and the Synthetic," p. 362. White would not
wish to speak of meanings at all, as Putnam does here. G. C. Field
writes: "The distinction . . . which Dr. Ross so frequently insists on,
between the attribute which we mean by a term and the further attribute
or attributes necessarily connected with it, seems to me an unreal one.
Partly it smacks too much of the sharp distinction between essence and
properties which we are agreed in abandoning" ("The Place of Definition
in Ethics," p. 94 ).

correct. Perhaps he should retain the one that is analytic, that ex-
presses the meaning of the term. But the whole preceding discussion
led up to the conclusion that deciding which statements are analytic,
because they express the meaning of a term, rests on "the impossibility
of separating, in the actual use of a word, that part of the use which
reflects the 'meaning' of the word and that part of the use which re-
flects deeply embedded collateral information."[1] When confronted with
such a recalcitrant experience one has to _decide_ which statements to re-
gard as definitional, at least for this particular crisis, although one
can give reasons for making one choice rather than another. Morton
White puts the matter in this way:

> And what I urge in contrast to Moore is that the selection
> of certain terms as primitive cannot be satisfactorily based
> by a philosopher on the metaphysical "fact" that these terms
> express or connote simple attributes. A clearer kind of justi-
> fication is needed, one which is fundamental in epistemology
> and the philosophy of language.
>     Now I don't mean to say that this kind of justification
> is the same as that which is involved in the case of moral

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[1] Hilary Putnam, p. 366. Incidentally, this difficulty does
not, however, give any comfort to a proponent of Moore's position. For
his position equally depends on separating that part of the use of the
word 'good' (i.e., its reference to a particular non-natural object)
from "that which reflects deeply embedded collateral information." Also,
the fact that there are no analytic statements about goodness does not
prove the other half of Moore's contention, that is, that all such state-
ments are synthetic, for, as Putnam writes, there "are just an enormous
number of statements which are not happily classified as either analytic
or synthetic. . . . it one wants to have a model of language, it is far
better to proceed on the idea that statements fall into three kinds--ana-
lytic, synthetic, and lots-of-other-things--than to proceed on the idea
that, except for borderline fuzziness, every statement is either analy-
tic or synthetic" (Putnam, p. 364). Numerous philosophers now agree
with this position, although for various reasons. See Karl Popper, _Con-
jectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge_ (New York:
Basic Books, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1962), p. 74 and
74n; and J. W. N. Watkins, "Between Analytic and Empirical," _Philosophy_
XXXII (1957), 112-131.

decisions in the usual sense, but it is very close. What I am
saying is that to debate the definability of term 't' is to
debate the advisability or justice or propriety . . . of saying
at some point "I define 't' as short for 'r O s'." The parallel
between 'I define' and 'I promise' has been observed by Austin
in this connection, and therefore the parallel I propose between
definability and what might be called "promisability" should be
evident. In the latter case we would ask ourselves, "Should I
say 'I promise to do such-and-such'?" In the former, "Should I
say 'I define so-and-so as such-and-such'?" Both questions are
related in turn to questions like 'Should I do such-and-such?'
where the doing is less verbal.

The significance of deciding to define 'good', for example, as 'such-

and-such' may be somewhat limited, however, since in the light of fur-

ther experience we may very well wish to revoke that decision. But if

are to call something a definition, how are we to decide which of two

or more statements about goodness which we have been treating more or

less as definitions and accepting more or less unquestioningly we

should call a definition and continue to treat as a definition when

they lead to contrary results? Previously, following G. C. Field, we

suggested that one needs to ask, "What sort of facts must we suppose

there to be in order to account satisfactorily for human beings having

these ideas about them, that is, the ideas seemingly implied or pre-

supposed by our use of moral language?" We might then decide upon a

definition of 'good' by deciding which statement with 'good' as its

subject best takes into account these facts? But then the question

arises, "Which facts?" Indeed it would seem that we only have gotten

into all this difficulty about defining 'good' because there are many

facts and many sorts of experience to which our moral language is

related and because there are many different ethical theories and

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[1]
    Toward Reunion in Philosophy, p. 195. Used with the permission
of Harvard University Press.

definitions of moral terms, each of which takes account of only some of them.

Let us now consider a particular moral theory and see how it takes into account certain facts of human experience which are presupposed by some of our use of moral language. These facts include: (1) that people seek their own interests and are often ready to curb their inclinations only when it is in their interest to do so: (2) that the ends of people acting in their own interest often come into conflict with each other; and (3) that "it is not possible that everyone should do better for himself by following enlightened self-interest rather than morality"[1] where morality is understood in a certain way, since the prospect is then one of society's degenerating into Hobbes' state of nature where life would be solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."[2] The philosopher whose point of view we are considering, Dr. Kurt Baier, writes:

> I take it that moral reasoning comes into the picture only when the goals of different individuals come into conflict with one another. For only then is there a need for reasons generally regarded as superior to . . . /reasons of enlightened self-interest/, to adjudicate between the conflicting needs, wants, and aspirations of different individuals.[3]

Seeing these as the facts which are presupposed by moral reasoning and thus by the use of moral language, we arrive at an account of morality

[1] Kurt Baier, "The Moral Point of View: A Rational Basis for Ethics (Ithica, New York: Cornell University Press, 1958), p. 314. Quotations are with the permission of Cornell University Press.

[2] Thomas Hobbes, quoted by Baier, p. 132.

[3] The Moral Point of View: A Rational Basis for Ethics, abridged edition (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 110.

which in effect can be presented as a definition of a morally good or
right action as one which is in accord with "rules designed to overrule
self-interest whenever it is in the interest of everyone alike that such
rules should be generally followed."[1]   It has been argued by a number of
philosophers that Baier has not shown, as he wished to show, that it
would always be more rational to act according to the rules of morality
rather than according to enlightened self-interest where these conflict.[2]
We wish to raise a different question, however.  Although Baier's concep-
tion of morality and therefore of moral goodness is in part true to our
use of moral language and takes into account facts presupposed by some
of our use of moral language, does it really include all that we ordinar-
ily mean by 'morality'?  One can only speak of moral obligation, accord-
ing to Baier's point of view, when one is in a situation where there
exists an institution of morality which is generally recognized.  In
situations where the institution of morality has broken down or where
there is no recognition of a common moral system, one has no moral obli-
gations at all, for one has a reason to disregard his own interests in
order to follow those rules which are designed to override everyone's
self-interest only if everyone else, or almost everyone else, also
recognizes and abides by such rules, or where there are sanctions en-
forceable against those who do not abide by them.  Under present circum-
stances morality has no applicability to foreign affairs because such

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[1] *The Moral Point of View,* second edition, p. 155, cf. first
edition, p. 314

[2] See H. J. McClosky, "Ethics, Metaphysics, and Sociology," *The
Review of Metaphysics,* XIII (1959), 126, and Paul W. Taylor, *Normative
Discourse* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1961) pp.145-150.

a system of rules with effective sanctions is not supported by the
nations. Although Baier may be correct when he says that it would be
foolish to adhere to a treaty because of a moral scruple when others
disregard it or other treaties, there are many other kinds of situations
in which we intuitively consider moral questions to be relevant where
such a mutually recognized and enforced system of morality does not
exist, for example, in dealing with prisoners and civilians in time of
war. Presumably an oppressed people would not have any moral obligation
not to participate in a revolution, since they would not be participating
in the benefits of a fairly enforced and mutually recognized moral sys-
tem, but intuitively we would hesitate to say that the right of revo-
lution (that is, the lack of a moral obligation to refrain from revolu-
tion) is equivalent to the right (similarly understood) to disregard any
and all restraints in adopting the means of revolution. Most people
would wish to say that all justifiable ends do not justify all possible
means even in circumstances where all of those involved do not recognize
any common moral system. But it does not seem that we could say such
things on the basis of Baier's position. Perhaps then what Baier is
doing is not offering a complete justification of morality as ordinarily
understood, but rather he is offering a justification of one aspect of
what we ordinarily consider to be morality, that which is the province
of what Hume called the artificial virtues,[1] along with a proposal that
our conception of morality be limited to fit what can be justified in
this manner. It would seem that some other conception of morality would
also be possible which would be based on those factors presupposed by

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[1] _Treatise_, III, II, I, pp. 477ff.

some of our use of moral language which Baier does not take into consideration. And we see that one reason the open question argument seems to work is that moral language may presuppose various sets of facts, and philosophers have come up with various conceptions of morality, and so with various definitions of 'good' and 'right', according to which ones they take into consideration.

Some philosophers have recognized that moral language is related to various facets of our experience and so have made distinctions between different aspects or types of morality.[1] So we have Hume's distinction between artificial and natural virtue,[2] the distinction in Christian ethics between the ethics of law and the ethics of redemption, to which Berdyaev also adds a third sort, the ethics of creativeness,[3] and Hare's distinction between matters of the adjudication of interests and matters of ideals. Hare writes:

> There are at least two kinds of grounds on which a man might say
> that the best thing to do would be so and so; one of these is
> concerned with interests, and the other with ideals. These
> sorts of grounds must be kept distinct from each other, even
> if later they turn out to be related in some way; but 'moral'
> may, all the same, be the word used in our common speech for
> both of them.[4]

W. B. Gallie attacks the idea that "what constitutes the rightness of a choice is its conformity to some single ultimate principle" and regards

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[1] See especially W. B. Gallie, "Where Moral Philosophy Rests on a Mistake," in his Philosophy and the Historical Understanding (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), ch. 9, pp. 192-212, where he attacks the view that morality "is something simple and single" (p. 192).

[2] Treatise, III, III, I, pp. 477ff.

[3] Nicholas Berdyaev, The Distiny of Man (New York: Harper and Bros., 1960), pp. 126ff, and The Meaning of the Creative Act (New York: Harper and Bros, 1955), pp. 251-273.

[4] Freedom and Reason, p. 149.

morality as an organic whole within which at least four facets "may be distinguished and towards which a number of originally independent tendencies may have contributed."[1] Here we can see why we might want to agree with Baier that keeping a treaty or a promise is not in one sense a moral obligation in international affairs, and yet affirm that the means used in war and revolution are the concern of morality, because the former is related to artificial morality or the morality of law which depends on a mutually accepted practice, while the latter may be a matter of natural morality, or the ethics of redemption, or of ideas about what brutalizes or humanizes human life in the light of the ideals we have of what it ought to be. Returning to Field's question about the facts which the use of moral language seems to presuppose or point to, perhaps we are justified in saying that there may be numerous ones besides those appealed to in a Hobbesian account of morality. There may even be non-natural qualities of the sort that Moore believed in, although it seems highly unlikely, but if they did exist they would only be one thing that entered into our use of moral language. The same thing would have to be said about Hume's sentiments of pleasure or disgust "which arise upon contemplation and view of particular qualities and characters"[2] and about Kant's rational will. Another fact which moral language may sometimes presuppose, whatever ontological status we might or might not wish to give it, is the experience of "a claim arising around and out of the facts to which" our prescriptive judgments

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[1] *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding*, pp. 193, 195.

[2] *Treatise*, III, III, I, p. 581.

are a response,[1] or of "demands which seem to be independent of us and to which we feel that we ought to respond."[2] Perhaps these experiences are even related to a relationship of fittingness between an action and its context or environment.[3] People use moral words not only on the basis of reasoning about or sentiments toward rules or principles and toward individual acts, but also on the basis of ideals they have about certain ways or patterns of life, and on the basis of certain ideas of the sickness or health of the individual soul or of society derived from the ideals, goals, patterns of life, or values of which they have caught a vision, and although they may not see any way to argue for or validate them, they feel that life in accordance with such a vision will ultimately be vindicated.[4] There is no reason why moral judgments based on various of these factors should not conflict with each other. One of the writers who most clearly recognizes that morality has these various aspects, Nicholas Berdyaev, also emphasizes the fact that judgments made in the light of any of the aspects of morality which he recognizes may conflict with those made on the basis of either or both of the others.[5] Each of these aspects of ethics has a certain legitimacy so

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[1] Ian T. Ramsey, "Moral Judgments and God's Commands," in Christian Ethics and Contemporary Philosophy, ed.Ramsey, o. 163.

[2] Maurice Mandelbaum, The Phenomenology of Moral Experience (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1955), p. 54.

[3] Ibid., op. 60ff.; A. C. Ewing, The Definition of Good (New York: Macmillan Co., 1947), op. 132ff.; C. D. Broad, Five Types of Ethical Theory (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1934; Totawa, New Jersey: Littlefield Adams and Co., 1965), oo. 219ff.

[4] See R. W. Hepburn and Iris Murdoch, "Vision and Choice in Morality," Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume XXX (1956), pp. 14-58.

[5] The Destiny of Man, oo. 99, 133, 135, 143.

that to cut any of them off in the interest of arriving at some sort of
relatively simple definition of 'morality' and therefore of 'morally
good' or 'right' would be arbitrary. Nor can we propose a precise com-
plex definition which takes into account all of the features which
should be recognized and sets up various sorts of rules of priority.
For one thing, no one would recognize such a definition as that which
he means by 'good' or 'right', secondly, we do not know in advance of
encountering particular situations how we would decide to arrange our
priorities or weigh the various factors to be taken into consideration,
and thirdly, this probably would not leave room for the creative aspect
of morality which both Gallie and Berdyaev emphasize.

In drawing this discussion to a close we wish to return to the
approach to analyticity characteristic of Quine, White, and Putnam.
Hilary Putnam remarks that some philosophers have wondered if any state-
ment made about "man" could be analytic. If we make a list of attributes
usually associated with a man and ask whether any particular one of
them is indispensable the answer would seem to be "No." But that cer-
tainly does not show that 'man' is a meaningless word. If we asked
whether a creature without a significant number of these properties was
a man we would have to answer, "No," because the extension of the word
had been significantly altered.[1] Such a word expresses a "cluster con-
cept." Somewhat similar to a "cluster concept" is a "law-cluster con-
cept" which Putnam introduces as follows:

> Law-cluster concepts are constituted not by a bundle of proper-
> ties as are the typical general names like 'man' and 'cow', but

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[1] "The Analytic and the Synthetic," p. 378.

by cluster laws which, as it were, determine the identity of the
cluster concept. It enters into a great many laws. It plays a
great many roles, and these laws and inference roles constitute
its meaning collectively, not individually. I want to suggest
that most of the terms in highly developed science arelaw-clus-
ter concepts, and that one should always be suspicious of the
claim that a principle whose subject term is a law-cluster con-
cept is analytic. The reason that it is difficult to have an
analytic relationship between law cluster concepts is that such
a relationship would be one more law. But, in general, any one
law can be abandoned without destroying the identity of the law-
cluster concept involved, just as a man can be irrational from
birth, or can have a growth of feathers all over his body, with-
out ceasing to be a man.[1]

At this point Putnam applies these observations to an example he was

previously dealing with, the meaning of "kinetic energy' before and

after Einstein. He points out that neither the extension of the term

'kinetic energy' or of the term 'energy' has changed. But he goes on

to write:

On the other hand, I want to suggest that the term 'energy' is
not one of which it is happy to ask, What is its intension?
The term 'intension' suggests the idea of a single defining
character or a single defining law, and this is not the model
on which concepts like energy are to be construed. In the case
of a law-cluster term such as 'energy', any one law, even a law
that was felt to be definitional or stipulative in character,
can be abandoned, and we feel that the identity of the concept
has, in a certain respect, remained.[2]

Now cannot very similar things be said about such terms as 'good' and

'right'? They have something in common both with cluster concepts and

with law-cluster concepts. The concept of goodness enters into a great

many principles and plays a great many roles and these principles and

constitute its meaning collectively, not individually. It would seem

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[1] "The Analytic and the Synthetic," p. 370.

[2] Ibid. Some people would not feel that the term 'intension'
does necessarily suggest the idea of a single defining character and so
would not object to its use even if they accepted Putnam's general point
of view.

that most of the value terms that arise out of the varying experiences
of human life express multiple-criteria concepts and that one should
always be suspicious of the claim that a principle whose subject term is
of this sort is analytic. The reason that it is difficult to have an
analytic relationship between moral concepts and other concepts is that
such a relationship would be one more moral principle. But, in general,
any one moral principle can be abandoned without destroying the identity
of the multiple-criteria concept involved, just as a man can be irra-
tional from birth, or can have feathers all over his body, without
ceasing to be a man. It would seem that the terms 'good' and 'right'
are not those of which it is happy to ask, "What are their intensions?"
if the word 'intension' suggests to the one who asks the idea of a single
defining law, for concepts like goodness cannot be construed on such a
model. In the case of such moral terms, any one moral principle, even
a principle that was felt to be definitional or stipulative in character,
can be abandoned, and we feel that the identity of the concept has, in
a certain respect, remained.

In pursuing our concern about the relationship between theology
and ethics we need to give up the question of how one could justify the
definition of 'good' or 'right' in terms of God's will, and to replace
it with two other questions. The first, which is dealt with in the next
chapter, is this: Can one be justified in taking the will of God as a
criterion in making moral judgments, or, if one wishes to restrict the
use of the term 'moral', in deciding what one should do? The second,
which is dealt with in the last chapter, is this: Is one ever justified
in letting judgments based on his theological criteria for knowing the

will of God override judgments based on autonomous, non-theological,
moral criteria? If the answer to these two questions is affirmative,
then it would seem that the claims made for the complete independence of
morality from religion will have been defeated.


F.  A Method of Ethical Reasoning


A method of ethical reasoning suggested by the preceding section
is similar to those out forth by Morton White and Richard Brandt.  White
takes the point of view that Duhem and Quine applied to science and
generalizes it to apply to ethics as well.

> When we study the logic of ethical argument, however, we must
> broaden our linguistic structure so that it includes ethical
> statements, and broaden the other elements in the situation
> beyond sensory experience to include moral feelings of approval,
> revulsion, loathing, etc., toward actions. . . .  The pattern
> of surrendering a moral principle is very similar to the sur-
> render of an isolated physical principle when everything else
> is held constant.  One exception after another eats away at the
> principle, and the same commitment to logical consistency forces
> its rejection as forces us to reject physical theories that go
> against observation.  We come to forge our own positive ethical
> principles in a similar way; they are the principles which to-
> gether with our other beliefs systematically organize our
> elementary moral convictions.[2]

A similar position is out forth by Richard Brandt which he calls the
"qualified attitude method" and which he regards as the "standard method
of ethical reasoning."[3]  He sees the same parallel between moral reason-
ing and science as does White.  Although he does not mention Quine, in

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[1] Morton White, Toward Reunion in Philosophy, p. 256.

[2] Ibid., p. 257.

[3] Ethical Theory (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall,
Inc., 1959), p. 244.

effect he sees the "promoting of attitudes," "feelings of obligation,"

"inclinations to make demands on others," "feelings of remorse or indig-

nation," etc. as the experiences at the boundary of a Quinean system of

beliefs. Another moral philosopher might wish to reject the relevance

of some of these experiences and/or to add others such as the experience

of "a claim arising around and out of the facts," or of "demands which

seem to be independent of us," or to make some other description of moral

experience, but this does not alter the basic scheme. Brandt goes on

to draw parallels with scientific reasoning.

> There is point in comparing the role of feelings or attitudes
> in ethics with the role of observation in science. Every sci-
> entist accepts a host of theories and laws about the subject
> matter with which he works, just as all of us have principles
> in ethics. But these beliefs are subject to continuous revi-
> sion in the face of experience; theory must conform with obser-
> vation. "Standard" thinking in ethics is similar: we revise
> our principles to conform with our persistent attitudes (feel-
> ings, impulses, emotion) with some qualifications to be men-
> tioned. There are further parallels. For instance, in empiri-
> cal science, observations do not determine exactly how prin-
> ciples are to be revised; often there are various possibilities
> and a choice between them must be made. Again, sometimes an
> observation may conflict with scientific theory so sharply, and
> in such an isolated way, that it is simplest to discount it as
> illusory, or as a result of an undetected defect in one's ex-
> perimental arrangements, or even to lay it aside as just "un-
> finished business." Perhaps the same situation exists in ethics. [1]

We begin with principles and criticize them on the basis of experience.

If a low level moral principle is brought into doubt, then also is the

higher level one from which it is deduced, if there is such a higher

level one. All attitudes are not relevant, however. Just as the

principles can be criticized, so can the attitudes. We discount

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[1] *Ethical Theory*, pp. 248-249

attitudes if we think they are not impartial and, where matters of con-
flict of interest are involved, where one would not have the same atti-
tude if relevant conditions were reversed. We discount an attitude
which we think is uninformed or which springs from an abnormal state of
mind, or "if accepting its prompting would be incompatible with having
a system of principles both consistent and general"[1]

> In summary, our proposal about the "standard" method of
> ethical thinking is this. (1) We decide particular problems
> both by appeal to principles that we already have more or less
> explicitly in mind and by appeal to our preferences, feelings
> of obligation, and so forth (which kind of attitude depending on
> whether the question is one about what is desirable, or what is
> obligatory, and so on). (2) We correct our principles if they
> are incompatible with our criticized (undiscounted) attitudes
> (feelings of obligation, and so forth); and we rely on our criti-
> cized attitudes in filling out and weighing our principles.
> (3) Judgments . . . must be consistent, and particular ones must
> be generalizable. (4) Attitudes are discounted if they are not
> impartial, informed, the product of a normal state of mind, or
> compatible with having a consistent set of general principles
> not excessively complex. Ethical thinking, then, is a complex
> interplay of attitudes, principles, formal requirements for
> principles, and rules for discounting. None of these can be
> submerged in the other three. Perhaps there are complications
> we ought to add.[2]

According to this method we correct our principles as they come
into conflict with relevant, undiscounted, experiences. It is not com-
pletely clear, however, where we get these principles in the first
place. Quine was previously cited as writing concerning scientific
beliefs:

> But the total field is so underdetermined by its boundary con-
> ditions, experience, that there is much latitude of choice as to
> what statements to re-evaluate in the light of any single
> experience.[3]

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[1] Brandt, _Ethical Theory_, p. 250   [2] _Ibid._, pp. 250-251.

[3] _From a Logical Point of View_, pp. 42-43.

There are two ways a particular person might have arrived at a set of beliefs different from the one he did arrive at even though he took into account the same experiences. He could have made different revisions. But he also could have arrived at a different set of beliefs by starting with a different set. It is not, therefore, just a matter of knowing which statements to re-evaluate, it is also a matter of knowing which statements to begin with in order to consider their re-evaluation. In science, at least in most periods, one begins with generally accepted scientific beliefs. In ethics, however, one may be faced with various alternatives, e.g., the teachings of one's religion, the views generally prevailing in society, or some philosophical ethic. When Brandt refers to principles he seems to be thinking of such things as those found, for instance, in the second table of the Ten Commandments. It might be plausible to argue that even as we test our principles by moving outward deductively to statements which come into direct contact with experience, so also we arrive at those principles by moving inward, inductively, from experience. Brandt seems to be thinking in these terms since in talking about scientific method and its parallels with moral reasoning he refers to some conceptions of induction that are supported by some contemporary empiricists. An account of various theories of induction and their critics cannot be given here, but perhaps it is worth noting that philosophers such as Karl Popper and Imre Lakatos and historians of science such as Thomas S. Kuhn[1] have pointed out that science does not actually proceed in the way suggested by such defences of induction as are given

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[1] _The Structure of Scientific Revolutions_ (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

for example, by Rudolf Carnap. It seems much more certain that the ethical thinking of an individual or a group does not do so.

There are two considerations which support the assertion that moral reasoning does not proceed by something like an inductive method. First, most people in fact do not arrive at their moral principles by anything approximating any inductive method, rather they begin with certain principles, because these have been explicitly taught to them or because they have assimilated them from their society, and they revise them or abandon them only when they are challenged by a recalcitrant experience (and not always then), or sometimes when they conflict with new values or principles which they encounter in a new or changed social environment. Secondly, among the principles which people hold are ones which seem to be too general to be arrived at inductively from attitudes and feelings of obligation, horror, remorse, etc., but which we feel are as important to ethics as very general high level theories are to science. Such general principles may have to do with matters of conflicts of interest as do these:

> (1) The fact that an action is in accordance with a practice which "is concerned with the harmonious satisfaction of desires and interests"[1] is a good reason for calling it good, or at least the fact that an action transgresses such a practice is a good reason for calling it bad.

> (2) A practice or system of principles is morally right if and only if it "would involve the least conflict of interests attainable under the circumstance,"[2] or if its "acceptance by everyone as overruling the dictates of self-interest is in the interest of everyone alike."[3]

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[1] Toulmin, _The Place of Reason in Ethics_, p. 223.    [2] _Ibid._

[3] Kurt Baier, _The Moral Point of View_, first edition, p. 314.

As we have previously noted, a person may also hold principles that have
to do with ideals. He may approve the sort of principles that have to
do with conflicts of interest because they conform to those which he
has that have to do with ideals. These may be of the following sorts:

> (3) An action is morally good (at least prima facie) when it
> proceeds from a character that realizes ideal X,[1] or when it
> exemplifies or witnesses to ideal X.

> (4) An action is good (at least prima facie) when it will help
> to produce ideal Y, or a state of affairs that embodies, exem-
> plifies, or witnesses to ideal Y.[2]

One person may hold to several principles of the form of (3) and (4)
and they may be arranged in various heirarchical sequences which may
or may not culminate in one all encompassing principle  that expresses
a whole way of life. Examples of various general versions of (4) are
produced by substituting for Y such expressions as "the least possible
conflict of interest," "the greatest good of the greatest number," "the
maximum possible pleasure with the least possible pain," "the greatest
amount of intrinsic goodness," "the relationship of love between con-
scious beings,"[3] or "the redemptive will of God." People in fact hold
such principles which they do not and could not arrive at inductively.
According to a version of Brandt's qualified attitude method which em-
phasizes falsification and criticism, there is nothing irrational about
this practice as long as a person keeps the beliefs he has open to criti-
cism, for this still allows one to practice what may very well be the

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[1] G. C. Field, *Moral Theory* (London: Methuen & Co., 1921),
p. 135.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 136.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 147.

only sort of rationality attainable.[1]

Brandt argues that his "standard method" is not only commonly used, but that it is the one supported by the best reasons. He tries to show that it is more rational than any of its most common alternatives such as theological rules, natural law theory, utilitarianism, or arguments from the "function" of ethics. These other methods, therefore, are thought of as alternatives to the "qualified attitude method." If we think of the qualified attitude method in a falsificationist way, however, this need not be correct. Just as most proposed definitions of ethical terms can also be looked at as moral principles, so statements of methods of moral reasoning can also be looked at as moral principles. The general moral principles mentioned above, on the other hand, also provide methods or criteria in reasoning about ethics. If a person who holds to any of these principles which embody such methods holds to them in a rational manner he must leave them open to possible criticism or falsification. Certainly one of the ways in which they might be criticized is by showing that they lead to results which the moral agent finds so contrary to his basic undiscounted attitudes and feelings that he cannot accept them. Is not this exactly the way in which the debate between the supporters and critics of utilitarianism has been carried on? The critic of utilitarianism shows that the utilitarian principle leads to approving abominable actions, and the proponent then tries to show either that it does not or that it can be reformulated or revised in such a way that it will not lead to the approval of such

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[1] See William W. Bartley III, _The Retreat to Commitment_ (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), chs. 4, 5.

actions. So if one is to argue for his position at all, or to leave it open to argument, he in fact presupposes something like Brandt's qualified attitude method. Looked at in this way the qualified attitude method may not be standard in the sense that one always uses it or ought to use it. One may use some other method, but that method is also expressed in terms of principles which make up part of one's total field of moral beliefs and which can be criticized by the retransmission of falsity from a belief that one must give up because it conflicts with his moral experience, although, of course, one may sometimes discount the recalcitrant experience. In other words the qualified attitude method as well as being used alongside of other methods is used to criticize other methods, that is, as well as being used to criticize low level moral principles, it can also be used to criticize the high level principles which embody other methods of moral reasoning. This is not to say that it too, or at least its results, cannot be criticized, for it too belongs to the set of beliefs that a person has which may conflict with his experience, but it might not be criticizable in the sense that it might be abandoned altogether, for then a powerful tool for criticizing other methods would be abandoned.

The problem with putting emphasis on criticism and falsification is that it might not allow us to arrive at any definite conclusions as to the best moral principles or way of life. It is not evident how much criticism a point of view can absorb before it is irrational not to give it up. This depends on how "forced" the other adjustments we must make in our belief system to divert criticism from some basic principle seem to be. It also depends on what the alternatives are. Advocates of Popper's approach sometimes seem to think that one gives up theories

with nothing to replace them when they are subject to important criticism.
But in the case of high level theories scientists in fact may allow them
to undergo a great deal of critical attack and still refuse to abandon
them until some more plausible theories come along. One does not know
how to proceed if he has no theory at all. If this is true in science
it is true to a greater extent in ethics, for one cannot cease to live
and to make decisions because his way of life has been shown to run into
serious difficulties. The situation maybe such that none of the live
options have been shown to be clearly superior to the others. It is con-
ceivable that one could start with widely divergent principles, none of
which have run into overwhelming difficulties by recommending acts that
we cannot help thinking of as reprehensible or by disapproving of those
which we cannot help thinking of as right. Yet it may make a great
deal of difference which one of these general principles we start from
because they may guide us in different directions in situations where
our undiscounted basic attitudes and emotions do not produce an un-
equivocal preference, and it is in just these cases where we expect
our moral principles to help us. In science certain experiments are re-
garded as crucial in deciding between competing theories, or "paradigms"
(Kuhn), or "research programs" (Lakatos). But usually such experiments
are seen to be decisive only in retrospect, perhaps many years later.
If the statement that Imre Lakatos has made, that "there is no such
thing as instant rationality,"[1] is true for science, it must be even more

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[1] "Falsificationism: The Methodology of Scientific Research
Programs," a lecture presented at the University of Pittsburgh, October
7, 1969, as part of the series of lectures presented by the Center for
the Philosophy of Science at the University of Pittsburgh.

obviously true for ethics. Let us consider the case of an individual
who has certain theological beliefs. Do those theological beliefs give
him a legitimate reason to place in the center of his system of moral
beliefs some general principle or principles, perhaps including some-
thing like, "We ought to do what God wills," rather than others, with-
out surreptitiously appealing in some way to other moral principles
as criteria which he therefore unwittingly admits to be more basic
than those which he is trying to show that he is justified in regarding
as fundamental? The next chapter deals with this question.

## III. THE WILL OF GOD AS A CRITERION IN ETHICS

### A. The Power of God as a Reason for Obedience

We have seen that it seems impossible to justify theological
ethics on the grounds of any supposed equivalence in meaning between
'good' or 'right' and 'willed by God' or any similar phrase. Other
sorts of reasons must therefore be sought. Theologians often write as
if it were presumptuous and sinful to ask why God's will should be
obeyed. Emil Brunner, for example, writes:

> The Good consists in always doing what God wills at any particu-
> lar moment.[1] . . . The Good is done for the sake of the Good
> when it is done for the sake of God, in obedience to the Divine
> Command. We ought to obey God because He commands it, not be-
> cause obedience means happiness and disobedience means unhap-
> piness. Faith would not be faith, obedience would not be obedi-
> ence, if things were otherwise. . . . To do the Good for the
> sake of God means to do the Good not because my moral dignity
> requires it, but because it is that which is commanded by God.[2]

Similarly Karl Barth writes:

> For the man who obediently hears the command of God is not in
> any position to consider why he must obey it. He is not in any
> position, therefore, from the vantage-point of a higher prin-
> ciple to try to show either himself or others how this law of
> human volition and action is reached.[3]

There is a sense in which what Barth and Brunner say may be true. "Faith
would not be faith, obedience would not be obedience if things where
otherwise." But how and why does faith become and remain faith in this
God and obedience become and remain obedience toward this God? The man
who obediently hears the command of God may not be in any position to
consider why he must obey that particular command, but he is in the

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[1] The _Divine Imperative_, p. 82.      [2] _Ibid._, p. 120.

[3] _Church Dogmatics_, II, II, p. 522. All quotations from Barth
are used with the permission of Charles Scribner's Sons.

position to ask himself why he has become and why he remains the man

who obediently hears the command of this God. So although the nature

of faith may be such that certain questions are not asked from within

it, this does not dispose of the questions but only leads us to trans-

late them into another form, that is, into questions about why one

remains in this particular faith. In spite of the quotation cited above

Karl Barth does take up this matter and discusses the various answers

that have been given to the question:

> Why has God a title to man, and therefore a claim on him? What
> is the source of His power over him? Why has man to obey Him?
> Why God and not any other authority?[1]

One of the possible answers which Barth considers he describes

as follows:

> It might be said that God is the power which is over and in all
> things, the necessity which rules in all being and occurence,
> the existence and activity of which we sense and experience,
> which we must also recognize as a necessity of thought, to which
> even man is obviously subject, to submit to which is for him the
> best course because it is unavoidable, because he cannot evade
> this submission, because a reluctance to submit can only do harm
> without altering actual subjection.[2]

It is not perfectly clear whether this is Brunner's position or not, but

such a position is explicitly set forth by the philosopher P. T. Geach.[3]

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[1] _Ibid.,_ p. 552.     [2] _Ibid._

[3] Brunner writes: "Because God has absolute power, He has the
absolute right over us; and in the fact that he lays His absolute claim
upon us, we perceive His absolute authority as "Lord". Since God lays
His absolute claim upon us, who are part of this world, He reveals Him-
self to us as absolute power, the power from which all other power is
derived. Only as this power--as the power of the Creator--is he able
to assert an absolute right over us. We belong to Him unconditionally,
because He created us" (_The Christian Doctrine of God,_ pp. 141-142).
It is not clear whether the decisive factor is God's power or His being
our creator.

Geach writes:

> But what if somebody asks, "Why should I obey God's law?" This
> is really an insane question. For Prometheus to defy Zeus made
> sense because Zeus had not made Prometheus and had only limited
> power over him. A defiance of Almighty God is insane: it is
> like trying to cheat a man to whom your whole business is mort-
> gaged and who you know is well aware of your attempts to cheat
> him, or again, as the prophet said, it is as if a stick tried to
> beat, or an axe to cut, the very hand that was wielding it.[1] . . .

>       I shall be told by /certain/ philosophers that since I
> am saying not: It is your supreme moral duty to obey God, but
> simply: It is insane to set about defying an Almighty God, my
> attitude is plain power-worship. So it is: but it is worship
> of the Supreme power, and as such is wholly different from, and
> does not carry with it, a cringing attitude towards earthly
> powers.[2]

There is of course a standard objection to this sort of claim. Ewing,

for example, writes:

> Without a prior conception of God as good or his commands as
> right God would have no more claim on our obedience than Hitler
> or Stalin except that he would have more power than even they
> had to make things uncomfortable for those who disobey him.[3]

Similarly Kai Nielsen writes:

> Suppose we say instead that we ought to do what God wills because
> God will punish us if we do not obey him. This may very well be
> a cogent self-interested or prudential reason for doing what God
> commands, but we hardly have a morally good reason for doing
> what he commands since such considerations of self-interest
> cannot be an adequate basis for morality.[4]

The cogency and relevance of this standard sort of objection

depend on a number of things including the acceptance or rejection of

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[1] *God and the Soul* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; New York
Schocken Books, 1969), p. 126. Quotations are used by permission.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 127.

[3] "The Autonomy of Ethics," *Prospect for Metaphysics*, p. 40.

[4] "God and the Good," *Theology Today*, XXI (1964), 50. This and
other quotations are used by permission of the editor of *Theology Today*.

what we have called the weak autonomy thesis.[1] According to Brunner there can be no valid morality at all apart from God's will.[2] Geach, on the other hand, finds this position to be incredible and insists that it is not only the case that "the knowledge of God is . . . not prerequisite to our having any moral knowledge," but also that this can be demonstrated.[3]

> Now it is logically impossible that our knowledge that lying is bad should depend on revelation. For obviously a revelation from a deity whose "goodness" did not include any objection to lying would be worthless; and indeed, so far from getting our knowledge that lying is bad from revelation, we may use this knowledge to test alleged revelations.[4]

Another issue which is relevant to the cogency of Nielsen's argument is the truth or falsity of his claim that there is a fundamental distinction between prudential reasons and moral ones, for if it were the case that in the long run moral reasons could be reduced to prudential reasons, as, for example, in some Hobbesian types of ethical systems, then there would be no basic difference between prudential reasons which referred to the power of God and other prudential reasons. Since there would be no difference in kind, prudential reasons of the former sort would override those of the latter sort for more would be prudentially at stake. In fact it is along these lines that Geach seems to be arguing.

Geach's general view of ethics is related to those of some other contemporary philosphers. Philosophers such as Moore have stressed a

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[1] see above, p. 7

[2] See the quote from Brunner on p. 17 above.

[3] God and the Soul, p. 120     [4] Ibid., pp. 119-120.

distinction between instrumental goodness and intrinsic goodness, but others have questioned the validity of this dichotomy and have added one or more additional categories.[1] Something can also be good in the sense of being a good representative of its kind. A knife, for example, is a good knife when it fulfils the expectations which are associated with knives well, in this case when it performs a certain function well. this seems to be the understanding of 'good' which J. O. Urmson regards as fundamental when he writes of 'good' as a grading label.[2] Likewise this seems to be the point of view that Geach is adopting when he insists that 'good' and 'bad' are attributive adjectives rather than 'predicative' ones. 'Red' in the sentence, 'X is a red book' is predicative because the sentence can be reformulated as 'X is a book and X is red', while 'big' is attributive because a sentence like 'X is a big flea' cannot be analyzed as 'X is a flea and X is big'. So it is with 'good' and 'bad'. To say that X is good is to say that it is a good representative of the sort of things that X is, and as Geach writes, "The traits for which a thing is called 'good' are different according to the kind of thing in question."[3] So it would seem that for Geach, as for Urmson, to say that a particular X is good is to say that according to recognized criteria it rates high on a grading scale of Xs. The question that then arises is how criteria come to be relevant for calling something morally good.

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[1] See C. A. Baylis, "Grading, Values, and Choice," Mind, LXVII (1958), 485-501; and Georg Henrick von Wright, The Varieties of Goodness (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), chs. 1-5.

[2] "On Grading," Mind, LIX (1950), 145-169.

[3] "Good and Evil," Analysis, XVII (1956), 37.

Starting from another place in Geach's discussion we can see
that his approach is basically Aristotelian and very similar to the
position put forth by Philippa Foot in her paper, "Moral Beliefs."[1]
Geach writes:

> We must allow in the first place that the question, "Why should
> I?" or "Why shouldn't I?" is a reasonable question, which calls
> for an answer, not for abusive remarks about the wickedness of
> asking; and I think that the only relevant answer is an appeal
> to something the questioner wants.[2]

So the analysis given in the preceding paragraph of the word 'good'
does not show us why calling anything good would give a person a reason
to do anyting, for the fact that something is a good X does not give
anyone a reason to do anything if he is not choosing an X and does not
happen to want an X. Morality can be based on this sort of analysis
of goodness only if it can be shown that there is something a man can-
not help wanting or choosing. This is what Geach maintains.

> It can, I think, be shown that an action's being a good or bad
> action is of itself something that touches the agent's desires.
> Although calling a thing 'a good A' or 'a bad A' does not of
> itself work upon the hearer's desires, it may be expected to do
> so if the hearer happens to be choosing an A. Now what a man
> cannot fail to be choosing is his manner of action. . . . any
> man has to choose how to act, so calling an action good or bad
> does not depend for its effect as a suasion upon any individual
> peculiarities of desire.[2]

So one condition that has to be met for knowledge that something is a
good X to influence our behavior is that we are choosing an X, but we
cannot help choosing a manner of action. But it is a confusion to say,
as Geach does, that this shows that "calling an action good or bad does
not depend for its effect as a suasion upon any individual peculiarities

[1] *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1958-1959, pp. 83-104.

[2] "Good and Evil," p. 40.          [3] *Ibid.*

of desire," because to be told that something is a good X only gives
a person a reason to choose it, even if he were choosing an X, if the
criteria in the light of which it was called good are criteria relevant
to his wants. So if the knowledge that an action is good is to influ-
ence behavior, it is not sufficient that a person cannot help choosing
a manner of acting, it must also be the case that the criteria in the
light of which it is called good are criteria that are relevant to his
wants. Geach does recognize this for he also writes that the only
relevant and rational reply to the question "Why shouldn't I do that?"
is an answer which refers to something the questioner wants and cannot
get if he does what is in question. So Geach applauds Phillipa Foot's
paper in which she writes:

> In general, anyone is given a reason for acting when he is shown
> the way to something he wants; but for some wants the question
> "Why do you want that?" will make sense, and for others it will
> not. It seems clear that in this division justice falls on the
> opposite side from pleasure and interest and such things. "Why
> shouldn't I do that?" is not answered by the words "because it
> is unjust" as it is answered by showing that the action will
> bring boredom, loneliness, pain, discomfort or certain kinds of
> incapacity, and this is why it is not true to say that "it's
> unjust" gives a reason in so far as any reasons can ever be
> given. It's unjust" gives a reason only if the nature of jus-
> tice can be shown to be such that it is necessarily connected
> with what a man wants.
>
> This shows why a great deal hangs on the question of
> whether justice is or is not a good to the just man, and why
> those who accept Thrasymachus' premise and reject his conclusion
> are in a dubious position.[1]

There are two possible avenues of criticism of this attempt to
understand morality in terms of means to ends that we cannot help having.
One criticism is that it is simply not true to what we mean by morality.

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[1] "Moral Beliefs," pp. 101-102. Used with permission of the
Honorary Secretary and Editor of the Aristotelian Society.

We will deal with this criticism below. The other criticism is that the attempted justification just does not succeed.[1] Geach himself puts forth just such a criticism of Philippa Foot's position. He believes that her argument will only take her part of the way toward her conclusion. He agrees that if we can determine that lying has effects such that we would desire to be without them, then lying is bad, and that it is also true that if lying is undesirable, then it is also undesirable to be a person who lies and it is desirable to have the virtue, that is, the habitual disposition, of telling the truth. So it is not only desirable to act in certain ways, it is also desirable to be a certain kind of person who acts in certain ways even if on any particular occasion doing so is to one's disadvantage. Foot seems to think that this is all that is needed in order to justify acting morally on those occasions when it is against one's own interest to do so. But this is where Geach disagrees.

> But somebody might very well admit that not only is there some-
> thing bad about certain acts, but also it is desirable to
> become the sort of person who needs to act in the contrary way;
> and yet **not** admit that such acts are to be avoided in all cir-
> cumstances and at any price.[2]

This certainly seems to be true where, for example, acting rightly would endanger one's own life. This is where God enters the picture for Geach. The believer in God expects that God would direct men to his own ends. How does God do this? Against much of contemporary Christian ethics Geach thinks that in the light of men's overwhelming ability to deceive themselves and make exceptions in their own favor one must regard God as forbidding whole classes of actions categorically. Where else is the

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[1] We have already made some reference to this issue in conjunc--
tion with Professor Baier's Hobbesian approach to ethics.

[2] God and the Soul, p. 123.

vast majority of mankind who have not received any special revelation

to see what God has forbidden except in what they themselves recognize

as generally bad?

> So unless the rational knowledge that these practices are
> generally undesirable is itself a promulgation of the Divine
> Law absolutely forbidding such practices, God has left most men
> without any promulgation of commands to them on these matters
> at all; which, on the theological premises I am assuming, is
> absurd.[1]

We have already seen that Geach's answer to the question, "Why should I

obey God's will?" is that it is insane to do otherwise. Ultimately,

then, the power of God provides the reason for doing what is good, that

is, what it is usually desirable to do, in those cases where, apart from

reference to the power of God, it would seem that it would be for our

good to act otherwise.[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 124.

[2] In spite of their both referring to God's power as a reason to
obey God there is a vast difference between Geach and Brunner. Brunner
criticizes all naturalistic ethics as being either eudaimonistic or
legalistic. He writes that "the ethics of eudaimonism remains close to
life, but it simply becomes worldly prudence. The ethic of duty, on the
other hand, is able to draw a clear distinction between the moral will
as obedience and the desires of worldly prudence, but the will becomes
encased in the lifeless rigidity of legalism" (Divine Imperative, p. 68).
Brunner might very well have seen Geach's position as one that managed
to preserve the defects of both eudaimonism and legalism and the advan-
tages of neither. According to Geach, we decide what is good autono-
mously and in an eudaimonistic manner, and then make it the will of a
legalistic God. According to Brunner, on the other hand, there is no
valid autonomous ethic (see above, p. 17) and we understand the good in
terms of God's will which is understood non-legalistically. Brunner
writes, for example, that "the Good consists in always doing what God
wills at any particular moment" (Divine Imperative, p. 82), and that
"therefore we can never know beforehand what God will require. God's
command can only be perceived at the actual moment of hearing it"
(Ibid., p. 117). In the second chapter of this paper which considered
the possibility of defining 'good' in terms of God's will we in effect
sided with Geach on this issue of the weak autonomy thesis. In terms
of what people in fact mean by morality it is not only difficult to
agree with Brunner's assertion that there is no autonomous ethic, it
becomes difficult to know what it means.

If Geach's position were correct it would seem to avoid the
standard objections to basing obedience to God on His power. First,
because of the way in which God's will is supposed to be known God
could not be conceived of as willing anything contrary to that which
men usually recognize as generally desirable. God cannot be thought of
as willing torture, murder, etc. Geach's understanding of how the will
of God is known is not, however, one that is likely to find unques-
tioned acceptance in theological circles. We do not wish to enter the
vast discussion of legalism and the place of rules in Christian ethics
but it is worth noting that most writers in Christian ethics today would
regard the strict legalism to which Geach's argument loads as a _prima_
_facie_ reason to reject it. Second, his method is perhaps unrealistic
in its assumptions concerning the degree of unanimity to which men have
come or to which they are likely to come, concerning which things are
desirable and which are not. Third, because of the differences in
human opinions, and because of the tragedies and absurdities that this
procedure has sometimes led to, most Christian thinking has become very
wary of making inferences about God's will from the moral opinions of
men.

Geach acknowledges that God's will may be known in other ways,
e.g., in revelation, although in his book he does not deal with this
since he is there concerned only with "natural theology." If God's
will were known partially or completely in ways other than Geach dis-
cusses we could ask if according to his understanding of morality he
would still avoid the standard objections against being obedient to
God simply because of His power. It seems that he would, for if all

that there is to be taken into consideration in morality is our desire
for various ends and the means to these ends, then it is difficult to
see how one could have any end that could override the desire not to
offend the Supreme Power of the universe.  If morality is related to
our needs in a more Hobbesian way the situation is the same.  Since the
power of God is greater  than any other power there does not seem to be
any reason why theological prudential reasons should not supersede
Hobbesian prudential reasons.  Both Hobbesian and Aristotelian ethics
are autonomous in the sense that they give good reasons for one course
of action being called good and being followed rather than another
apart from any reference to the will of God, but since the sort of
reasons they give are not qualititatively different from the reasons
which God's power provides for obedience to Him, such moral theories
have no basis on which to appeal to the standard objections against
using the power of God as a reason to obey Him.

We have seen that Geach accepts the first sort of criticism of
the attempt to justify morality in terms of means to ends that we can-
not help having.  That criticism is that such a justification just does
not succeed.  Geach agreed that it does not succeed and brought in God
to correct that difficulty.  The second criticism is quite different.
It is not concerned  with whether such a justification works or does
not work, but with whether what is justified by reference to our needs,
wants, and purposes is really morality, or if it is part of morality,
whether it is everything that is involved in a correct understanding of
what is morally good.  Dewi Z. Phillips devotes a paper, "Does it Pay

to be Good?"[1] to criticizing Philippa Foot's paper, "Moral Beliefs".

Drawing on Kant, Kierkegaard, and J. L. Stocks for support he asserts

that those who understand morality in terms of means to ends just do

not and cannot give an adequate analysis of remorse and moral blame.

Suppose that it could be shown that being a just man is generally

desirable for leading the best life, and so all men have a reason to

choose justice. What can we say, however, about the man who chooses

against the odds and seems to succeed in realizing all of his ends?

> We want to say that what this man did was wrong. The fact that
> in facing death he shows no remorse is but an additional mark
> against him. But Mrs. Foot can give no account of this judg-
> ment. She must admit that he has in fact lived the best life
> he could have. Her only consolation is that such a man, like
> everyone else, had good reason to choose justice rather than
> injustice. But he chose injustice.[2]

Phillips' understanding of of morality is directly opposed to Foot's and

to any Aristotelian approach as can be seen from his quoting with

approval from J. L. Stocks as follows:

> Morality requires that all means shall be justified in some other
> way and by some other standard than their value for this or any
> end; that however magnificent is the prospect opened out by the
> proposed course of action, and however incontestable the power
> of the means chosen to bring this prospect nearer, there is still
> always another question to be asked: not a question whether in
> achieving this you will not perhaps diminish your chances of
> something still more important; but a question of another kind.
> "There is a decency required," as Browning said: and this demand
> of decency is prepared to sacrifice, in the given case, any
> purpose whatever.[3]

If this conception of morality is in fact the correct one so that moral

reasons are qualitatively different from any kind of prudential reason,

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[1] *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1964-65, pp. 45-60.

[2] Ibid., pp. 59-60. Used by permission of the Aristotelian Society.

[3] "Is There a Moral End?", *Aristotelian Society Supplementary
Volume VIII* (1928), pp. 89-90. Used by permission of the Honorary Sec-
retary and Editor of the Aristotelian Society.

than the objections to basing obedience to God on his power become convincing. These objections are forcefully set forth by Karl Barth.

> Obedience to Him does actually include this subjection to His predominance. But this does not give us an ultimate, compelling basis for His claim to our obedience. . . . /The power of God/ of itself . . . does not provide us with the basis of the divine claim. . . . Man as man is still free in face of power as power. He can sink under it; he can be annihilated by it. But he does not owe it obedience, and even the most preponderant power cannot as such compel him to obey. Power as power does not have any divine claim, no matter how imposing or effective it might be. To maintain himself against power as power, even to his own undoing, is not merely a possibility for man. It is not merely the assertion of his right and dignity. It is the duty he has to fulfil with his existence as man.[1]

Whether or not we can base obedience to God, either considered as part of morality, or as overriding an autonomous morality, on God's power depends, therefore, on what analysis of morality we regard as correct. This is a difficult question since it is not even perfectly clear what we mean when we say that one analysis of morality is _correct_. In fact, as we have insisted in chapter two, moral goodness as most people think of it is a cluster concept and some of the criteria on the grounds of which people are not willing to give up some moral judgments do not seem to be justifiable on the basis of any relationship to any end in an Aristotelian, Hobbesian, or other manner. At any rate people accept moral principles as valid without discovering whether or not they can be justified or criticized on such grounds. They are sometimes regarded as binding apart from questions of their utility for any end one might have. If we are justified in holding to such criteria and such principles—and how could it be shown that we are not?—then

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[1] _Church Dogmatics_, II, II, pp. 552-553.

it may be the case that they should be accepted as overriding other
principles which are based indirectly on prudence, and so as overriding
the will of God, if in fact the only reason to obey God's will is our
fear of His power.  None of this, however, implies that the power of
God would never be a good reason to act in a certain way, for it does
not imply that prudential reasons are never good reasons to act in a
certain way nor even that some prudential reasons are not also moral
reasons, that is, that they do not reflect some of the data that moral
language takes into consideration.  Ewing and Nielsen are wrong, there-
fore, if they are implying that we would have no sufficient reason to
obey God's will unless we judged it to be good by those sorts of moral
considerations that are not connected in any way to prudence.  Rather
for us not to have a sufficient reason to obey the Supreme Power we would
not simply have to judge that some alternative was better or equally
as good according to such considerations, but that what was commanded
was clearly a positive evil according to these considerations.  If, on
the other hand, there ought not (whatever sense could be given to this
'ought not') to be any such elements in our morality, then there is no basis
at all on which to object to basing obedience to God on His power.

     Although the power of God supplies us with a good reason to
obey Him, even though, if certain views of morality are correct, this
reason could conceivably be overriden by some moral reasons, there are
theological objections from the Christian point of view to making such
a reason for obeying God fundamental.  For Karl Barth,the reasons why
it is man's duty not to be subject to power as power are theological

reasons. The first of these is that it is not God's intention to win

men's obedience in this way for God has determined and created man for

freedom. The second is that the sort of obedience that God wants from

man is not the sort that can be compelled. So to decide for God is

to reject the alternative of being obedient to power as power.

> Power as power cannot possibly be the basis of man's obedience,
> For it is not the basis of the claim made upon him, in spite of
> the fact that this is the claim of God, the Almighty. . . .
> The basis of the divine claim does not consist in the fact that
> God can overcome and smash and annihilate man. By doing this
> God cannot and will not compel man to obedience; and He never
> has. He could certainly compel him--but only to something which
> falls far short of man's obedience. If He were to compel him
> in this way, His claim on him would still be without foundation.
> Even in the depths of hell it could still be flouted and de-
> spised.[1]

B. Morality and the Vision of an Ideal Way of Life

We turn now to another approach to justifying moral principles

which may be relevant to an attempt to base ethics, at least in part,

on the will of God. One way of seeking to justify the acceptance of

certain moral principles is not to justify them directly, or to justify

them in terms of particular wants or interests, or in terms of their

role in society, but rather in terms of how they contribute to a total

way of life. Paul Taylor gives an account of various stages of justi-

fication. He writes:

> Validation always takes place _within_ a value system. We validate
> standards and rules by referring to higher standards and rules
> within the same value system; we validate these higher standards
> and rules in turn be referring to still higher standards and
> rules within the system. . . . But at any given time, for any
> given person, there will be some norms that are for him supreme.

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[1] _Ibid._, pp. 553-554.

> What makes them supreme? Simply the fact that the person
> accepts them as supreme whenever he is asked to justify the
> standards and rules he has adopted. . . . Now suppose the per-
> son is asked to justify them, since they are supreme. He is
> being asked to justify the whole value system within which he
> validates all his other standards and rules.[1]

How does he do this? When a person adopts a value system he not only

uses it for justifying his judgments, but he also regulates his life by

it. The way he justifies his value system as a whole is by testing it

in life, by pragmatic justification, by vindicating it in the course

of his life. A value system is vindicated by being a good means to an

end and by contributing to the value of a whole of which it is a part.

This end and this whole are the same thing--a way of life, that is,

the way of life which the individual chooses to live.

> All we can do to justify anyone's adopting a value system as a
> whole is to ask (invite) him to adopt it. We then ask him,
> first, whether the consequences of his doing so do not further
> certain ideals which, on reflection, he really wants to see
> realized in the world, and second, whether living in accordance
> with that system is not part of a whole way of life which, on
> reflection, he really wants to live.[2]

In order to vindicate a value system a person must be invited to adopt

it and if he chooses not to adopt it he of course loses the possibility

of either vindicating it or pragmatically "falsifying" it, for judg-

ments concerning its instrumental and contributive value must be veri-

fied or falsified in actual practice. The individual must see for him-

self how well the value system stands up. In order to decide whether

something "works" it is also necessary, however, to specify what ends

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[1] Paul Taylor, Normative Discourse (Englewood Cliffs, New Jer-
sey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1961), p. 128. Used by permission.

[2] Ibid., p. 132.

its successful working is supposed to achieve. If a value system is

vindicated by reference to how it contributes to a way of life, it

would still seem to be necessary to ask what it would mean for a

way of life to be justified and how one might try to show that it was

justified. We will return to these questions in part E of this chap-

ter.

For Taylor morality is one of the value systems which, along

with other value systems and rules of priority, go to make up a way of

life. But people also think of the choice of a way of life as a whole

as an ethical or a moral matter in a larger sense of 'ethical' and

'moral', and they do not necessarily see this way of life as made

up of specifiable rules, though perhaps rules always play some part.

R. W. Hepburn, for example, writes:

> Most recent British moral philosophy has been dominated by the
> "rule-obedience" model of moral judgment: the endorsing of
> principles, commitment to universalizable policies. There
> have been lately, however, some reminders that, whether or not
> rule-obedience may be the most satisfactory analysis of moral
> language, very different models are quite often in fact held
> by morally sensitive people--by those, for instance, who see
> moral endeavour as the realizing of a pattern of life or the
> following out of a pilgrimage.[1]

The important question one asks of himself is not simply "What should I

do?" There are other questions: "'What does my life add up to?' 'what

is its meaning?' is it coherent, integrated, or formless, chaotic?'"[2]

etc. Some of those who make this sort of emphasis think of a man as an

artist and his life as an artifact made from the materials and resources

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[1] "Vision and Choice in Morality, I," Dreams and Self Know-
ledge; Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume XXX (1956), p. 14.

[2] Ibid.

granted him. Such self-creation may involve both dealing imaginatively with personal and environmental resources and limitations, and with complex moral situations to which general rules are simply not applicable, and it tries to do so in a way that achieves "unity of being." Hepburn goes on to write:

> Drawing together those different ways in which one may meaningfully speak of "design" being given to life, it may be claimed that the genuinely religious life most clearly exemplifies these and exhibits in addition other ways in which "unity of being" can be achieved. The religious person has his vision of the good life, to the attainment of which all activity is subordinated. All the teachings and actions of the central figure of the religion are charged with the high solemnity and authority of his person.[1]

The person who tries to live in such a way often uses stories which may be historical, or which may simply be parables, as his guides instead of formulated rules. According to Hepburn, this is the way in which a religion like Christianity guides one's life. The story has the advantage of generating new insights, but it has the problem of being more difficult to alter in the face of a recalcitrant moral experience than is a principle. In this context it can be claimed that the way in which the moral life is based on the will of God in Christianity is that there is a divine invitation given by Jesus to adopt a vision of a certain way of life with Christ as a paradigm, and a vision of certain ideals represented by the "Kingdom of God" which are to be striven for in this world. Rules and values are not completely without a role to play in the life of a person who accepts the view that "a man's morality is not only his choice but his vision,"[2] and these are

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[1] Ibid., p. 21.

[2] Iris Murdoch, "Vision and Choice in Morality, II," Dreams

vindicated in the life of the Christian, or of someone with another vision, in precisely the way that Taylor indicates, according to how they work in contributing to his way of life and furthering the ideals he wishes to realize in the world.

There is, however, a basic problem with this approach to ethics as Helen Oppenheimer points out in responding to Hepburn. She writes:

> To many people the whole point of morality is precisely that it is not a matter of individual inspiration but the same for everyone.[1] . . . In concentrating on the genuine and useful analogy between moral choice and artistic choice, the fact that both can be creative, the "painter" model draws away the emphasis from the whole aspect of morality which is not choice at all but claim.[2]

One way of dealing with both of these sorts of observations about moraity is to speak of morality's having two levels.

> The lower level is the level of a rule-morality. Some will want to emphasize that it is basic, others that it is inferior. Its characteristic concept is the idea of fairness, of what may in justice be required of people; and of course the idea of "universalizability" is very much at home here.[3]

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and Self Knowledge, Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume XXX (1956), p. 43. She supports the position here being discussed as follows: "When we apprehend and assess other people we do not only consider their solutions to specifiable practical problems, we consider something more elusive which may be called their total vision of life, as shown in their mode of speech or silence, their choice of words, their assessments of others, their conception of their own life, and what they think funny: in short, the configurations of their thought which show continually in their reactions and conversation. These things, which may be overtly and comprehensibly displayed or inwardly elaborated and guessed at, constitute what . . . one may call the texture of a man's being or the nature of his personal vision" (Ibid., p. 39).

[1] "Moral Choice and Divine Authority," in Christian Ethics and Contemporary Philosophy, ed. by Ian T. Ramsey (London: S. C. M. Press, New York: Macmillan Co., 1966), p. 225.

[2] Ibid., p. 228.          [3] Ibid., p. 229.

P. F. Strawson makes a similar distinction between social morality with its system of reciprocal claims and its demand for justice (that is, its demand that men who insist on their own claims must acknowledge reciprocal claims) and "some ideal image of a form of life."[1] G. R. Grice devotes a good deal of attention to a similar distinction between basic obligations which relate to a social contract idea and ultra obligatiions which go beyond basic obligations and relate to one's personal fulfillment.[2] Berdyaev, as we have previously noted, speaks of three levels of morality, the first of which can be identified with Oppenheimer's lower level and the similar conceptions of the other writers. Both of the other two levels of morality would be included, most likely, in what the other writers call the morality of a man's vision and of his ultra obligations. But how do we relate these different levels to each other? Is a particular conception of the upper level of morality only obligatory on someone who thinks that acting according to it fulfills his life in some way, as Grice supposes, and so in an ultimate sense it remains optional? The optional nature of any proposed upper level of morality, or of any ultra obligations, seems plausible from a humanistic point of view. What is distinctive about Christian ethics, however, is not only a peculiar content to the "upper level" of morality, but also the claim that in the eyes of God, and therefore ultimately, it is just as obligatory as the basic level. Numerous writers on Christian ethics certainly believe that obligations associated with the

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[1] "Social Morality and the Individual Ideal," Philosophy, XXXVI (1961), p. 2.

[2] The Grounds of Moral Judgment (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), chs. 3, 4.

ethics of redemption or of creativity can on some occasions overrule
what are _prima_ _facie_ obligations of basic morality.  Certainly Chris-
tian discipleship is regarded as being a response to a gracious invita-
tion, and certainly it is not primarily following rules but adopting a
vision and an appropriate style of life which has room for individual
moral creativity.  But if the Christian "vision" is only a matter of
optional acceptance of an invitation, then, as Barth, writes, "The same
man who today selects God as his supreme good may tomorrow wish to
select a very different good. Where then is the claim of God?"[1]  Even
if we talk about part of this upper level of morality as being un-
specifiable because it is the creation of what does not yet exist, if
that creativity is part of adopting the vision of a way of life held
forth by Christian faith, as Berdyaev believes it is, it too is re-
garded by the Christian as obligatory and not as optional.

> God calls man to perform the creative act and realize his
> vocation, and He is expecting an answer to His call.[2] . .
> Creativeness and a creative attitude to life as a whole is
> not man's right, it is his duty.[3]

We need to ask what could be a basis for regarding an upper level of
morality with a particular content as being as binding as the basic
level.


### C.  A Way of Life as an Obligation to God

One way of arguing that a Christian upper level of morality is
as binding as the lower or basic level is by claiming that this upper

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[1] _Dogmatics_, II, II, p. 556.

[2] Berdyaev, _The Destiny of Man_, p. 128.    [3] _Ibid._, p. 132.

level of morality takes into account an additional aspect of reality,
the reality of God, or an additional aspect of man's relationships, his
relationship with God, in such a way as to make evident additional obli-
gations on men, obligations to God. For both Jesus and the Old Tes-
tament some of the fundamental ways of justifying and motivating parti-
cular behavior is by reference to obligations we have to God. According
to Amos Wilder, this sort of appeal in the teaching of Jesus is, in its
most elementary form, "just the Old Testament plea for obedience to
One who is ruler and king over all men, to One who is the Almighty, the
Lord of Hosts, the King of Kings. . . . In the teaching of Jesus the
duty of obedience to God is implicit throughout."[1] For Jesus, as well
as for the Old Testament, there are other obligations which men have to
God, in addition to the obligation of obedience, namely the obligation
to imitate God and the obligation to sanctify or glorify God's name.
Relevant to the former are the words of Leviticus 19:2, "You shall be
holy; for I the Lord your God am holy," and such teachings of Jesus as
"Be merciful even as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36). Concerning
the latter, according to George Foote Moore, the appeal to sanctify or
glorify God's name is "the most characteristic feature of Jewish ethics
both as principle and motive."[2] Wilder writes:

> The meaning of this motive is that the action of the faithful
> should be such as to bring honor and glory to the God of Israel.
> The New Testament expressions, "Hallowed by thy name" and "glori-
> fy your Father who is in heaven," are exact expressions of this.[3]

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[1] Eschatology and Ethics in the Teaching of Jesus (New York: Har-
per, 1939), p. 124. Used by permission of Harper and Row.

[2] Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era, The Age
of the Tannaim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), Vol. II,
p. 125.

[3] Eschatology and Ethics, p. 200; see also p. 125.

Psychologically this conception, according to Wilder, rests on the holiness of God in both a numinous and an ethical sense. Our question, however, is not with its psychological basis but with its justification. Can it be argued that we have any of these obligations to God which do not depend on our deciding that what God wills is good and so which do not put us in the position of judging God?

We noted before that Emil Brunner seemed at times to justify obedience to God by reference to His power, but perhaps the reference to power was meant in a different way from Geach's appeal to God's power. Brunner emphasizes that it is as the power of the Creator that God has an absolute right over us. "We belong to Him unconditionally, because He created us."[1] Can such a claim be justified? The objection to it is that it depends on a suppressed major premise which is a moral principle, i.e., one that states that we have obligations to those to whom we owe our existence, and perhaps it is necessary also to add that consequently we have an absolute obligation to whomever we owe our existence in an absolute sense. As it stands the principle seems somewhat dubious. Since the first part does not say that our obligations might not be overriden by other obligations it is less problematical, but we would be inclined to say that there could be commands that we ought not to obey no matter who issues them, and if we say this we would have to qualify the second part of the principle. In any case, to argue in such a fashion requires as a major premise a moral principle which we must accept prior to our accepting the will of God as authoritative or any

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[1] The Christian Doctrine of God, pp. 141-142.

obligation to God as binding. This principle itself, therefore, could not be derived from the will of God. This result, no doubt, would not be acceptable to Brunner.

Dewi Z. Phillips believes that we can get around this difficulty and can argue from factual statements about God to our having duties to Him without referring to any such moral principle as a premise.[1] He defends such a procedure by drawing parallels with the arguments presented by A. I. Melden which have to do with obligations that people have to their parents apart from any judgments they might make concerning their parents' virtues or vices.[2] Our obligations to our parents do not depend upon or begin with our deciding that they have met our criteria of worthiness nor do they depend on what our parents have done for us. Even as being a father "entails certain rights which the children of the father have obligations to satisfy,"[3] so God's being men's creator entails that men have certain obligations to God. If "it is possible to argue from 'He is my father' to "I ought not to leave him destitute,'"[4] as seems to be the case, then why is it not possible to argue from "He is God," to "I ought to glorify and honor His name," or "I ought to do His will"? The objection could be given that this still involves a moral principle to the effect that we have certain obligations to whomever we owe our existence. Phillips does not wish to deny that such a principle is involved; what he wishes

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[1] "God and Ought," in _Christian Ethics and Contemporary Philosophy_, ed. Ian T. Ramsey, pp. 133-139.

[2] _Rights and Right Conduct_ (Oxford: Blackwell, 1959).

[3] Phillips, "God and Ought," p. 136.     [4] _Ibid._

to deny is that our obligations to our parents, or to God, are depen-
dent on anyone's acknowledging such a principle or deciding to accept
it. Rather the moral principle is in some sense implied by the facts
themselves. Do we not in fact recognize this when we argue that we
have obligations to our parents?

The problem with Phillips' argument is that it fails to take
into account certain differences between the situation that Melden is
talking about and the one he is talking about. Although he refers to
it several times, he still fails to see the significance of Melden's
insistence on the "need to take account of the institution of the
family in any explanation of parental rights and the obligations of
children to their parents."[1] He agrees with Melden that outside the
institution of the family the fact that a particular man begat me
would not have the same moral significance. What we wrote concerning
Searle's effort to derive 'ought' from 'is' by way of 'I promise',
holds true here as well. What is involved in the statement, 'X is my
father' is an 'is'-statement that refers not to "brute" facts but to
institutional facts which are facts only because certain institutions
exist in society. In the case of the family, as in the case of prom-
ising, if there were no such institution the argument about our obli-
gations would not go through, but in fact the existence of such an in-
stitution depends upon people's judgments that this is the best way of
organizing society, or at least their judgment not to change the

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[1] Ibid., p. 134.

[2] See below, pp. 11-13.

structure of their society, and upon individuals' judgments not to with-
draw from this society. The fact that God is our Creator, however, is
a "brute" fact if it is a fact and does not depend on the existence of
any institution. Phillips regards Melden's reference to the institution
of the family as important for the understanding of the relevant moral
concepts. He writes:

> Just as Melden insists on the basic role to be played by the
> institution of the family in an explanation of the moral con-
> cepts he is dealing with, so I am insisting on a reference to
> the institution of religion whenever one wants to understand
> what religious people are saying.[1]

There is, however, a misunderstanding here, for the primary reason for
taking account of the institution of the family is not that of under-
standing certain concepts, e.g., the concept of children's obligations
to their parents, but rather that of understanding why we have good
reason to recognize the existence of such obligations. The parallel
with religious institutions therefore breaks down, for although a
reference to the institution of religion may aid us in understanding
what religious people are saying, it cannot aid us in discovering
whether what they are saying is true, at least when what they are saying
makes reference to what is not part of the social institution, namely,
God. Obligations arise between parents and children because they are
both members of an institution which serves a useful function in the
structure of society which people in one way or another acquiesce in.
Men cannot incur obligations to God in this manner, for although there
are religious institutions in a society God is certainly not a member

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[1] "God and Ought," p. 139. Quoted with permission of the pub-
lisher.

any such institution. Men's obligations to God, therefore, cannot be understood in terms of any analogy to the obligations which members of any social institution have to each other, nor are religious obligations justified in terms of their benefit to society. Some people may see obedience to religious teachings in this light, but these are people who are not really religious, that is, who do not really take the claim of God seriously in its own right. Phillips of course does not wish to support such implications, but his analogies with Melden's argument do not support whatever it is that he does wish to say.

Phillips goes on to contrast obligations to God with obligations to parents in this respect: since the obligations to one's parents are one sort among many within the institutions of society, one may justifiably decide not to act according to these particular obligations under certain circumstances, but the obligation to God, on the other hand, cannot be overriden in the same manner because it is not one of many competing claims in a way of life. To reject God's claim is to reject the foundation of an institution, "it is to reject a way of life as such."[1] But this is precisely why the parallels with Melden's argument will not work. Obligations to one's parents are obligations in so far as one lives in and shares the benefits of a society of which the institution of the family is an integral part. But it is utterly trivial to say that one has obligations to God as long as he accepts the institution or the way of life which has as its central element the recognition of obligations to God. Phillips ends up by not really advancing beyond

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[1] "God and Ought," p. 139.

the view that we are invited to accept a way of life which involves a recognition of obligations to God, but which does not show that that way of life has any claim upon us. But what we wish to know is if the existence or nature of God entails obligations to God, or good reasons to accept a way of life that includes acknowledging obligations to God. We could say that the power of God gives us such good reasons, but that would take us back to Geach's position which we have already discussed and against which we have found significant objections.

### D. A Way of Life and the Desire for Happiness

A completely different way of relating God to ethics has been taken by John Hick.[1] Like Geach, Hick has a basically Aristotelian approach to ethics, but his position differs radically from Geach's in significant ways. First, Hick is interested in Christian ethics, particularly in the moral teaching of Jesus, rather than in what a natural theology might have to say about ethics. Secondly, beginning from this point he sees Jesus' ethic not as a set of commands or a system of law, but as a way of life, a way of life that requires not obedience to external commands but a change of perspective and, on one level, a change of motivation.

> Jesus' ethic may be described as the ethic of the Kingdom. That is to say, it is a general account of the way of life of an individual who acknowledges the rule of God in this present world.[2]

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[1] .Faith and Knowledge (Ithica, New York: Cornell University Press, second edition, 1966), ch. 11, pp. 237-263.

[2] Ibid., p. 240. This and all other quotes from Hick's Faith and Knowledge are used with the permission of Cornell University Press.

Since the ethic of Jesus is so radical and seems to require acting with reckless disregard of one's own immediate interests the question naturally arises as to how anyone is "induced or empowered to live as a citizen of the Kingdom?"[1] Must dread of the power of God be the inducement? On the contrary, and this is the third radical difference from Geach's position, no inducement is needed at all. While on one level Jesus calls for a radical change in men's motivation, on a deeper level he calls for none at all.

> Jesus' teaching does not demand that we live in a way which runs counter to our deepest desires, and which would thus require some extraordinary counterbalancing inducement. Rather he reveals to us the true nature of the world in which we are living and indicates in the light of this the only way in which our deepest desires can be fulfilled. In an important sense then Jesus does not propose any new motive for action. He does not set up a new end to be sought, or provide a new impulse to seek an already familiar end. Instead he offers a new vision, or mode of apperception of the world, such that to live humanly in the world as it is thus seen to be is to live the kind of life which Jesus describes.[2]

Hick accepts, at least to a great extent, a dispositional analysis of belief. To believe a particular proposition, according to this sort of analysis, is to have a tendency or disposition to act in ways "appropriate to the truth of that proposition in situations to which the proposition is seen to be relevant."[3] He extends this analysis from believing that (a proposition is true) to believing in (e.g. God). To believe in God as Jesus depicts Him is to live without anxiety for oneself and with love for others. How does this follow in the light of Hume's insistence that we cannot deduce a moral imperative such as "Do

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[1] _Faith and Knowledge_, p. 242.    [2] _Ibid._, p. 243.

[3] _Ibid._, p. 247.

not be anxious" or "Love your neighbor as yourself" from such propositions as "God is love"? It is true enough, Hick could reply in agreement with Hume and Geach, that beliefs alone could not determine behavior.

> Our actions are the product of two interacting factors--our beliefs about the world, and the aims and desires in terms of which we inhabit the world as we believe it to be. . . . it might seem that there is very little scope for differing conceptions of the nature of our environment, but almost endless scope for variations in men's desires and aims, so that any change in a man's way of life must result from a change in his fundamental objectives. However, I believe that in fact the contrary is the case, and that we are all dominated by the same basic desire, which leads to a variety of types of action because of differing understandings of the nature of our environment.[1]

On one level, of course, people's desires differ and the Gospel does call for a change in motivation. But here is where a basically Aristotelian perspective comes in.

> But it is equally evident that our multitudinous desires do not all operate on the same level. Some desires are particular expressions of another more general desire. . . . I suggest that our desires form a hierarchical structure culminating in a single highest-level desire of which all our other desires are expressions at varying levels of concreteness. This highest level desire is the desire for happiness.[2]

Hick then goes on to write:

> If, then, it is a basic fact of human life that all men seek happiness, and if men pursue this and that concrete goal because they suppose that these will gain them happiness, then different ways of life will arise, not from men setting for themselves different basic goals (for there is only one such goal, namely, happiness), but from their different beliefs as to the actual paths which lead to that goal.[3]

Before we proceed to see what use Hick makes of this understanding of happiness and human motivation we will consider one of the several sorts of objections that can be raised to these presuppositions.

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[1] Hick, _Faith and Knowledge_, p. 251.  [2] _Ibid._, pp. 252-253.

[3] _Ibid._, p. 257.

W. F. R. Hardie thinks that there are really two conceptions of happiness
which are suggested in Aristotle's analysis of human motivation and that
the one which Aristotle chooses to be the basis of his ethical position
is the wrong one.[1] It is this conception of happiness as the dominant
end which Hick adopts from Aristotle. According to Hardie, however, the
correct conception of happiness is not one which regards it as a primary
end of human action at all, and therefore not one which regards it as
the one dominant end to which all others are means. In fact, according
to Hardie, it seems doubtful whether very many people have any one
dominant aim at all, and to assume that there is such a dominant end is
a source of error. Hardie writes:

> We can now distinguish the two conceptions which are confused
> or conflated in Aristotle's exposition of the doctrine of the
> single end. One of them is the conception of what might be
> called the inclusive end. A man reflecting on his various
> desires and interests, notes that some mean more to him than
> others, that some are more, some less, difficult and costly to
> achieve, that the attainment of one may, in different degrees,
> promote or hinder the attainment of others. By such reflection
> he is moved to plan to achieve at least his most important ob-
> jectives as fully as possible. The following of such a plan is
> roughly what is sometimes meant by the pursuit of happiness.
> The desire for happiness, so understood, is the desire for the
> orderly and harmonious gratification of desires. Aristotle
> sometimes, when he speaks of the final end, seems to be fum-
> bling for the idea of an inclusive end, or comprehensive plan,
> in this sense. Thus in NE I, 2, he speaks of the end of poli-
> tics as "embracing" other ends (1094b6-7). The aim of science
> which is "architectonic" (1094a26-27; cf. NE VI 8, 1141b24-26)
> is a second order aim. Again in NE I 7 he says that happiness
> must be "most desirable of all things, without being counted
> as one good thing among others since, if it were so counted, it
> would be made more desirable by the addition of even the least
> of goods. . . ." (1097b16-20). Such considerations ought to
> lead Aristotle to define happiness as a secondary end, the full
> and harmonious achievement of primary ends. This is what he

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[1] "The Final Good in Aristotle's Ethics," Philosophy, XL (1965),
277-295.

ought to say. It is not what he says.[1]

If Hardie's position is correct it would seem to be destructive of Hick's effort to justify Christian ethics on the grounds that they embody the way to man's final end, happiness, for according to Hardie, happiness is not a primary end at all, nor is there any other one dominant end that could be substituted for happiness. It can perhaps be argued successfully, however, that happiness is in fact a primary end. Whether or not it is the one dominant end of all human action is a question which will be taken up later. With respect to the first issue it can be claimed that although people may indeed connect happiness with the harmonious achievement of as many of their primary ends as possible, they do so not because happiness is the same thing as this harmonious achievement of their primary ends, but because it is something which they hope to attain by means of realizing their other ends. What supports this view and serves as a counter-example to Hardie's position is that people use the word 'happiness' in such a way that it makes perfectly good sense to say about a person, "He got everything he ever wanted but he still isn't happy." Happiness may here be understood as a psychological state. Although Aristotle regarded _eudaimonia_ as a primary end, whether it is the same end as is denoted by the English word 'happiness' is another question, especially if the latter is thought of as referring to a psychological state. Hick seems to be following H. A. Prichard in thinking that what Aristotle is talking about is the same thing people often mean by 'happiness' and that

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[1] "The Final Good in Aristotle's Ethics," p. 279; quoted with permission of the secretary of the Royal Institute of Philosophy.

Aristotle's further discussion is not an analysis of what eudaimonia is, but rather an account of how to attain it, for we already know what it is.[1] Prichard's interpretation, however, seems to be incorrect, as J. L. Austin has shown.[2] After Aristotle identifies the chief good of man with eudaimonia he says that a clearer account of what it is must be given. Whether 'it' refers back to the chief good of man or to eudaimonia, what Aristotle seems to be discussing in the following paragraphs does not seem to be the way to what we already understand and desire, i.e., happiness understood in some familiar way, but rather what eudaimonia or the final good of man actually is. In order to aid his discussion he introduces the concept of the function of man, a concept which his illustrations can lead one to interpret in various ways, and whether any of these ways can serve his purpose is a matter of doubt and dispute.[3]

Hick refers to Aristotle's view that a man's happiness consists in the fulfillment of his end or telos, or rather, the end or telos of human nature. The concept of the telos of human nature, and the concept of the function of human nature in realizing such a telos, also play an

[1] Moral Obligation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), reprinted in Moral Obligation and Duty and Interest (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 52. Here Prichard writes: "Aristotle himself is in agreement with the view that our ultimate end is happiness, and . . . , taking its truth for granted, his Ethics is concerned first to prove that it is by virtuous action that it will be realized, and then to work out in detail the character of virtuous action, so that we shall be better able to obtain our aim."

[2] "Agathon and Eudaimonia in the Ethics of Aristotle," in Aristotle, ed by J. M. E. Moravcsik (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1967), pp. 261-296.

[3] See Frederick Siegler, "Reason, Happiness, and Goodness," in Aristotle's Ethics, ed. by J. J. Walsh and H. L. Shapiro (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1967), pp. 30-46.

important part in the Thomistic natural law tradition, a tradition which
we will therefore consider in this context. Jacques Maritain, a promi-
nent representative of this tradition, sets forth what he considers to
be the ontological basis of natural law as follows: Although man, being
intelligent beings, can choose their own ends they also have such a
thing as human nature which is the same for all men and which is an
"ontologic structure which is a locus of intelligible necessities"
such that

> man possesses ends which necessarily correspond to his essential
> constitution and which are the same for all--as pianos, for in-
> stance, whatever their particular type and in whatever spot they
> may be, have as their end the production of certain attuned
> sounds. If they do not produce these sounds they must be tuned,
> or discarded as worthless. But since man is endowed with intel-
> ligence and determines his own ends, it is up to him to put him-
> self in tune with the ends necessarily demanded by his nature.
> . . . Any kind of thing existing in nature, a plant, a dog, a
> horse, has its own natural law, that is, the normality of its
> functioning, the proper way in which, by reason of its specific
> ends, it "should" achieve fulness of being either in its growth
> or in its behavior.[1]

Contemporary analytic philosophers generally regard this whole line of
argument as absurd. Most would not think of questioning the assertion
that Hardie makes in his discussion of Aristotle's ethics that "the
notion of function cannot be defended and should not be stressed, since
a man is not designed for a purpose."[2] But in the context of Christian
thought, as opposed to Aristotelian thought, it is precisely the case
that man is indeed designed for a purpose, so why should one not speak
of his function? Serious problems still remain, however. The first of

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[1] *Man and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951),
pp. 86-87; used by permission of the University of Chicago Press.

[2] "The Final Good in Aristotle's *Ethics*," p. 279; see also Kai
Nielsen, "The Myth of Natural Law," in *Law and Philosophy*, ed. Sidney
Hook (New York: New York University Press, 1964), pp. 122-143.

these is an epistemological problem. How does one know what is or is not contrary to the structure of human nature? The second is whether this form of argument does not commit the "naturalistic fallacy" in a most blatant form.

Concerning the epistemological question St. Thomas writes:

All those things to which man has a natural inclination are naturally apprehended by reason as being good, and consequently as objects of pursuit, and their contraries as evil, and objects of avoidance. Therefore, the order of the precepts of the natural law is according to the order of natural inclinations.[1]

This suggestion has been developed in various ways. Conservative natural law theorists have also appealed to Aquinas' earlier remarks in his Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard where he says that a particular action is wrong if it is performed in a way or under circumstances that make it unsuitable to the primary ends which nature "intends to obtain" by acts of that kind. Here we have moved from talking about the function or ends of human nature which are related to the structure of human nature as it was created according to the Divine purpose to talking about the teleological function of actions. In addition to the conceptual confusion that seems to be present, there is the problem of deciding what are the primary and secondary ends of human activity, or of even knowing if such a distinction makes any sense. The absurdity of the conclusions that have been reached by this method, for example, those concerning birth control, and the suspicion that all sorts of strange and mutually exclusive conclusions could be argued for by this means, emkes this

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[1] Summa Theologica, I, II, Question XCIV, Article 2, translated by Anton C. Pegis in Introduction to Saint Thomas Aquinas, ed. Pegis (New York: Random House, 1948), p. 637.

approach highly suspect to say the least, and in fact Aquinas himself
abandoned this sort of argument in his more mature works.  In the Summa
Theologica Thomas does not refer to the purpose of particular actions,
but rather to the tendencies or inclinations of human nature in a much
broader sense, e.g., the inclinations toward self-preservation, sexual
intercourse, the education of offspring, seeking the truth about God,
and living in society.  Beginning from the last of these he argues for
rules having to do with living with one's fellow men in a way hardly
different from Toulmin's view that we have a good reason to act in a
particular way if it leads to social harmony.  Maritain puts this matter
of knowledge through the inclinations of human nature in this way:

> When he /Thomas/ says that human reason discovers the regulations
> of natural law through the guidance of the inclinations of human
> nature, he means that the very mode or manner in which human
> reason knows natural law is not rational knowledge, but knowledge
> through inclination.  That kind of knowledge is not clear know-
> ledge through concepts and conceptual judgments; it is obscure,
> unsystematic, vital knowledge by connaturality or congeniality,
> in which the intellect, in order to bear judgment, consults and
> listens to the inner melody that the vibratingstrings of abiding
> tendencies make present in the subject.[1]

As a method, apart from claims concerning what it is that is known by
means of the method, this seems to have something in common with the
approaches of Brandt and Morton White.  There are problems for this
natural law approach, however.  John Courtney Murray says that the dic-
tates of natural law are based on those inclinations that reason recog-
nizes as authentically human.[2]  But cannot it be argued that reason is

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[1] Man and the State, pp. 91-92.

[2] We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American
Proposition (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960), p. 330.

going to recognize as authentically human those inclinations which it
has been taught to recognize as authentically human by some particular
culture or tradition?  Perhaps the natural law theorists should say more
about how attitudes and inclinations are to be qualified or discounted
as Brandt, for example, does.  Occasionally, however, they may go fur-
ther in trying to protect against a parochial or prejudiced view by
maintaining, as David Little does in his discussion of Calvin's concept
of natural law, that

> anyone, including a Christian, who sets out to develop a natural
> law theory would have to show . . . that it is possible to estab-
> lish a set of empirical generalizations about human nature that
> is constant, both spatially (cross-culturally) and temporally
> (historically).[1]

Little believes that Calvin did seek to do this and he tries to do it
himself.  Maritain also makes some remarks which suggest that he also
believes that this is both necessary and possible.[2]  Of course such a
method could not be infallible for it cannot take into consideration
future societies in its empirical generalizations.

A second major problem still remains.  Suppose it is the case
that human nature does have a certain structure.  How do we infer any-
thing about how men ought to act from this.  It may be claimed that we
can argue from the structure of human nature, whether we know about it
through the methods of the natural law theorists or in some other way
(e.g., revelation), to the purpose for which man was created and by

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[1] "Calvin and the Prospects for a Christian Theory of Natural
Law," in Gene H. Outka and Paul Ramsey, eds., _Norm and Context in Chris-
tian Ethics_ (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), p. 176.  Used by
permission of Charles Scribner's Sons.

[2] _Man and the State_, pp. 93-94.

which he ought, therefore, according to this view, to be evaluated. "Man ought to act as he was intended or created to act."[1] But the "is-ought" problem raised by Hume still remains. Why ought man to act as he was created to act? Suppose human nature is structured in the light of the divine purpose for which man was created; suppose man does have an end and a function in this sense. Why should he adopt this end as his own conscious end? Why should he accept this function as his own? One answer given by people who take this sort of approach is that to act contrary to one's nature is to act in a way that is destructive of one's happiness and welfare. Hick appealing to Aristotle, writes;

> Happiness is thus relative to structure, being the fulfillemnt of a thing's nature, whatever that nature and its fulfillment may be. The happiness of a human being must accordingly consist in his fulfillment of the potentialities of specifically human nature.[2]

This is not altogether clear, since it is not completely clear what is meant by 'consists'. Is the relationship between the fulfillment of the potentialities of human nature and happiness a causal one or a logical one? However Hick intends this it seems that the connection between happiness and human nature can be stated in such a way that it is plausible to argue that one has a good reason not to act contrary to the telos in the light of which human nature is structured, if it is structured to fulfill any purpose, or not to act contrary to what may just happen to be the structures of human nature apart from any purpose. If human nature is such that the effort to achieve certain primary ends in our lives, or to make certain ends dominant, will always eventually be

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[1] Little, p. 195.

[2] Faith and Knowledge, p. 256.

frustrated, or, if not frustrated, discovered in tetrospect to be un-
rewarding or self-destructive, and the effort to achieve other ends
leads to the realization of inherent potentialities and attendent satis-
factions, then, however we would wish to define 'happiness', human
nature, or the telos or function for which human nature is created or
structured, has very much to do with achieving happiness. If a course
of action's bringing happiness or satisfaction is always a good reason
for living in a particular way, then the way in which human nature is
structured has a great deal to do with the way in which we ought to
live. So whether we infer that something is in accord with human
nature according to the methods of the natural law theorists, or
whether we infer it from what we take to be the paradigm case of un-
distorted authentic human nature (as a Christian might regard Jesus),
or whether we infer it from what we regard to be the revelation of the
will of God for which man was created, we have a good reason to live
in one way rather than in another if in fact human nature is as we
understand it to be. In the third case we also have a good reason to
do what God wills.

At this point Hick would object to our conclusion as failing to
take something important into consideration. He here gives the Aris-
totelian eudaimonistic approach a somewhat different twist as he writes
as follows:

> The only addition which should perhaps be made to Aristotle's
> definition is an enlargement of its scope. Happiness consists
> in the fulfillment of a conscious being's nature provided that
> such fulfillment turns out to be in harmony with the determining
> realities of its total environment. If the structure of human
> nature were fundamentally in conflict with the wider structure
> of the universe in which our life is set, the fulfillment of

the human _telos_ would not constitute man's ultimate well-being
or happiness, but on the contrary his ultimate ill-being and
frustration. . . . If, for example, the development and exercise
of love is one aspect of the perfection of our nature, and if it
should prove that the character of the universe is radically in-
hospitable to love, then to achieve man's _telos_ would not be to
achieve happiness.[1]

How Christian faith affects the way men live  then, according to Hick, is

not by laws and censures, but by first giving them, in the example of

Jesus Christ, a vision of the fulfillment of the potentialities which are

inherent in the structure of human nature, and secondly, by giving them

a vision of the universe as created and ruled by God in such a way that

the divine purpose for man will not be frustrated. Now we can see what

Hick means when he writes that:

In an important sense then Jesus does not propose any new motive
for action. He does not set up a new end to be sought, or pro-
vide a new impulse to seek an already familiar end. Instead he
offers a new vision, or mode of apperception, of the world.[2]

So he concludes:

In the costing struggle against evil, as in passing through
life's green pastures and beside its still waters, living in
the way which Jesus describes is a natural outcome of seeing
the universe as he depicts it.[3] . . . Faith inevitably ex-
presses itself in works, because all men live in the world as
they see and experience it; and religious faith is seeing and
experiencing the world as being under the ultimate control of
sovereign personal love.[4]

Concerning the matter of the two levels of morality Hick could say that

while they are both important for the attainment of happiness, the lower

level has to do with that which can be seen to be so in the light of any-

perceptive person's view of human nature and reality, and the specifi-

cally Christian level is that which can be seen to lead to happiness

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[1] _Faith and Logic,_ p. 257.

[2] _Ibid.,_ p. 243.

[3] _Ibid.,_ p. 261.

[4] _Ibid.,_ p. 263.

only in the light of a Christian understanding of man and the universe.

According to Hick's position happiness is the dominant primary end of human action. We have considered one alternative position to this, namely that which regards happiness as not being a primary end at all and therefore not the dominant primary end. Another alternative is to regard happiness as a primary end, but not as the dominant primary end. According to this point of view it would make sense to say that although we know that a certain course of action is the one that will bring the most happiness we may still have good reasons not to choose it. A writer who passionately asserts such a thesis is Nicholas Berdyaev. He writes:

> Happiness is not the supreme value. Tragic moral conflicts show
> the falsity of psychological and ethical theories which take hap-
> piness to be the aim of life. The idea that happiness is the
> supreme good and the final end has been instilled into man in
> order to keep him in slavery. Human freedom and dignity forbid
> us to regard happiness and satisfaction in this light. There
> is an irreconcilable conflict between freedom and happiness.
> This is the theme of Dostoevsky's "Legend of the Grand Inquisi-
> tor." I agree to suffer and to be unhappy for the sake of re-
> maining a free being. The ethics of law promises happiness as a
> result of fulfilling the law. "Do what I tell you and you shall
> be happy." But the ethics of grace—of grace legalistically mis-
> interpreted—also promises happiness. Roman Catholic theology is
> particularly inclined to hedonism. The Thomists still hold psy-
> chological theories according to which man always strives for
> bliss and happiness. But modern psychology, following the work
> of Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard, has completely disproved
> that rationalistic doctrine. Man is a free, spiritual and cre-
> ative being, and prefers the free creation of spiritual values
> to happiness. At the same time man is a sick being divided in
> himself and influenced by a dark subconscious. Consequently he
> does not necessarily strive for happiness and satisfaction. No
> law can make him into a creature that prefers happiness to free-
> dom, rest and satisfaction to creativeness. For this reason
> alone human life cannot be entirely subject to law. As to grace,
> it only gives us moments of joy and bliss.[1]

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[1] The Destiny of Man, p. 102.

Berdyaev seems to be attacking both the belief that happiness is what men ought to seek, and the belief that happiness is what men necessarily do seek. He connects such views with legalistic ethics. Hick, however, wishes to be anti-legalistic, and on the other hand, there certainly are legalistic points of view that are not hedonistic or eudaimonistic. We are not concerned with evaluating everything Berdyaev says in this quotation, but only with the claim that men do not necessarily seek happiness and satisfaction, either because they sometimes out of the sickness of their minds choose what they know will be destructive of their own happiness, or because they are able to choose, and sometimes do choose, some other positive value, such as freedom, even when such a choice means a sacrifice of happiness. Such a claim certainly seems plausible, especially in the case of choosing what is self-destructive. Do not people sometimes seek to carry out vengance, or to pursue the object of unrequited love, even though they are perfectly aware that what they are doing is destructive of their own welfare or happiness? Why may they not also choose at times to reject the way that leads to their own happiness for some other positive value? We might say that some people are irrational and that all that Hick needs to assert for his argument to be plausible is that men, when they act rationally, act according to their strong tendency to seek their own happiness or welfare, not that they always in fact must act according to that tendency. But would it not be begging the question to reply in this way which in effect makes choosing happiness or well being over all other ends a necessary condition for rationality? Without begging the question how could one substantiate the claim that the rational person always chooses happiness even over that which leads to some other end which he regards as a value?

Some people might wish to argue that since failing to attain some
other end brings a person unhappiness, a person never acts for any ulti-
mate end other than happiness, for when he disregards what seems to be a
source of happiness for his other end he is doing so to avoid the unhap-
piness which not achieving what he desires brings. This argument, however,
is of the same sort as and is just as implausible as the one that asserts
that people always act as egoists because when it appears that they are
acting disinterestedly they are still acting for the sake of the satis-
faction that they get out of being benevolent. In fact, however, they
could only achieve satisfaction because they first had some other end,
and likewise, the person who is made unhappy by failing to achieve some
end could only have been made unhappy because he had this other and inde-
pendent end.[1] Another sort of argument that has been raised against the
view that happiness is a man's sole and final end is that which asks
whether a person would be able to choose between two proposed states of
affairs if he could be assured that he would be equally happy with
either choice. Would it not be the case that a person in such a situ-
ation would have other criteria by which to make such a choice? In ad-
dition to these arguments against the view that happiness is the dominant
end for all men, there are the arguments, also used against Geach's
position, that morality has to do, at least in part, with that which
cannot be justified by any direct or oblique reference to any ends which
we might have at all. The correctness of any or all of these arguments

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[1] Cf. Joseph Butler, Fifteen Sermons upon Human Nature (London,
1726; 2 nd ed., 1729), especially sermons I and XI; C. D. Broad, "Egoism
as a Theory of Human Motives," Hibbert Journal, XLVIII (1949-1950), 105-
114.

against the presuppositions of Hick's position does not demonstrate that the happiness or misery that results for us from any particular action does not provide us with a very good reason to do or to refrain from doing something. It simply supports the claim that there may be cases in which, in the light of other facts, men regard that reason as not good enough, that is, as being overriden. Hick's account of the relationship of faith and ethics may still, therefore, have a considerable amount of validity.

Depending on what sort of theology a believer accepts there still may be theological grounds on which to reject Hick's way of grounding Christian ethics in theology. Karl Barth considers a position which has similarities to this one. "It might be said," he writes, "that God is simply the all-sufficient being 'whom I have selected as my supreme good.'"[1] He sees such a position in this way:

> Since, objectively (and even at times subjectively), God alone can suffice man, is not the claim of God really based on man? Man must obey God because without Him, except in obedience to Him, he cannot live?[2]

Hick, of course, plays down the role of obedience and thus of God's "claim," but for him also the way of life which the Christian faith teaches is to be followed because in the light of a certain understanding of human nature and of the nature of reality it is seen as that which brings satisfaction rather than misery, and so Barth's objection would be similar:

> For if the relationship between God and man finally consists in the fact that God is the One who gives man satisfaction, . . . then in this relationship there can be a divine claim

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[1] _Dogmatics_, II, II, p. 555.    [2] _Ibid._

only in the setting and on the basis of the claim which man has
first made on the God whom he has chosen. Every divine claim
is ultimately only a confirmation, a condition, of the fulfil-
ment of this human claim. It has the character only of an in-
vitation. It is certainly not a claim which is grounded in
itself. We hold to God because and to the extent that finally
we want to uphold ourselves.[1]

What is objectionable about this consequence? Can a man be morally con-

demned for not being wise enough about the means to his own happiness

or for being badly informed about the nature of the reality in which

he lives? Is moral error a matter of error either in the knowledge

that must be used in prudential reasoning, or in that reasoning itself?

These questions present problems for any eudaimonistic ethic, but they

become even more serious for a Christian ethic. According to most

Christian theology, the evil that men do involves sin against God.

But if the foundation of Christian ethics does not involve the acknow-

ledgment of God's claim on man how can it be said that man sins against

God? Man may be misguided and may sin against himself, but it would

not seem that he sins against God. It would seem, therefore, that

from the point of view of most varieties of Christian theology, Hick's

understanding of the relationship between faith and ethics is not in

itself adequate.


E. The Vindication of a Way of Life

We have claimed that the results a person obtains when he uses

the qualified attitude method or something similar depend on what sort of

general principles he begins with, or, to put it another way, with what

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[1] Barth, Dogmatics, II, II, pp. 555-556.

is at the center of his Quinean field of beliefs. The most central beliefs are ones which express the way of life to which a person is committed, or the ideal of which he has caught a vision. We have also indicated that Paul Taylor spoke of vindicating the adoption of a set of value systems in terms of how they contributed to a way of life. This, however, also left us with the question of how the adoption of a way of life could be justified, and what it would mean for it to be justified. We have just considered the possibility that the adoption of a way of life could be justified in terms of how it in turn contributed to the attainment of what, because of the structure of human nature, must be the dominant and ultimate end of human action. We were faced, however, with strong doubts as to whether human nature is a "given" with such a determinate structure that there is any one such end, or that happiness can be understood to be such an end. So it seems that after we press justification in terms of ends so far we can go no further. If we are to avoid ultimate relativism we must, therefore, try a different approach. At this point Paul Taylor turns from justification in terms of the ends for which something is chosen to justification in terms of the method of choosing.[1] The way of life which is justified is the way of life which is, or which would be, chosen when one chooses in a rational manner.

What does Taylor understand a rational choice of a way of life to be? A rational choice of a way of life is one that is free, enlightened, and impartial. A choice is free if it is not determined by

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[1] _Normative Discourse_, ch. 6.

unconscious motives nor by internal or external constraint, but rather
it must be decisively determined by the person's own preference. This
preference, however, must also be enlightened and impartial. In order
for it to be enlightened it must be made by one who knows the nature
of each of the alternative ways of life, the probable effects of living
according to each of them, and the means necessary to bring about each
way of life. To meet these conditions a person must have intellectual
knowledge, imaginative knowledge, and practical knowledge. In order
for the choice to be impartial it must not be determined at all by con-
cern for special privileges or by emotional prejudices. In order to
guarantee the meeting of this condition it is stipulated that a person
making such a choice would not know what position he would have within
the way of life if it were to be realized and if the ways of life being
decided upon were ways of life of societies having different positions
within them. This in fact is the way Taylor seems to understand a way
of life, but the idea of a rational choice would seem to be equally
applicable to an individual's choosing which way to live within a
society that is already present. In whatever context it is understood,
Taylor's concept of rational choice is set up as an ideal which can only
be approximated in life. As he elaborates on the conditions, however,
the ideal becomes something which the individual can hardly even try
to approximate. This is especially true with respect to the final
guarantee of impartiality which specifies that the individual must
choose between ways of life other than the one in which he was brought
up. The only way, then, that he could decide that way of life A was
to be preferred, if he himself had been brought up in way of life A,
would be to discover that other people attempting to make a rational

choice of a way of life, who had not been brought up in way of life A,
had in fact decided in favor of A. So to fulfill the criteria of making
a rational choice one would have to have the co-operation of a great
many people with many different backgrounds. So as Taylor admits:

> It will always be impossible _in practice_ to know with certainty
> which way of life is more justified than any other, since the
> conditions of an ideal rational choice are such that it is
> difficult even to approximate them. But it is _theoretically_
> possible to do so, and therefore _meaningful_ to speak of a
> rationally chosen way of life.[1]

I do not believe that Taylor is quite correct, however, about a
rationally chosen way of life, as he understands it, being a justified
way of life, for it may be the case that there are aspects of reality
which should be taken into consideration in deciding on a way of life
which are not the object of scientific discovery. We cannot rule out
taking into consideration the sort of beliefs about reality which Hick
rightly pointed out as being important, beliefs about the course of human
history and the wider structure of reality as a whole within which our
lives are set. If in the light of what seemed to be enlightened beliefs
one fulfilled the requirements for making a rational choice of a way of
life, but in retrospect it turned out that the beliefs were mistaken
and the choice was far different from what it would have been if bhe's
beliefs about reality had been correct, then in spite of the fact that
the way of life seemed to be rationally chosen we would still want to
say that it was the wrong choice. If what in fact turned out to be
true about such matters could make a vital difference to what way of life
we would in retrospect regard as justified if we were ever to be in a

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[1] _Normative Discourse_, p. 174.

position to make that sort of judgment about such matters, then it would seem to be true that the metaphysical and religious beliefs we now hold are of crucial importance to the way of life we at present believe to be justified. To see how this is the case we can take note of a plausible principle of "just-war theory" which states that "a just war may be conducted only by military means that promise a reasonable attainement of the moral and political objectives being sought."[1] In other words, how much one risks to attain a certain end, or has the right to ask others to risk to attain that end, depends in part on the probability of achieving that end. If a Marxist revolution is inevitable, or if God will certainly achieve certain purposes, then one ought not to expend a great deal of energy or cause a great deal of suffering in the effort to achieve ends which cannot be achieved because they are incompatible with those whose realization the nature of reality makes inevitable.[2] The justified way of life would not be the one rationally chosen according to Taylor's description, but the one which would have been rationally chosen by a person all of whose relevant beliefs were true, even if their truth could not have been ascertained at the time by ordinary means. Since we do not know whose beliefs are all true we cannot define the justified way of life as one that is actually chosen in a particular way. We might say something like this: The justified way of life is one that an informed and enlightened person would approve if he could look back in an impartial manner at the life of a person who chose that way

[1] Edward LeRoy Long, Jr., War and Conscience in America (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), p. 28.

[2] Cf. J. W. N. Watkins, "Epistemology and Politics," Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 1967-1968., pp. 79-102.

of life, where the person who approves it is looking back from the perspective of the time when all the causes that that person lived for, or chose not to live for, had reached their ultimate fruition. If the Christian's beliefs are true that time would be the advent of the Kingdom of God.

According to this view it makes a great deal of difference what religious or metaphysical beliefs one has for what way of life he ought (in the subjective sense of obligation) to adopt. If these are beliefs about God, and if the person believes that all of God's commands are related to his overall purpose and that God knows what he is doing, then it is not necessary that the person decide for himself that particular commands of God are better than all possible alternatives, any more than a soldier who is fighting for a just cause need decide whether each particular command he receives is the best one possible, as long as such a command is not actually evil or immoral. Neither does a soldier, or anyone else who is involved in some co-operative effort for some worthy goal, have to presume to decide whether it is the best of all possible goals. If it is a goal exclusive of other goals he need only decide that it is the best that has a possibility of being realized. If a Christian or Marxist conception of human history or the nature and destiny of the individual is true, so that there is only one goal that has a possibility of being realized, then one's options about many matters are reduced to two, to judge that what will be realized is good and to co-operate, or to judge that it is evil and to resist. If God has a purpose in human history and that purpose is in some sense good rather than evil then the way of life which would be vindicated in

retrospect would be one that acquiesced in what God was doing and recog-
nized an obligation to co-operate with God's purpose. But this is in
fact what most Christians believe about God.

IV.  WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SAY THAT GOD'S WILL IS GOOD?


A.  Karl Barth's Theological Account of God's Claim on Man


We have shown that beliefs about the existence and nature of
God do in fact give us, under appropriate circumstances, good reasons
to live differently and to make moral judgments differently than we
would have otherwise, so that in fact religious belief can make a
great deal of difference for ethics.  We have also argued that given
the belief that God is good, or that His purpose is good, and the
belief that His commands are intimately connected with His purpose, it
is plausible to claim that we have an obligation to God, and this is
certainly something which most Christians would also wish to say.  We
need to ask whether allowing our obligation to God to be dependent on
a belief in the goodness of God is acceptable to Christian theology.
We have taken note of Barth's criticism of some of the positions that
can be taken as offering answers to the question he poses:

> Why has God a title to man, and therefore a claim on him?  What
> is the source of His power over him?  Why has man to obey Him?
> Why God, and not any other authority?[1]

Barth writes that although there are many answers to the question of
the good, the question of what man should do, an answer which is really
to be effective, which will convince men, must be one which has such a
solid basis that it will not be possible for men to  take up an atti-
tude of reserve towards it, by in some way defeating its claim.  Many
ethical systems point to God in some way, Barth writes, but if God is

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[1] Dogmatics, II, II, p. 552.

to be the basis of the ethical claim then God must be shown to have

authority over man and therefore the right to claim him for Himself.

The power of God, the essential goodness of God, or the ability of God

to satisfy us, to which the various positions which Barth criticizes and

rejects refer, do not provide this firm basis because these features do

not characterize God as the God in whom we may believe, by which Barth

means the God in whom we can have faith or trust or confidence. Faith,

according to Barth, has as its object what God does and is to be under-

stood in this way:

> The essence of faith is simply to accept as right what God does,
> to do everything and all things on the presupposition that God's
> action is accepted as right.[1]

> We might perhaps substitute for "accept as right" some such
> phrase as "acquiesce in" or "respect" or "allow to stand" or
> "adhere to." . . . "To accept God's action as right" is to love
> God in His action, to love Him with all our heart and soul and
> strength.[2]

This poses several questions. We can begin with this: What is

it that God does that we can accept as right and acquiesce in? Barth's

answer is that what God does is what He does in the life, death, and

resurrection of Christ.

> God has given us Himself. He is not only mighty over us. He
> is not only the essentially good. He is not only our complete
> satisfaction. He has given Himself to us. He has graciously
> turned to us. He has made Himself ours. With His divine good-
> ness He has taken our place and taken up our cause. He is for
> us in all His deity. Although He could be without us--He did
> not and does not will to be without us. Although He has every
> right to be against us--He did not and does not will to be
> against us. This is the God in whom we may believe.[3]

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[1] Dogmatics, II, II, p. 583.  [2] Ibid., pp. 579-580.

[3] Ibid., p. 557.

Of course it would take an extensive exposition of Barth's theology to develop what he has to say here satisfactorily, but it does not seem that we need to understand or to agree with the particular nuances of his understanding of God's reconciling or saving work in Christ for our present purpose. We need only to take into consideration the common Christian conviction that God's purpose is for the wholeness, salvation, and welfare of men, and that it is revealed and in some way or to some extent achieved in a gracious and self-giving action involving the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

> And it is from the fact that He is this God that there derives the superiority and authority, basis and justice of His claim, the validity of His command, the vanity of all other commands, the freedom in which we are bound to Him, to His command, the absolutely distinctive imperative of obedience to His will.[1]

Questions can be raised about Barth's meaning. Do we acquiesce in or accept as right what God does simply because it is done out of love and for our benefit, or because it really is right or good, or is benevolence the only criterion of goodness so that these are not two alternatives? Barth does want to say that God has a claim on us because of His goodness.

> The goodness of human action consists in the goodness with which God acts toward man. But God deals with man through His Word. Therefore man does good in so far as he hears the Word of God and acts as a hearer of this Word. In this action as a hearer he is obedient. Why is obedience good? . . . It is good because the divine address is good, because God Himself is good.[2]

Certainly the fact that God's action is motivated by love and intends our benefit or welfare gives us a reason to recognize it as good and to

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[1] Barth, _Dogmatics_, II, II, p. 557.    [2] _Ibid._, p. 546.

regard God as good, and perhaps therefore also to obey Him, but there
may also be other criteria which could override these which either
God's intention or His action fail to meet. James F. Ross in effect
gives us an analysis of 'God is good' when he writes, "It would appear
that the actions of a morally perfect being should be such that no one
who fully grasps the circumstances can reasonably disapprove of them."[1]
Perhaps there are other grounds on which someone could disapprove of
God's action. Barth in fact does have a section in the volume of his
Dogmatics with which we have been dealing called "The Goodness of the
Divine Decision" in which he sets forth three aspects of the content
of the Divine action which in effect become three criteria of goodness.
He writes, "We understand by goodness the sum of all that is right and
friendly and wholesome: the three taken together."[2] We shall try to see
what he means by these.

Concerning the first of these three factors Barth writes that
"God establishes the right, doing what is appropriate and creating order,
by making a decision about man in His command." This, along with much
else in this section on the goodness of the divine decision, is not par-
ticularly clear, but other statements indicate that what he is getting
at is that God's commands are not arbitrary. Although in some sense
God's commands are manifold and appropriate to particular circumstances,
there is also a universal element, a consistency with His primal deci-
sion, His total purpose.

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[1] Philosophical Theology (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-
Merrill Co., Inc., 1969), p. 230.

[2] Barth, Dogmatics, II, II, p. 708.

He wills what He wills and demands what He demands in the
process of realizing His eternal counsel formed in Jesus Christ.
He wills and demands it in the sequence of His acts, which form
the history and its sequel of His covenant of grace. . . .
Because /His decision/ is the decision of His goodness, it is
not disorderly nor does it operate chaotically, but it estab-
lishes and creates fellowship: fellowship as the inner con-
nection of all that God wills and requires yesterday, today,
and tomorrow, from this or that man, in this or that situation;
. . .[1]

In the last section  of the preceding chapter we argued that the goodness

of God and His purpose in general could only put us under an obligation

to obey specific commands if they were rationally connected with that

purpose.  Barth seems to be recognizing the same point only he is

putting it this way: we have an obligation to God only if His purpose

is good and it is only good if His particular commands are rationally

integrated as part of that overall purpose.  This of course, does not

mean that he thinks that men are in the position to decide whether or

not these individual commands are rationally connected with His overall

purpose.  But Barth does include this condition among the aspects of

the goodness of God's primal decision or intention and of the carrying

out of it.   In other words we have an obligation to obey God's com-

mands only if they are rational, that is, if God "not only wills but

knows what He wills" and "why and wherefore He wills it,"[2] for only if

this is the case is God the One in whom we can believe or have con-

fidence, and so the one whose action we can accept as right and ac-

quiesce in.   This is true not only concerning the relationship of

God's individual commands to His purpose and action, but concerning

His merciful action itself.  In discussing the divine wisdom in the

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[1] Barth, Dogmatics, II, II, p. 711.   [2] Ibid., II, I, p. 423.

section on the attributes of God Barth clearly recognizes that it is

not enough to say that God is gracious and acts for our benefit. That

is not enough to give us reason to treat His action as right and to

trust in Him.

> The freedom in which we see God manifest these perfections and
> give Himself still bears some resemblance to chance or accident.
> Why is it that God is gracious and merciful? . . . For if God
> is for us an abyss of chance and caprice, if as far as possible
> we regard the irrational as the essentially divine, we neither
> have nor can have any real confidence in relation to God. For
> confidence is based on the appreciation of reason, meaning and
> order. So long as we do not have this, the knowledge of God
> cannot give us any freedom . For freedom comes only from the
> recognition of reason, meaning and order, and not from the
> consideration of chaos, chance or caprice.[1]

But we can have confidence in God because of His wisdom.

> God is not guilty of impulsiveness or irrationality when He is
> gracious and merciful, any more than He is of a surrender of His
> holiness and righteousness. He is not, then, overcome by a
> whim or a chance inspiration. He is not capricious. . . . We
> can only say once again that it all depends absolutely on how
> far we recognise God as wisdom. God is wise in so far as His
> whole activity, as willed by Him, is also thought out by Him,
> and thought out by Him from the very outset with correctness and
> completeness, so that it is an intelligent and to that extent a
> reliable and liberating activity. We have to say of His activ-
> ity in His works and also of His inner activity, of the essen-
> tial actuality of His divine being, that God is wise, that in
> Him is wisdom.[2]

This emphasis on the order, unity, and wisdom of the divine purpose and

action also answers the question of why it is enough to accept as right

or acquiesce in what God does in one particular place, that is, in

Christ. Barth's whole theology might be seen as an attempt to prevent

this question from arising for his theology is largely characterized by

its emphasis on the claim that God's whole nature and intention is what

is revealed in Christ, that there is no different God hidden behind the

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[1] _Dogmatics_, II, I, pp. 424-425.   [2] _Ibid._, pp. 425-426.

revelation in Christ who may have some other purpose, perhaps a purpose antecedent to His saving purpose in Christ for which the latter may only be a secondary rescue operation.[1]

The second aspect of God's goodness is the "friendliness of the divine decision." Here Barth seems to be saying two things. The first of these is that in what He does God is moved "by His friendliness and goodwill to men."[2] Here again we can return to what was said in the section on the attributes or perfections of God, in this case to what Barth had to say about the divine grace.

> When God loves, revealing His inmost being in the fact that He loves and therefore seeks and creates fellowship, this being and doing is divine and distinct from all other loving to the extent that the love of God is grace. Grace is the distinctive mode of God's being in so far as it seeks and creates fellowship by its own free inclination and favour, unconditioned by any merit or claim in the beloved, but also unhindered by any unworthiness or opposition in the latter--able, on the contrary, to overcome all unworthiness and opposition. It is in this distinctive characteristic that we recognise the divinity of God's love.[3]

But now the emphasis is not so much on the fact that God's purpose creates fellowship between men and God as it is on the claim that it reconciles men to each other and creates fellowship between them.

> It is never the fault of the command, but only of its hearers, if men think that there is no further place for right and friendliness and wholesomeness in their mutual relations and that they should engage in mutual conflict. . . . To hear and obey the command of God is always to be on the way to fellowship. If we are not, if our feet are on the opposite path, there can be no doubt that--even under the most honourable

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[1] See Robert W. Jensen, _Alpha and Omega: A Study in the Theology of Karl Barth_ (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1963), passim, esp., p. 69, and John Dillenberger, _God, Hidden and Revealed_ (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1953), pp. 117-143.

[2] _Dogmatics_, II, II, p. 709.

[3] _Ibid._, II, I, p. 353.

title--we are in conflict and contradiction with the command.
. . . For it is always required of us that we ourselves
should be good in correspondence with the goodness of God.[1]

There is of course all sorts of Biblical evidence that can be cited

for this point of view. According to Ephesians 1:9-10, to which we

have already referred, God's purpose, previously kept secret but now

revealed, is to unite all things in Himself. This purpose becomes the

key to understanding the proper attitudes and relationships between

Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and Barbarians, etc., as these are discussed

in Ephesians, Colossians, and Galatians. In the light of this purpose

"there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there

is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus."[2] So

also Colossians 3:4 says, "And above all put on love, which binds every-

thing together in perfect harmony." The relevant passages are numerous.

The third aspect of the goodness of God's command is its "whole-

someness," that is, its being for the individual's welfare. In the

section on the divine attributes Barth deals with the mercy of God.

The mercy of God is the love of God seen in its character of being di-

rected toward one who is in distress. "The mercy of God lies in His

readiness to share in sympathy the distress of another, a readiness

which springs from His inmost nature and stamps all His being and doing."[3]

But God's love toward and sympathy with the creature who is in distress

would be of little value unless the creature's situation is actually

changed. The "wholesomeness" of the divine purpose and command is that

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[1] Barth, Dogmatics, II, II, p. 717.    [2] Galatians 4:28.

[3] Barth, Dogmatics, II, I, p. 369.

it not only intends but also achieves man's welfare. Barth writes in

his introduction to the section on the goodness of the divine decision:

"What He purooses and effects is man's welfare, salvation, life, and

eternal joy in His presence."[1]  In the sub-section that explicitly deals

with the topic under consideration, that is, the third aspect of the

goodness of the divine decision, Barth sees the healing of man's dis-

tress orimarily in terms of man's being unified with himself, of his

being made whole.  He relates this to the previous topic.

> It is because man is not at one in himself thatwe are not at
> one with each other.  It is because inner consistency and con-
> tinuity are lacking in the life of the individual that there
> is no fellowship among men.  Yet the fault is not with God's
> command, but with man himself. . . [2]

Rather "because the command of God is good, it unifies each individual

man in himself."[3]  Barth also writes that because the divine decision

is good it establishes and creates fellowship in which he includes "fel-

lowship as the inner connexion binding into an integral whole the life of

each individual."[4]  Here and in other places where the importance of

God's love effecting man's welfare is insisted upon, Barth regards this

theological ethic as preserving what is true and imoortant in the vari-

ous sorts of eudaimonistic positions that we have to some extent discussed.

In conjunction with a discussion of eudaimonism Barth writes:

> Where the obligatory is to be understood as the content of the
> divine command, we cannot refuse absolutely to interpret it
> also as that which is supremely pleasing and useful and valu-
> able.[5]

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[1] Barth, Dogmatics, II, II, o. 709.  [2] Ibid., oo. 726-727.

[3] Ibid., o. 726.  [4] Ibid., o. 711.

[5] Ibid., o. 650.

Our own criticism of the eudaimonistic position in the light of the
affinity of moral concepts to other cluster and law cluster concepts,
with their multiplicity of criteria, was that the eudaimonistic criteria
were not the only criteria. After recognizing the validity of an eudai-
monistic element in ethics Barth writes:

> On the other hand, we have to admit that Kant has expressed the
> essential concern of Christian ethics by pointing out that of
> itself what is pleasing and useful and valuable does not give
> us the concept of what is obligatory.[1]

So for Barth, we do not obey God primarily because obedience leads to
happiness, but because in the light of God's goodness obedience is
right. But in fact we can only accept what God does as right and there-
fore obedience to His command as right because He is the God in whom we
can trust and have confidence. If His purpose or command were something
that ultimately leads to the frustration, disintegration, or misery of
the individual rather than to some sort of self-fulfillment then it
would not be possible to trust in or acquiesce in God's purpose and so
accept it as right and his command as right. So this eudaimonistic
element is necessary for Barth's ethic.

We quoted James Ross above as saying that to call a being morally
perfect is to say that no one who was fully informed could reasonably
disapprove of his actions. Barth could say that anyone who really un-
derstands the purpose of God as revealed in Jesus Christ could not rea-
sonably disapprove of anything He commands, at least in so far as it was
in accordance with that purpose. The goodness of the divine purpose
which could not be reasonably disapproved of has the three aspects which

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[1] Barth, _Dogmatics_, II, II, o. 650.

we have just discussed and which become criteria for judging whether human action is in agreement with the divine goodness. Barth does not want to allow men to be in the position of judging God and these three aspects of the divine goodness are not three criteria with which Barth begins and which he then uses to decide whether or not the divine purpose is good. Rather "the idea of God and His command are absolutely prior to the idea of the good. The good is a perfection predicated of God and His command."[1] It would seem that this could mean one of two things. It could mean that whatever God's purpose was we would have to recognize it as good and use its various aspects as criteria of goodness even if this purpose were very different from what it happens to be. But in fact we would have no reason to accept any such arbitrary definition of good and no reason to accept the will of God as normative. This interpretation also runs completely contrary to everything that Barth has said against God's power being the basis of His claim on us and everything he has said about God's claim being based on His goodness and His giving Himself to us in Christ. If Barth at this stage of his argument is to be interpreted in this way he would have to be regarded as utterly confused. The other thing that it could mean is that we do not have any adequate criteria to judge the goodness of God's purpose before becoming acquainted with it, but once it confronts us we recognize it as good and we recognize the various aspects of its goodness as the proper criteria for goodness. But if we recognize the aspects of God's purpose as the proper criteria for goodness it surely follows,

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[1] Barth, _Dogmatics_, II, II, p. 709.

whether Barth would have admitted it or not, that if God's purpose had been radically different it would not have been good and we would not have had reason to trust in God and to accept His purpose as good and His command as right. Barth might have replied that he was talking about this God who is revealed in Christ and no other, so that we cannot suppose that He would have been different. We can still put the hypothetical question this way: Suppose the almighty being with whose will we were confronted was not this God and indeed precluded the reality of this God, would that will provide us with the criteria of goodness? Although Barth might have reacted unfavorably to the consideration of such a hypothetical possibility, it is necessary to raise such questions for the sake of conceptual clarification. If Barth were to have replied to such a question he would certainly have had to answer "No" if he were to avoid inconsistencies and circular arguments.

So in spite of Barth's abhorrence of putting the matter in this way it must be admitted that in fact he gives hypothetical grounds for rejecting the purported commands of a deity. A fully informed person could disapprove of the actions of an almighty being if His commands did not make any sense or were not intelligibly integrated with some overall rational purpose, if His purpose and so also obedience to His command led to isolation, hostility, and conflict, rather than to reconciliation and fellowship between men, or if His purpose and obedience to His command led to the destruction or disintegration of the individual rather than to his wholeness and welfare. God would not then be the God in whom we can believe, that is, in whom we can trust and whose action we can "accept as right." Admitting this does not really

put the believer in the position of judging God and his commands (and

this is why we referred to "hypothetical grounds for rejecting the

purported commands of a deity"), for he is never in the position of a

fully informed person, although of course at some time he must recognize

the goodness of the divine purpose or else he would not be a believer.

Barth recognizes that it is often where God and His command are most

talked about that there is the least harmony and fellowship among men,

and sometimes the most neurosis.

> Yet the fault is not with God's command, but with man himself,
> not with his obedience but with his disobedience to the command--
> if he cannot be at harmony with himself and others. In Rom.
> 7:7f., Paul has described how the real work of sin consists in
> misinterpreting and misapplying the divine command. Sinful man
> makes of the command a pretext for trying to justify and sanc-
> tify himself, instead of allowing himself to be jus tified and
> sanctified by the command.[1]

Since in any given case we can always attribute what may appear to be

the failure of God's command to produce results that conform to the

criteria for goodness to the self-justifying and self-righteous misuse

of the command, or the failure to receive it at all, the ultimate veri-

fication of God's goodness can only be eschatological. So although the

criteria do not, in any straightforward sense, enable men to test God's

goodness, they do give the assertion that God is good cognitive con-

tent and make it something other than simply an expression of one's

subjective preference or sentiments and something other than a vacuous

tautology. In one sense Barth has answered the question, "What do you

mean when you say that God's purpose and command are good?" He means

that they have these three aspects, or fulfil these three criteria.

But since he infers these criteria from what he takes to be the

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[1] Barth, _Dogmatics_, II, II, p. 727.

revelation of God's purpose and will we can still ask the question all over again either in the same form, "What do you mean when you say that God's purpose is good?" or in another form, "What do you mean when you say that these criteria are the right ones?" Perhaps we have some indication of an answer in James Ross's assertion that "It would appear that the actions of a morally perfect being should be such that no one who fully grasps the circumstances can reasonably disapprove of them."[1] We need to deal with this question more fully, however, and will do so in the next section. Another question is, "How does one come to believe, or justify believing, that God's purpose, or decision, or will, is good, that is, that they fulfill these criteria and that these criteria are the correct ones?" This is the question that will be dealt with in chapter V.

## B. What Do We Mean by 'God is Good'?

In chapter II we concluded that we could not give a definition of 'good' or 'right' as used in moral contexts--at least not one which itself embodied a substantive moral principle--because moral concepts with their multiplicity of criteria are similar to what Hilary Putnam refers to as cluster concepts and law-cluster concepts. There may be, however, other ways of carrying forward an analysis of moral langauge which will enable us to discover the "nature of the facts that we must suppose to exist in order to account for the way in which we think about /moral/ matters"[1] as we see that thinking reflected in moral

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[1] Philosophical Theology, p. 230.

[2] G. C. Field, "The Place of Definition in Ethics," pp. 101-102.

discourse. In fact we did carry forward this effort in the last section of chapter III which dealt with the vindication of a way of life. We are here interested in an analysis of the concept of moral goodness which will aid us in understanding what is meant by the assertion that God is good. We have seen that one theologian, Karl Barth, analyzes God's goodness in terms of various characteristics of God's action. We are then, however, faced with the question, "What do we mean when we say that these characteristics are those in which God's goodness consists, or that they supply the correct criteria for goodness?" which in effect means that we have to ask the question "What do we mean by 'God is good'?" all over again. Perhaps some suggestions of David Hume, often considered to be the arch-enemy of religion and the precurrsor of all emotivism and subjectivism in ethics, can aid us in carrying out the sort of analysis that will provide an answer to Field's question about what is implied or presupposed by our use of moral discourse.

Hume's moral philosophy has to do with two matters: (1) what things are regarded as good by men and why they are so regarded, and (2) what morality is, or what we are doing when we use moral language, or what the nature of the moral judgment is and what its relationship to our sentiment and our reason is. It is with the second question that we are concerned. In Part I of Book III of the Treatise Hume writes much that is congenial to contemporary emotivism and subjectivism, so that Antony Flew, for example, portrays him in this way:

> Hume's central insight was that moral judgments are not statements of either logically necessary truths or facts about the natural (or Supernatural) universe around us; and, hence, that "All morality depends upon our sentiments." . . .

Now if this is right, as surely it is, then Hume is to be regarded as the first parent of all those tough-minded and this-worldly moralists who are characterized by their opponents as, in an admittedly very broad sense, subjectivists . . . , such writers as F. P. Ramsey, Ayer, Stevenson, Hare, Nowell-Smith, Edwards, et hoc genus omne.

In progressing from the beginning to the end of Book III of his Treatise, however, Hume makes notable refinements in his view of the nature of moral discourse and its relationship to our sentiments, so that what he finally has to say can be seen as an expression of a very different point of view than one would likely get from reading only Section I of Part I, perhaps the only part that some contemporary philosophers read. In Section II of Part I Hume already makes a break with some of the cruder forms of subjectivism and emotivism by insisting that moral language reports or expresses a sentiment of satisfaction "of a particular kind."[2]

Nor is every sentiment of pleasure or pain, which arises from characters and actions of that peculiar kind which makes us praise or condemn. The good qualities of an enemy are hurtful to us; but may still command our esteem and respect. 'Tis only when a character is considered in general, without reference to our particular interest, that it causes such a feeling or sentiment, as denominates it morally good or evil.[3]

Hume's view of a particular moral sentiment, which in the second Enquiry he calls "humanity", arises, as we see here, from his observations concerning the use of moral language. So, according to Hume, moral language is in fact different from other language that expresses preferences and pro and con attitudes. In the Enquiry Hume wrote:

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[1] "On the Interpretation of Hume," Philosophy, XXXVIII (1963), 180.

[2] Treatise, III, I, II, p. 471.

[3] Ibid., p. 472.

> When a man denominates another his _enemy_, his _rival_, his _antago-
> nist_, he is understood to speak the language of self-love, and
> to express sentiments, peculiar to himself, and arising from his
> particular circumstances and situation. But when he bestows on
> any man the epithets of _vicious_, or _odious_, or _depraved_, he then
> speaks another language, and expresses sentiments, in which he
> expects all his audience arc to concur with him. He must here,
> therefore, depart from his private and particular situation and
> must choose a point of view, common to him with others.[1]

So as Bernard Mayo writes, "Moral discourse, just because it involves

criteria of correctness, presupposes a general agreement, a consensus,

among moral speakers."[2]

If we put together the observation that moral discourse presup-

poses or implies some common agreement with Hume's belief that moral

discourse expresses or reports our sentiments, then the conclusion that

Hume reached immediately presents itself,that is, that there is a par-

ticular sentiment which can be distinguished from all others and which

is universal among men. This is the moral sentiment.[3] Since for Hume

sentiments are impressions which the mind perceives a moral judgment

would, according to this view, report the presence of this one impres-

sion (or perhaps give expression to it) which is perceived and

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[1] _Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals_, in Hume's _Enqui-
ries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of
Morals_, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, second edition,
1902), Sect. IX, Part I, p. 272.

[2] _Ethics and the Moral Life_ (London: Macmillan Co., New York:
St. Martin's Press, 1958). Quoted with permission of the publisher.

[3] Hume writes: "The notion of morals implies some sentiment com-
mon to all mankind, which recommends the same object to general appro-
bation, and makes every man, or most men, agree in the same opinion or
decision concerning it. It also implies some sentiment so universal and
comprehensive as to extend to all mankind, to render the actions and
conduct even of persons the most remote, an object of applause and cen-
sure" (Enquiry, Sect. IX, Part I, p. 272).

distinguished from all other secondary or reflexive impressions by the process of introspection. Even if sentiments and emotions were the sorts of things that Hume thought they were, it is difficult to believe that a person could isolate and distinguish in this manner the various ones that Hume thought existed. It is becoming increasingly recognized that feelings are not entities that are distinguished from each other in this way nor are they causally related to certain objects or states of affairs. Rather they are distinguished (at least in part) by reference to the sorts of objects to which they are directed and the conditions in which they arise. They are logically rather than causally related to such objects and conditions, because if a particular feeling was not directed to a certain kind of object and associated with particular kinds of behavior, or if it did not occur under certain kinds of circumstances, then it could not be called that kind of feeling.[1] In other words, criteria for the application of words that name emotions or sentiments are to a great extent, although not completely, behavioral rather than introspective. But if there is no distinctively "moral" sentiment then a relativistic subjectivist might claim that the absence of such a sentiment makes it impossible for Hume to distinguish moral judgments from other expressions of pro or con feelings, and that, in fact, there is no difference between moral judgments and others which report (or express) our feelings and preferences. But in answer to this it must be said that although Hume is certainly wrong in his theory of the passions, and thus in his understanding of the moral sentiment, we still have to come to terms with those facts about moral discourse which

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[1] See Antony Kenny, _Action, Emotion and Will_ (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), chs. 2 and 3.

led Hume to posit a particular moral sentiment of the sort he did.
This is what we are attempting to do.

Hume took note of something which Hare, for example, seems to
miss. Hare analyzes 'You ought to do X' as 'If you do not do X, you will
be breaking an "ought"-principle to which I hereby subscribe'.[1] But as
Bernard Mayo writes:

> Hare's analysis does not bring out the point that, in saying
> "You ought to do X," I am also appealing to a principle which I
> assume my hearer to adopt too. Even if I say "I ought to do X,"
> if I say it aloud and to a listener, I am appealing to something
> presupposed by the speaker-hearer community. Consequently I
> should want to add to Hare's analysis and to say "If you do not
> do X, you will be breaking an 'ought'-principle to which I hereby
> subscribe, and to which I assume you to subscribe." Or, if it
> turns out that my assumption is mistaken, or if I know or suspect
> in advance that my listener does not subscribe to it, I shall
> add, in effect, "and which I invite you to adopt."[2]

I think we can go even further than that and say that the analysis of
'You ought to do X' also includes the following added to Mayo's analysis:
"and, if I am correct, which you would adopt and see as applicable to
this situation if you were fully informed, disinterested, and not
prejudiced in any way." Given his peculiar view of the sentiments Hume
could have adopted this analysis and have added "and, if I am correct,
which you would adopt and see as applicable to this situation if you
both fulfilled the requisite conditions for the moral sentiment to arise
in you and if you successfully distinguished your moral sentiment from
other sentiments." A redeeming feature of Hume's view of the moral judg-
ment is that he could also express it apart from his distinctive view
of the passions, and even do so more adequately. He says that a moral

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[1] The Language of Morals, p. 191.

[2] Ethics and the Moral Life, pp. 89-90.

judgment reports the presence of, or expresses, a certain pro or con attitude or sentiment, introspectively distinguishable from others, which arises under certain circumstances.

> 'Tis only when a character is considered in general, without reference to our particular interest, that it causes such a feeling or sentiment, as denominates it morally good or evil.[1]

It would be an improvement if he were to omit the idea of an introspectively distinguishable sentiment and just say that morality has to do with pro or con attitudes which we have when we satisfy certain conditions. We could speak of a moral sentiment, recognizing that it becomes a moral sentiment by its connection with conditions and not by its psychological distinctiveness, or we could refrain from speaking about moral sentiments at all, and just speak of sentiments or pro or con attitudes which may be present whether or not certain conditions have been fulfilled, but which are only relevant to moral judgments when the conditions have been fulfilled. In either case we preserve Hume's view that moral "blame or approbation" is derived from a sentiment or a pro or con attitude but only when the sentiment or attitude is related to certain conditions, such as disinterestedness. In fact, Hume's position can be more adequately stated in this way because one of the conditions necessary for a judgment to be a moral judgment is adequate knowledge, as he maintains when he writes, for example, that "all the circumstances of the case are supposed to be laid before us, ere we can fix any sentence of blame or approval,"[2] and there is no possible way in which a particular sentiment or emotion can be caused by adequate

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[1] _Treatise_, III, I, II, p. 472.

[2] _Enquiry_, Appendix I, Part 2, p. 290.

knowledge, for the adequacy of the knowledge is not a part of the know-
ledge which can have a causal relationship to a feeling. The adequacy
of the knowledge can only be logically related to a moral sentiment or
a moral judgment. In other words, we refuse to call any sentiment or
attitude a moral sentiment or attitude, or a judgment which expresses
this sentiment or attitude a moral judgment, if it is not made by a per-
son who has at least made an attempt at being adequately informed. If
the requisite conditions are met we can sympathetically identify with
the various interests involved in a moral issue and thus our sentiments
of approval or disapproval will be such that a consensus can occur with
others who also meet the requisite conditions. As Ronald Glossop points
out, this is one of the accounts of moral discourse which Hume gives.
He writes:

> Hume gives us alternative descriptions of the derivation of ethi-
> cal terms. Sometimes . . . he maintains that the sentiments of
> approbation need no correcting because they are the result of an
> imaginary, completely disinterested point of view, an ideal uni-
> versal sympathy. . . . In accord with /this/ description, the
> definition /of a virtue/ would become: "A virtue is whatever men-
> tal action or quality gives to a fully-informed, completely dis-
> interested spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation."[1]

In one place William Frankena supports a point of view very similar to

this. He writes:

> I find . . . plausible a noncognitivist view that says something
> like this: moral judgments are expressions of attitudes taken
> when one tries to take the point of view of some such "ideal" or
> "qualified" observer with respect to one's own or other people's
> actions.[2]

[1] "The Nature of Hume's Ethics," Philosophy and Phenomenological
Research, XXVII (June, 1967), 531.

[2] "Ethical Theory" in Roderick Chisholm, Herbert Feigl, William
Frankena, John Passmore, and Manley Thompson, Philosophy (Englewood
Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1964), p. 375. Used with per-
mission of the publisher.

This view preserves something like the usual emotivist or noncognitivist understanding of the relation between moral language and one's attitudes, but with the qualification that only when certain conditions are met is a judgment a moral judgment. 'God is good' understood along these lines would mean that God's purpose and action are such that I have a pro attitude toward them when I regard them from a disinterested point of view, or that the criteria which I approve as good when I take this point of view are ones to which God's purpose conforms. For Hume, this understanding of moral language would also differ from most subjectivist positions in being non-relativistic, since he believed that if all spectators were human they would all express the same pro or con attitudes or have the same sentiments under the prescribed conditions. As Glossop writes about Hume's position, "Insofar as people are disinterested, informed, and human, their judgments will coincide because there will be nothing to cause them to differ."[1] The major problem with this, however, is that adequacy of knowledge and disinterestedness are ideals hardly to be achieved in this world, or even approximated to any great extent. We have no way of knowing, therefore, whether in fact man's judgments would coincide in such circumstances.

Hume, however, also presents another account of moral judgment, or at least a further refinement of the above account, perhaps made in the light of a recognition that the specified conditions of a moral judgment are not actually fulfillable and thus could not produce the agreement which moral language presupposes. He writes:

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[1] "The Nature of Hume's Ethics," pp. 530-531.

In general, all sentiments of blame or praise are variable, according to our situation of nearness or remoteness, with regard to the person blam'd or praised, and according to the present disposition of our mind. But these variations we regard not in our general decisions, but still apply the terms expressive of our liking or dislike, in the same manner, as if we remain'd in one point of view. Experience soon teaches us this method of correcting our sentiments, or at least of correcting our language, where the sentiments are more stubborn and inalterable.[1]

Ronald Glossop comments on the subjectivist interpretation of Hume:

The subjectivist interpretation of Hume is correct in its insistence on the importance of approbation. But what the subjectivist interpretation neglects are the distinctions (1) between a spectator and a qualified spectator, and (2) between a sentiment of approval and a judgment of approval.[2]

The first distinction is present in Hume's first account of moral judgment, but the second distinction only appears in this second account. In this account whatever sentiments or attitudes may be expressed in making a moral judgment, the moral judgment also states, or at least implies or presupposes, a certain kind of statement of fact, a hypothetical conditional about what an impartial informed spectator would approve. F. C. Sharp is another philosopher who interprets Hume in this way:

The predicate right does not cover everything that happens to appeal to the passing sympathy of the moment; nor does it fail to include forms of good that may happen to leave our feelings cold. The play of sympathy (and we may add, of altruism) is affected, as Hume has shown in various places, by our relationships to the persons concerned, our distance from them in time and space, the nature and limitations of our own past experience, the efficiency of the working of our imagination, familiarity, and the preoccupations or humors of the hour. When we call an action right we suppose ourselves to have abstracted from these conditions, that is to say from all the accidental relationships of the action in question to self, whatever their nature. The moral judgment is the judgment of the impartial spectator.[3]

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[1] Treatise, III, III, I, p. 582

[2] "The Nature of Hume's Ethics," p. 532.

[3] "Hume's Ethical Theory and Its Critics," Mind, XXX (1921), 54.

Hume, in contrast to some emotivists and subjectivists, does take account of the fact that we argue about and discuss moral judgments in such a way as to make it apparent that we in fact believe that it makes sense to say that they can be right or wrong, correct or incorrect. Sharp continues his interpretation of Hume as follows:

> Now, when we call conduct right we believe we have emancipated ourselves from the effects of this play of chance forces, and that we have reached real impartiality. As a matter of fact we may have failed to do so. It follows that in such a case the judgment is not really what it claims or supposes itself to be. Or since claims which cannot be substantiated are called invalid, we may pronounce such a judgment as invalid. The distinction accordingly between the valid and the invalid moral judgment is inseparably bound up with the fundamental features of Hume's ethical system.[1]

Hume's second account of moral judgment seems to correspond to what Roderick Firth calls an absolutist dispositional analysis of ethical statements, or an "ideal observer theory."[2] As a naturalistic theory it attempts to overcome the "unbridgeable" is-ought dichotomy, if not in actual application, at least in principle. The sentences that refer to facts are not of the sort that are open to scientific investigation allowing moral issues to be settled by empirical research. Since this possibility is sometimes held to be a necessary part of ethical naturalism one might wish to call this sort of theory "quasi-naturalistic." These fact-stating sentences are of a rather peculiar kind.

> They are not necessarily facts concerning actual sentiments felt by actual persons. They are hypotheticals. A virtue is a mental quality which would evoke a sentiment of approval in a spectator if he were fully informed and completely disinterested.

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[1] "Hume's Ethical Theory and Its Critics," p. 55.

[2] "Ethical Absolutism and the Ideal Observer," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, XII (1952), 317ff.

It is not just any spectator's sentiments which define virtue, but only those of the qualified spectator, and when a person is considering particular cases he cannot be certain that he is qualified. If this interpretation of Hume's ethics is correct, the definition, the analytic part of his hypothesis, takes us from 'is' to 'ought', but the 'is' does not necessarily refer to any actual sentiments of any actual spectator, but refers rather to the sentiments of qualified spectators, which in any given case might be a class with no members.[1]

There are various arguments against ideal observer theories which refer either to the fact that we cannot be sure that even under ideal circumstances all moral observers would agree, or to the difficulty in specifying the conditions for adequate knowledge, for impartiality, and for anything else it may be thought necessary for an ideal observer to have.[2] These criticisms, however, seem to be quite beside the point if we are talking about what our use of moral language seems to presuppose or imply, and not what actually must be the case. As Mayo points out, Hume overstates his case when he says that moral language "implies" a consensus, as if it could tell us about reality to that extent. Rather he should say that it presupposes a consensus, for without its making an appeal for general support moral discourse does not make sense.[3] Hume's own view was that it is not very difficult to arrive at such a moral consensus, indeed the empirical part of his ethics purports to tell what that consensus is in matters of general principle if not in reference to particular cases. It is this

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[1] Glossop, "The Nature of Hume's Ethics," p. 534.

[2] See Richard Brandt, "The Definition of an 'Ideal Observer' Theory in Ethics," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, XV (1955), 407-413, and Jonathan Harrison, "Some Comments on Professor Firth's Ideal Observer Theory," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, XVII (1956-57), 256-262.

[3] Ethics and the Moral Life, p. 83.

which misleads Broad into thinking that for Hume the good is by defi-
nition that which most men approve on most occasions.[1] Such a belief,
however, is not actually implied in Hume's account of moral judgment.
As Frankena writes:

> The fact that ethical and value judgments claim a consensus on
> the part of others does not mean that the individual thinker
> must bow to the judgment of the majority in his society. He is
> not claiming an actual consensus, he is claiming that in the
> end--which never comes or comes only on the Day of Judgment--his
> position will be concurred in by those who freely and clear-
> headedly review the relevant facts from the moral point of view.
> In other words he is claiming an ideal consensus which transcends
> majorities and actual societies. One's society and its code and
> institutions may be wrono. Here enters the autonomy of the moral
> agent--he must take the moral point of view and must claim an
> eventual consensus with others who do so, but he must judge for
> himself.[2]

We have in the quotation from Frankena a logical development of
Hume's insights about morality and moral discourse stripped of his
quaint language about sentiments. This is the sort of analysis of moral
discourse which seems to be correct. We have now quoted Frankena in fol-
lowing Hume along two different lines. At one stage in his writings he
agrees with one view that Hume expressed, that is, that moral judgments
express attitudes taken when one tries to be disinterested and uses some-
thing like the qualified attitude method. At another stage he agrees
with Hume's second view that moral judgments express a hypothetical
judgment about an ideal consensus. The first stage is probably correct
in preserving the recognition of an emotive element in moral judgments
but wrong in limiting moral judgments to those that are made in a

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[1] C. D. Broad, Five Types of Ethical Theory, o. 85.

[2] Ethics, p. 96.

particular way or with a particular method. We do not always use the
qualified attitude method when we make moral judgments, rather we often
appeal to principles, some of which embody other methods, and ultimately
to a way of life, even as Taylor has argued, and then to some kind of
vindication of that way of life. In order to appeal to an ideal consen-
sus one does not have to try to approximate the position of an ideal
observer when making each particular judgment, but he does have to believe
that in so far as he or anyone else could approximate the conditions
necessary for being an ideal observer the principles on which he makes
his judgment would be vindicated. So when one makes a moral judgment
he is not only expressing an attitude but also making a hypothetical
claim "that in the end--which never comes or comes only on the Day of
Judgment--his position will be concurred in by those who freely and
clear-headedly review the relevant facts from the moral point of view."
The second stage of Frankena's thought seems to be correct in pointing
out that such a claim is made by moral judgments, and this, in fact,
seems to be the distinctive and decisive factor in moral judgments.
Frankena speaks of an ideal consenus of those who take the moral point
of view. Since the "moral point of view" is understood in a number of
ways by philosophers, we might wish to say more than this, for if one
understands the moral point of view to have specific content then it
too would need to be vindicated. What we wish to say is that one who
makes a moral judgment is claiming that his position will be (or would
be) concurred in by those who freely (without internal or external com-
pulsion) and clear-headedly review the relevant facts in an impartial
manner, that is, with attitudes not determined at all by blind emotional

prejudice or by concern for special privilege. This is one answer to Field's question about what sort of facts we must suppose there to be in order to account for the ideas which the nature of moral discourse indicates that people have about them, although these ideas about the alleged fact, or this fact's being presupposed by moral discourse, does not assure us that it is really a fact, that is, that there actually would be this ideal consensus.

It is clear that we have come, via an investigation of Hume's concept of moral judgment, to the same place at which we arrived before by means of an investigation of Paul Taylor's analysis of normative discourse. When we spoke of the vindication of a way of life we in effect were doing nothing but applying a development of Frankena's idea of an ideal consensus to a particular subject matter, i.e., a way of life. Although moral evaluation of human acts must take into consideration their relationship to a way of life, we re-examined moral discourse in general apart from the concept of a way of life in order that we might understand its use in reference to God. 'God is good', in the last analysis seems to mean, or at least to presuppose or imply, that God's purpose and action and command will "in the end--which never comes or comes only on the Day of Judgment"--be approved, applauded, recognized as right, acquiesced in, and praised by all who consider them from an informed and unprejudiced point of view. To believe that God is good is to believe that what He does and commands will ultimately be vindicated, just as to believe that a way of life is right is to believe that it will be (or would be) vindicated in a similar manner. The characteristics which embody God's goodness, and so provide criteria

for regarding Him as good, are those in the light of which God will be
vindicated. And as we have seen, to believe that God's purpose will
be vindicated certainly means to believe that a way of life hostle or
indifferent to it cannot be vindicated. This analysis of 'God is good'
does not conflict with Ross's statement that "It would appear that the
actions of a morally perfect being should be such that no one who fully
grasps the circumstances can reasonably disapprove of them."[1]  Rather
it simply elaborates on the conditions under which disapproval would be
reasonable disapproval.


### C. A Theological Postscript

Although moral discourse presupposes an ideal consensus we do
not know whether in fact all men who fulfilled the requisite conditions
for being ideal observers would agree about all moral issues. The intro-
duction of God into this picture changes this situation, however. The
claim that God is good is the claim that when all the facts are known all
men who fulfill certain conditions will regard Him as worthy of worship
and approve His purpose and command. Since there are only two options
it is likely that human nature is sufficiently constant that all men who
fulfill the conditions of impartiality would do the same thing. To believe
that there is a God who has a purpose in human history reduces the options
concerning which way of life to adopt which face the moral agent to two,
at least in many respects. The principle choice is between co-operating
with God's purpose or resisting it. Again it seems much more likely

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[1]  Philosophical Theology, p. 230.

that all men who fulfill the conditions of adequate knowledge, impartiality, freedom, etc., could agree on which choice was to be approved under these conditions, than in a situation in which there could be an unlimited number of options. Belief in God, therefore, would seem to make the belief that there would be an ideal consensus about many crucial matters quite plausible.

Why should it be expected, however, that in the light of these two options men should come to affirm, approve, and accept as right what God does? Why should it be expected that ultimately men who are free, informed, and impartial, should accept the characteristics of God's purpose and will as proper criteria of goodness? Since, according to the Christian faith, God's intention is man's welfare and salvation, there would be some reason to expect that men would accept it as right. There are, however, various conceptions of what one's welfare is, or of what sort of thing the wholeness or health of the person or of the community is. An individual might believe that God should find some way of acting for his welfare without requiring him to be reconciled with his fellow men, or create for him a heaven without people he does not like, or create him in such a way that he can attain self-fulfillment without having to fulfill other requirements. One answer to the above question is that God's will is not imposed on man as something completely alien to man which he can have no reasons other than prudential reasons for obeying. God, according to the Christian faith, appeals to man's approval of His own action. God seeks "to prove . . . that he himself is righteous,"[1]

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[1] Romans 3:26.

and to have men affirm: "Thou art justified in thy sentence and blameless in thy judgment."[1] That God appeals to the best in men for their approval does not mean that He tailors His purpose to fit human expectations or actual moral criteria. God's purpose is not the manifestation of love, forgiveness, and grace because men value and approve these things or would do so under ideal circumstances, nor does He seek to reconcile men into the Kingdom of God because that is what they would approve of. Rather God's purpose is the manifestation of His love simply because His nature is love. He does not accommodate Himself to the opinions of men.

> That God is gracious does not mean that He surrenders Himself to the one to whom He is gracious. He neither compromises with His resistance, nor ignores it, still less calls it good. But as the gracious God He affirms Himself over against the one to whom He is gracious by opposing and breaking down His resistance, and in some way causing His own good will to exert its effect upon him.[2]

This is what Barth calls God's holiness. How is it then to be expected that men should ever come to affirm as right what God intends and does and commands? Barth says that the Covenant is the internal basis of creation.[3] By this he means that God's purpose revealed in Christ and carried out in part in the historical covenant with men is logically antecedent to the decision to create, so that the cosmos, and especially man, is created in the light of God's purpose. According to this line man was created for a purpose. Barth asks about where God's grace finds man and he answers:

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[1] Psalm 51:4b.    [2] Barth, Dogmatics, II, I, p. 361.

[3] Ibid., III, I, pp. 228ff.

> It finds him in the position of Adam. This means, on the one
> hand, that he is the creature whom amid the rest of creation
> He has determined to be His image, i.e., the mirror and there-
> fore the reflection of His own image.[1]

Since man is created in the image of God he is determined by God--struc-

tured by God in such a way--to approve, mirror, and reflect God's own

nature which is expressed in what He does. It would seem that he is

created with such a nature that he can only find wholeness or ultimate

fulfillment when he reflects God's nature, and secondly, that we could

expect that an individual man fulfilling the criteria of being an ideal

observer would approve, acquiesce in, and regard as right, what God

does and commands. The fact that man is structured in this way would

also be a theological reason for seeing the qualified attitude method

as having some capability of approving what God wills even under the

conditions of this world. Why the judgments men make according to their

own criteria of goodness and by autonomous methods so little conform to

the Christian's conception of the will of God is also a question for

which the theologian should have an answer. We will consider that ques-

tion in the last section of the final chapter.

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[1] Barth, _Dogmatics_, II, II, p. 560.

## V. THE AUTONOMY THESIS AND BELIEF IN THE GOODNESS OF GOD

### A. Some Attempted Refutations of the Autonomy Thesis

#### 1. The Position of Burton F. Porter

Although it may not be necessary for us to judge that God is good by our own criteria in order for us to know what we mean when we say "God is good," it may still be necessary for us to make such a judgment in order for us to have a good reason to say it. We have not fully answered Nielsen's argument that

> the believer can say "God commands me to do X" implies "I ought to do X" only because he has made the logically prior moral judgment that "Whatever God commands is good" and "God is good" or "God is love." But how, except by his own moral understanding, can he know that this Objective Power is good or is a Being whose commandments we ought to obey? . . . How do we know that this being is good except by our own moral discernment? . . . Only if we independently knew what we would count as 'good', 'righteous', 'just', etc., would we be in a position to know whether this Being is good or whether his commands ought to be obeyed. That most Christians most of the time unquestionably assume that he is good only proves that this judgment is for them a most fundamental moral judgment.[1]

In a recent book Burton F. Porter argues that indeed we only have reason to recognize God's claim on us if he is good, but that this does not mean that we must judge that God is good or that what he wills is good. He writes:

> God wills X therefore X is good does not require the proposition Everything God wills is good, because the concept of God already embraces the notion of absolute goodness. God is good is on this reading an analytic proposition; its truth or falsity is discoverable through an analysis of the subject God. The predicate is actually unnecessary to a real or theoretical intelligence

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[1] "Some Remarks on the Independence of Morality from Religion," *Mind*, LXX (1961), 181. Quotations are used with the permission of the editor of *Mind* and with the permission of Professor Nielsen.

> possessing a thorough understanding of the subject. For the
> idea distinctly expressed in the predicate was implicit (a
> priori) in the subject. . . . Since the attribute of good-
> ness is intrinsic to the concept of God, it would be grossly
> self-contradictory to declare that God is not good.[1]

Porter notes that it is usually held that sentences such as 'God is

good', which might be called personal sentences, cannot be analytic

and this is held to be the case because it is thought that proper names

do not have connotation. He quotes Mill who writes:

> Proper names are not connotative: they denote individuals who
> are called by them; but they do not indicate or imply any
> attributes as belonging to those individuals.[2]

Porter wishes to argue, however, that proper names can be connotative.

He uses the name 'John Thistlewaite Barker' as an example and claims

that from this name we can determine a number of facts with a good

deal of certainty, e.g., that the person designated is a male human

being of English nationality.[3] He recognizes that proper names have

vague limits, but thinks that these are only quantitatively different

from the vague limits of application of ordinary descriptive terms.[4]

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[1] _Deity and Morality: With Respect to the Naturalistic Fallacy_
(London: Allen and Unwin, New York: Humanities Press, 1968), p. 125.
The same point of view is maintained by Patterson Brown in his "Reli-
gious Morality," _Mind,_ LXXII (1963), 235-244.

[2] John Stuart Mill, _A System of Logic_, pp. 33-34, quoted by
Porter, p. 128.

[3] Porter, p. 139

[4] Ibid., p. 146. If Porter is thinking of a name like 'Aristotle'
which we use to designate one particular individual the situation is
different from one in which we are talking about a name like 'John This-
tlewaite Barker' which we may use for various individuals. Although when
we use the word 'chair' we may sometimes be mistaken when we infer that
the object it refers to is of a certain sort and when we use the name
'John Thistlewaite Barker' we may be mistaken when we infer that the
object it refers to is of a certain sort, the situations that obtain are

Porter uses an illustration involving numbers given to prisoners in such

a manner that those within certain ranges refer to certain types of

criminals. These numbers are like names in that they denote particu-

lar people, yet from them we can infer certain facts about the people

denoted. So, Porter concludes, proper names can possess connotation.

He then goes on to write:

> I believe that I have demonstrated by the previous argument that
> proper names do possess connotation. Therefore, the principal
> argument denying that goodness is essential to God on the basis
> of the impossibility of proper names (like God) possessing con-
> notation is untenable. . . .
>
> Any act commanded by God is _ipso facto_ good. An act is
> neither made good by God's willing it, nor willed by God on the
> basis of its objective value. Rather the concept of goodness
> is an integral and intrinsic constituent of the concept of God,
> so that if we believe that God wills certain actions it follows
> that these actions are necessarily good.
>
> To the philosopher who contends that we must be supplied
> with the proposition: _Whatever_ _God_ _wills_ _is_ _good_ before con-
> cluding _X_ _is_ _right_ from _God_ _wills_ _X_, the theologian can reply
> that a moral assessment of God's character or conduct is an-
> appropriate and superfluous. The notion of God contains the
> notion of goodness.[1]

Although Porter's analysis of proper names is overly simple

it is true that proper names, especially those which we do not learn

by ostensive definition, do often have connotation and that the word

'God' as many people use it is understood in such a way that it would

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considerably different. There is a continuity of resemblance in form
or function between objects called chairs even though the extremities
may be vague, so that we may not know how far to stretch the limits
of application of the word. There is no such continuity between the
many times when 'John Thistlewaite Barker' refers to Englishmen and
the infrequent times when it may refer to an American horse or to a
South African dog.

[1] _Deity_ _and_ _Morality_, pp. 151-152.

be self-contradictory to say that God is not good.[1] But in fact the crucial issue is not whether or not proper names have connotation so that a thorough discussion of proper names does not seem to be necessary. While it may be self-contradictory to say that God is not good it is not self-contradictory to say that God does not exist. Suppose one accepts the claim that a certain being is the creator and sustainer of the universe, omniscient and omnipotent, and that that being has revealed that he wills us to do X. Now if we understand the concept of God in such a way that the attribute of goodness is intrinsic to it, then if God wills something it must be good (presupposing that the concept of God also includes the attributes of wisdom, knowledge, etc.). But we do not yet know whether this being who wills us to do X is God. Even if one accepts some form of the ontological argument which would say that it is self-contradictory to say that the self-existent being does not exist, we could still ask if that being were God. For if part of the meaning of the word 'God' is that the one to whom it refers must be perfectly good, then we do not know whether God exists, that is, we do not know whether the word 'God' so understood has a referent until we decide by some means or other whether any being to which we are considering applying it does indeed have the attribute of goodness, just as in order to be able to infer from the prisoner's number whether he is a thief or a murderer we must first know whether he is a thief or a murderer in order to know what number to give him. Kai Nielsen anticipates the sort of reply which

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[1] See John R. Searle, "Proper Names and Descriptions," in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan and Free Press, 1967), Vol. VI, pp. 487-491.

Porter makes to his argument and considers the case in which 'God' is

used in such a way as to make 'God is not good' a self-contradiction.

Concerning 'God is good' when 'God' is understood in this way he writes:

> This is really a material mode statement about the use of the
> word 'God', that is to say, we would not call a Z 'God' unless
> that Z were a fitting or proper object of worship or a Being
> that ought to be worshipped. And if we say 'Z is a fitting
> object of worship," or "Z ought to be worshipped" we must say
> "Z is good," Z could not be one without being the other; and
> if Z is a fitting object of worship Z necessarily is a being
> we would call 'God'. Thus if Z is called 'God' then Z must
> also of necessity be called 'good' since what ought to be wor-
> shipped must also be good. (This is a logical remark about the
> phrase, 'ought to be worshipped'.) "God" by definition is
> "good," we would not call a being or power 'God' unless that
> being was thought to be good.[1]

In response to such an understanding of 'God' Nielsen writes: How else

but by our own moral judgment that Z is a being worthy of worship are

we enabled to call this Z "My Lord and my God"?[2] Consequently,

> Morality cannot be based on religion. If anything, the opposite
> is partly true, for nothing can be God unless he or it is an
> object worthy of worship and it is our own moral insight that
> must tell us if anything at all could possibly be worthy of
> worship.[3]

Porter devotes only the last one and a half pages of his book

to stating and replying to this mode of argument against this position.

He notes that many writers maintain that analytic propositions tell us

about how words are used and not about the characteristics of reality.

He insists, however, that there is another class of analytic proposi-

tions which are of a different sort and cannot be thought of as being

necessarily true only because of linguistic conventions. These are

true analytic propositions in a metaphysical sense. He gives some

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[1] "Some Remarks on the Independence of Morality from Religion,"
Mind, LXX (1961), pp. 181-182.

[2] Ibid., p. 183.    [3] Ibid., p. 183.

examples such as

> I cannot be in Chelsea and Kensington at the same time, The
> square of the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal to
> the sum of the square of the other two sides, A surface cannot
> be both red and white all over, Every effect has a cause.[1]

Porter has included in one bag very different sorts of sentences, par-

ticular representatives of which would be variously classified by dif-

ferent philosophers as ordinary synthetic sentences, ordinary analytic

sentences, synthetic-a priori sentences, unclassifiable members of a

Quinean web of belief, and representatives of Putnam's "lots-of-other-

things" category, but hardly as "true analytic propositions in a meta-

physical sense." But it is in this doubtful category that Porter wishes

to place 'God is good'. Even if for the sake of argument it is granted

that there might be such sentences, Porter would have to make an effort

to show that 'God is good' was one of them, and this he fails to do and

so he fails to support his claim that when one says "God is good" "a

necessary and metaphysical truth is being asserted about the universe."[3]

So Porter provides us with no adequate reply to Nielsen's argument.[4] So

whether we begin with a definition of God which does not include moral

predicates, or whether we begin with one which does, we are still thrown

back on our own moral criteria, according to the proponents of the strong

autonomy thesis, for in the former case we must ask whether God is good,

and in the latter case we must ask whether a particular being ought to

be called God, and in either case we must use our own criteria to

answer the question.

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[1] Deity and Morality, pp. 156-157.    [2] Ibid., p. 157.

[3] Ibid., p. 157.

[4] Nielsen's argument is also set forth in his "God and the Good,"
Theology Today, XXXI (1964), 58.

2. The Positions of Thomas Aquinas, James F. Ross, and Charles Hartshorne

There is another sort of reply that can be made to this argument. It may in fact be the case that when we affirm that God is good "a necessary and metaphysical truth is being asserted about the universe,"[1] although not an analytic one. This must be argued for, however, and not merely assumed. It can be argued that there are non-moral attributes of Deity which make it necessary that if there is a God his actions cannot be morally evil. Thomas Aquinas argues in this way:[2]

(1) A being can act against its nature only if it is ignorant
or weak.                                    Premise I

(2) God is neither ignorant or weak

.˙. (3) God cannot act against His nature.  (1), (2) modus tollens

(4) A being does what is evil only if it acts against its
nature.                                     Premise II

.˙. (5) God cannot do evil.                 (3), (4) modus tollens

James Ross sets forth this argument and takes issue with Premise II. He brings in another criterion for moral perfection which is not very different from the one we decided upon above, and perhaps follows from it. He states that "the actions of a morally perfect being should be such that no one who fully grasps the circumstances can reasonable disapprove of them."[3] He takes an example of an act which one could reasonably disapprove, the annihilation of an intelligent creature with

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[1] Porter, Deity and Morality, p. 157.

[2] Summa Contra Gentiles, Book I, ch. 95, no. 3.

[3] Philosophical Theology (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1969), p. 230.

a natural desire for immortality, and concludes that we would not have
to postulate either weakness or ignorance in God to conceive of His
performing that act. He then gives a modified form of Thomas' argument
which he thinks may better express what Thomas really intended. He
accepts these premises:

> (a) No being can pursue any end unless it pursues it as a means
> to its own happiness or unless, possessing its own happiness, it
> pursues that end as a means to the fulfillment of the natural in-
> clinations of some other being. (b) No being can perform an evil
> act unless that being is defective in either power or knowledge
> with respect to its own happiness. This defect is a necessary
> condition for any agent's performing an evil act, since no act
> that secures the happiness of an intelligent agent can be evil.[1]

Ross argues that since God does not pursue happiness because He already
has it He cannot make errors due to defects in knowledge or power while
pursuing it. Ross does not give any reason why (b) should not say "No
being can perform an evil act unless that being is defective in either
power or knowledge with respect to its own happiness or with respect to
the happiness of others its acts affect," for it would seem that a being
which did not need to seek its own happiness could still perform acts
with bad results through weakness or ignorance in its effort to act for
the welfare of others. It would also seem that it could perform an
evil act by acting for the happiness or welfare of one other being at
the expense of another. The omnipotence of God, however, would perhaps
preclude His being put into a situation of having to do this. So a
suitably modified form of (b) would seem to be plausible if (a) were
true. Ross claims that (a) "is an a priori claim which, in effect,
specifies part of what we mean by 'the act of an intelligent being'."[2]

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[1] _Philosophical Theology_, p. 234.     [2] _Ibid._, p. 234, note 15.

If this is the basis of his argument we need to substitute "no intel-
ligent being" for "no being" in both (a) and (b). If human beings are
intelligent beings then the claim seems to be false as we argued in
discussing Hick's position and as Berdyaev has argued against Thomism.
If it is claimed that in so far as human beings do not act according to
this principle they are not intelligent beings then we are perhaps
using a persuasive definition of 'intelligent being'. How do we know
that God is an intelligent being according to this particular definition
of 'intelligent being'? Since according to these presuppositions God
could not procure his own happiness by acting in such a way as to frus-
trate the inclinations or the happiness of other intelligent beings, he
could not have any self-interested reason to do so. But it could also
be claimed that for the same reasons he could not have any self-interest-
ed reason to further the happiness or fulfil the inclinations of other
beings either. Ross himself concludes that God cannot perform an evil
act, but he says that this is only a reasonable hypothesis because a
sufficiently detailed and careful analysis has not been given of key
concepts in the premises. It seems, however, that for the conclusion
to be plausible the argument has to be carried further in order to show
that there is something about the nature of God or about His relation
to the  world which makes Ross's definition of 'intelligent being'
applicable to Him and which makes it inconceivable that he should be
other than benevolent.

One of the ways in which this argument can be carried further
involves giving up the Thomistic conception of God and accepting the
view that the happiness of creatures affects the happiness of God.

Such an approach is taken by Charles Hartshorne. To say that an action is morally good is to say that it issues "from the fullest realization available of all the interests affected by the action."[1] He defines a right decision as one which is "adequately informed as to its context."[2] According to this view "omniscience in action is by definition right action."[3] Since by definition God is omniscient, if God exists, and therefore an omniscient being exists, He is necessarily morally good. This equation of knowledge with virtue has, of course, often been challenged. In this case, however, the objections do not seem to have too much force because for Hartshorne complete knowledge includes sympathetic awareness of all the sentient beings which would be affected by any act and identification with their feelings and interests. Because of the way in which God is related to the world, somewhat analogously to the way in which the mind is related to the body, he cannot fail to identify with and take into consideration the joys and the pains of all conscious beings, for in a sense He feels them Himself. God Himself cannot fail to be the ideal observer, for He knows all actuality as actual and all possibility as possible, and His knowledge of the actual includes his experiencing, somewhat as His own experience, all the conscious states of all other beings, for this is, in fact, his way of knowing the world. Nor is there any reason to think that he would fail to act to maximize the sort of experiences that adequately informed sentient beings would desire, for He Himself shares in those experiences.

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[1] _Man's Vision of God_ (New York: Harper and Bros., 1941), p. 30.

[2] _The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God_ (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), p. 125.

[3] _Ibid._

So according to the understanding of 'God is good' which was previously

set forth, it would seem that we can conclude that God is good simply

on the basis of a descriptive account of His metaphysical attributes

without having to make any value judgments based on our own criteria,

for His attributes make it inconceivable that He should be other than

good.

> If, then, God is adequately aware of all actuality as actual and
> all possibility as possible, he has adequate motivation for
> seeking to actualize maximal possibilities of further value.
> There can be no ethical appeal beyond the decision of the one
> who in his decision takes account of all actuality and possi-
> bility. To what could the appeal be made?[1]

Perhaps there are also other ways of arguing that the nature of

God assures us that he is morally good without leaving the more tradi-

tional and Thomistic point of view. Perhaps metaphysical reasons could

be given for why the nature of God would give Him reason to seek the

happiness of other beings and not to frustrate their natural inclina-

tions even though neither course of action enhances God's own happiness

which is already supreme. So it is possible that there are several sets

of attributes which if possessed by a being would assure us that what he

willed would be good. It seems clearly false then that we could not

infer that God is good purely from a description of his metaphysical

attributes without evaluating them according to some moral criteria.

But if a version of the autonomy thesis which asserts this is not correct

in the abstract it may still be correct in any particular situation, for

it is still an open question (1) whether any purported revelation of the

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[1] The Divine Relativity, pp. 124-125.

will of God really is such a revelation, and, more importantly, (2) if
there really is a revelation of God (a being which fulfills enough of
the creteria for the application of the term 'God' for it to be applied
to Him), whether He is actually characterized by one of the sets of at-
tributes which assure His goodness. There have been arguments, of course,
that any being which possessed certain of the attributes often ascribed
to deity would necessarily have to be characterized by certain others.
By such arguments it might be claimed that any being which has an essen-
tial attribute of deity, e.g., existence by its own power, would have to
have certain other attributes which would assure its moral goodness.
Such arguments, however, are hardly very convincing today to very many
people, believers or unbelievers. In Hartshorne's case it may be help-
ful in thinking about God to think of His relationship to the world in
the way that Hartshorne describes it, but can we really know that any
being with some of the attributes of deity must necessarily be related
to the world and have knowledge of the world in the way that Hartshorne
sets forth? It may be true that the nature of God must be such that
His existence entails His goodness, but we may not be in a position to
know whether or not that is true.


B. The Autonomy Thesis, Reformulated and Examined

We have concluded that there are various ways in which beliefs
about the will of God along with other beliefs (e.g., about the power
of God or the nature of man) give us good reasons to adopt one way of
life rather than another apart from any belief that whatever God wills
is good. Most adherents of the major monotheistic religions (Judaism,

Christianity, Islam), however, would want to say not only that we have
good reasons to obey God, but that He has a claim upon us and we have
obligations to Him, obligations to obey Him, to honor His name, or to
imitate Him. We have argued that certain beliefs about God and His
will do seem to entail the belief that we have an obligation to obey
God and perhaps to imitate His action. These beliefs, however, must
include the belief that God and His purpose are good, or at least not
evil. So the goodness of God gives us a reason to have such a state-
ment as "We ought to do what God wills" at the center of our ethical
beliefs, provided that we accept certain other statements about God's
knowledge and the relationship of what He wills for us to do in par-
ticular circumstances to what His overall purpose is. We have also
claimed that a plausible analysis of 'God is good' can be given and
that such an analysis does not say that "God is the sort of God I would
pick to be God if I were in the position to make the choice." We have
also said that in the light of this analysis of 'God is good' we could
infer the goodness of God from descriptive statements about God's at-
tributes and His relation to the world, but that problems having to
do with knowing whether God possessed these attributes and having to
do with knowing what God wills remained. These problems will not be
forgotten as we seek to analyze what it is that the strong autonomy
thesis is claiming and to evaluate the plausibility of its claims.

A proponent of the autonomy thesis is almost certainly not
making an empirical claim about how people in fact come to use the
purported will of God as a criterion for ethics. For it is surely false
that all or most believers in God come to believe that God is good or

that they ought to do His will by first judging that individual commands ascribed to God are good or right. Certainly many people, from the time when they were children, have believed that many things were good and were willed by God and have not asked whether God willed them because they were good according to indeoendent criteria or whether God's willing them made them good. They may have accepted the belief that they ought to do what God wills without questioning any further. Evidence for this assertion may be found in the manner in which communication about moral issues often breaks down between certain tyoes of religious peopie, e.g., some Catholics discussing (or refusing to discuss) birth control, and other peoole with different preeuppositions.

So the oerson who maintains the autonomy thesis is probably not concerned with how most people arrive at their beliefs, but perhaps he is concerned with how a person must arrive at his beliefs if he is to be rational, or, if he is not concerned with how a person actually arrives at his beliefs, how he must be able to justify them if he is to be rational. Perhaps someone like Nielsen wishes to maintain that one can only be rational in holding his moral beliefs if he has arrived at them, or at least could have arrived at them, by some process similar to induction. Beginning from any authority at all would be open to the same kind of arguments as are used against beginning from the will of God. The belief that God's purpose will be ultimately vindicated to those who take an imoartial point of view may provide a good reason to make "One ought to do what God wills" or "One ought in certain resoects to imitate God's action" a central principle of his moral beliefs, but it is certainly not a belief that could conceivably be arrived at by

generalizing from or making an inductive inference from particular ex-
periences or observations. We have argued, however, that people do
not arrive at moral beliefs in this way and to insist that in order
to be rational they must do so, or be able to do so, is to impose an
impossible conception of rationality. Could utilitarianism be justified
inductively from our intuition or from anything else? A more plausible
standard of rationality is one which substitutes a concern for criti-
cizing and correcting beliefs for a concern for justifying them. Brandt
regards his "qualified attitude method" as proceeding in this manner to
a great extent, and perhaps he would have better seen it as completely
concerned with the criticism, rejection, qualification, and correction
of moral beliefs. So if the autonomy thesis states that beliefs must
be arrived at in a certain way, or that it must be possible to arrive
at them in a certain way, for a person who holds them to be behaving
rationally, then it seems to be false.

How, we can now ask, could the autonomy thesis be reformulated
in such a way as to be compatible with an emphasis on criticism rather
than on justification? Perhaps someone like Nielsen would claim that
one could be rational in holding to the belief that God wills X and
that His will is good (or that X is willed by a being who is worthy of
worship and so of being called God), only if it has not happened that the
goodness of X has come into conflict with one's moral intuitions or auton-
omous moral judgments, and furthermore, that one is ready to give up these
beliefs about God and His will if such a conflict does occur. If such a
conflict does occur one might give up the belief that God wills X, or
that God is good, or that the being who wills X should be called God.

Whichever alternative an individual chooses he is allowing his reli-
gious beliefs to be criticized by his autonomous morality and so is
acknowledging the independence of that morality from religion and the
dependence of that religion on morality. The autonomy thesis would
seem to be maintaining that if he failed to choose any of these alter-
natives he would not be acting rationally. To evaluate such a claim
let us suppose a believer accepts the following sentences as true:

> (1) According to set of criteria X, action Y is judged to be
>     good.
>
> (2) Set of criteria X includes the qualified attitude method and
>     perhaps general principles which have so far met the quali-
>     fied attitude test.
>
> (3) Y is good.
>
> (4) We call the Creator of all things God and His will is good.
>
> (5) Whatever meets set of criteria Z is in accordance with God's
>     will; what conflicts with it is contrary to God's will.
>
> (6) Y meets set of criteria Z.

Suppose, in the first case, that the person who accepted these sentences
as true now comes to believe that (6) is false and something incompatible
with Y meets set of criteria Z. The autonomy thesis would seem to claim
that however truth values are redistributed, (1) and (2) and therefore
also (3) are immune from criticism in this case with the result that
either (4) or (5) must be rejected. Suppose in a second case that an
individual who accepted the above six sentences as true now comes to
believe that (1) is false and that an action incompatible with Y is
judged to be good according to set of criteria X. The autonomy thesis
would then perhaps claim that (3) must be rejected and therefore also
either (4), (5), or (6). To make either of these claims might be to

imply that there is an analytic sentence, i.e., a sentence immune from revision, embodying (1), (2), and (3) which sets forth the criteria for using the word 'good'. But there does not seem to be any reason at all to suppose that there should be such a sentence immune from revision. A proponent of the strong autonomy thesis, however, could also say that although any such sentence could be revised, it should not be revised because of conflicts with (4), (5), and (6). There does not seem to be any prima facie reason to accept this, however.

An opponent of the view that we might have to give up our belief in the goodness of God because of conflicts between what He is purported to will and our autonomous criteria, intuitions, or judgments might here wish to argue that one can always avoid doing so by making appropriate modifications in (4) instead, the latter having to do with the criteria for knowing God's will.[1] This in fact is very often the solution that is taken when such a conflict arises. Many Catholics have changed their views about the authority of the Pope rather than either their autonomous moral convictions or their belief in the goodness and wisdom of God, and many Protestants have changed their views about the authority of the Bible as a vehicle of revelation rather than their beliefs about the goodness or authority of God when commands or laws attributed to God conflicted with their autonomous moral convictions. So it might be claimed that one could continue to modify criteria for the knowledge of

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[1] The problem with Kierkegaard's discussion of Abraham in Fear and Trembling is that he does not adequately face up to the epistemological issue of how one is to know that the command which conflicts with the ethical is really God's command. See Søren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling and the Sickness Unto Death (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), pp. 9-132.

God's will indefinitely in such a way that autonomous moral convictions and beliefs about God's goodness would never conflict. But to take this approach is to make one's belief in God's goodness morally irrelevant, for it does not impose upon us an obligation to obey any particular command attributed to God. To make that sort of move is to grant the correctness of the autonomy thesis. Thus there must be some point at which one can no longer make modifications in (5), that is, in one's set of criteria for determining God's will, in order to protect (4), the belief in God's goodness, for it is precisely (5) that gives content to a particular religion. If one modifies it beyond a certain point he may still believe in the goodness of some God, but he has ceased to believe in the goodness of the God of any particular revelation or of any particular conception, e.g., the God of Israel, or the God and Father of Jesus Christ.

C. A Theological Interlude: What is the Will of God?

We are interested in what happens when what is thought to be the will of God conflicts with what our own intuitions or autonomous judgments tell us is good. For Christianity God's will is known through His revelation which is related in some way to the content of the Bible. How that revelation is understood determines where a decisive conflict between these two parts of one's beliefs can occur. A sound theological understanding of revelation should prevent it from occurring prematurely but not from occurring at all, for in the latter case it would have to remove all fixed content from revelation completely. The Scriptures themselves have an understanding of revelation as an unveiling, a

disclosure of what was previously hidden, and they also provide us with a basis for understanding the context, mode, and content of revelation. The Bible is to a great extent a history book which purports to relate the history of God's covenant people. What is not history sets the stage for this historical account or needs to be understood in relation to it. The locus of revelation is understood to be within this covenant people and its history, and the purpose of revelation has to do with the life of this covenant people, with its creation, sustaining, interpretation, re-direction, judgment, guidance, redemption, and fulfillment. To anticipate what will be presented below, the locus of revelation is the history of God's redemptive work, and the purpose of revelation is a redemptive purpose.

The mode of revelation within this history of the covenant people is primarily the word of God's messenger. There are other modes, theophanies, dreams, visions, etc., but these are usually just some of the ways of supplying the messenger with his message. The word of God's messenger, before or after the fact, often designates some event as in some way an act of God, gives an interpretation of the event indicating its significance for God's covenant people, and therefore also for the work of redemption, and/or commands some sort of action as appropriate in the light of the past, present, future, or possible future event and its significance. C. H. Dodd writes as follows:

> The pattern of history in which God's covenant with men is es-
> tablished /has/ two elements: (a) a direction of events, and
> (b) an interpretation of these events. These two elements in-
> teract. The message of the prophets arises out of the course
> of events; and because they interpreted them so and not other-
> wise, the history of God's people after the Exile took that
> form and no other; and so all through. The decisive significance

of the interaction is accounted for upon the Biblical postu-
late that God is <u>both</u> the Lord of history <u>and</u> the Interpreter
of His own action to the mind of men. . . . This total struc-
ture of event and interpretation is God's word to man.[1]

This holds true for the New Testament as well where such events as the

disciples' experiences of Jesus after his death gain their significance

from being interpreted in certain ways, e.g., in terms of the enthrone-

ment motifs of the royal Psalms and in terms of the conviction found in

the Psalms and in Deutero-Isaiah that God vindicates His servant. Even

when the word of the messenger does not seem to be related to any par-

ticular event, it is related to the history of the covenant people

shaped by such events and it uses concepts which are also shaped by this

history and these events.

For the Christian the Bible is the normative vehicle of revela-

tion in some way or other and has God-given authority, so it is with

the Biblical message that we may find a conflict with our own moral

judgments and convictions. Where do we find the normative message

within this variety of literature? According to the Biblical view of

revelation the prophetic messenger also speaks with God-given authority.

But, as Markus Barth comments, the granting of authority by God is not

the authorization to do whatever one likes, rather it involves a specif-

ic charge and calls for the fulfillment of a specific ministry. Gener-

alizing from the particular messenger to the Bible itself as a vehicle

of the message, it too would seem to be normative for the believer only

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[1] "Principles of Interpretation," in <u>Biblical Authority for</u>
<u>Today</u>, ed. Alan Richardson and Wolfgang Schweitzer (London: S. C. M.
Press, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1951), p. 159.

[2] <u>Conversation with the Bible</u> (New York: Holt, Reinhart and
Winston, 1964), p. 175.

in so far as it is fulfilling a specific ministry or task. The ministry
of individual messengers is usually understood to be the disclosure of
some aspect of God's intention toward men, or of what He wills that men
should do. These are embodied in threats, promises, commands, descrip-
tions of characteristics of God which men are called upon to reflect in
their own lives, and interpretations of events in which God's purpose
toward men is being carried out. The content of revelation is what God
is doing in the world to carry out His intention toward or purpose for
men, and what men ought to do as a consequence. Markus Barth, commenting
on the purpose for which God grants authority to particular men according
to the Bible, concludes that in every case it is for the sake of service
in the cause of redemption, and that this also includes those cases in
which authority is granted for the sake of performing the service of
conveying the divine revelation. Revelation, then, discloses God's
redeeming purpose for the sake of accomplishing that purpose. The Bible
as a whole then would seem to have the authority of divine revelation
for a believer in so far as it serves this purpose.

A crucial conflict can occur, therefore, where one's own moral
judgments and sentiments conflict with what is regarded as being a
direct consequence of God's redemptive purpose. Conflict can also
occur with respect to many particular alleged actions and commands of
God, but in most of these cases there is still the possibility of
avoiding any direct conflict between belief in the goodness of the God
who reveals Himself in the Biblical history and one's own autonomous

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[1] Conversation with the Bible, p. 176.

judgments because one can question whether intentions, actions, and commands are correctly attributed to God, whether particular practices might no longer serve the purpose for which they were originally intended because of changed circumstances, etc. One can do this without acting completely as an autonomous judge of the Scriptures as long as he can appeal for support to other passages or motifs having to do with God's purpose. This can be prevented from becoming a game of playing off one passage or motif against another in such a way that one's own judgments always prevail only if one overriding divine intention is understood as being the basic content of the revelation for which the Bible as a whole is the vehicle. This basic purpose or intention toward man is understood as being carried out in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and is understood in the light of these events as interpreted in terms of various images, parables, analogies, etc., which together give enough cognitive content to revelation that it can be clearly seen to point in some directions and not in others. When the basic thrust of divine action moves in certain directions and calls for men to witness to, imitate, or reflect the purpose being carried out in that action, then there is the possibility for a crucial conflict to occur between one's autonomous judgments and what is believed to be the will of God. For example, the demand that men forgive their enemies, not return evil for evil, love their neighbors, etc., all follow directly from beliefs about God's nature and activity and about His will that men further his purposes and rightly portray His character by imitating His activity. To reject these moral demands on the basis of one's autonomous criteria means to reject either the belief that God calls upon men to imitate his character and intention, or the belief that God has this particular

character and intention, or the belief that God is good. But to choose
any of these alternatives is to reject the central assertions of the
Christian faith and thus to give up Christianity. The fact that analy-
ses of public opinion show that probably a sizable majority of the
American people, certainly including many who think of themselves as
Christians, do not believe that such principles as those which call
for not hating one's enemies and not returning evil for evil are right
does not show that such principles do not follow from Christian theologi-
cal beliefs, rather it simply shows that many people who think of them-
selves as Christians have not the slightest idea of what Christianity
is all about.


D. Conclusion


We have seen that in many cases where a conflict seems to occur
between plausible autonomous moral considerations and what purports to
be the will of God, the most common and most plausible way of dealing
with this situation is to make adjustments in one's understanding of the
criteria for knowing the will of God. If this tactic is pushed too far,
however, one's belief that there is any knowledge of the will of God at
all which has any normative authority dies a death of continuous quali-
fication. We have argued that there is in Christianity, or at least in
some versions of it, a way of understanding revelation which allows one
to take this approach up to a certain point but which prohibits one from
going further. This is probably true of other religions also. It may
also be the case, however, that the defining concept of a religion is
a cluster concept so that there is no one element that cannot be given

up if certain other elements are retained. The retention of a certain

number of these elements, however, would still provide a limit as to how

far this method of avoiding a direct conflict between one's most funda-

mental theological convictions and one's basic moral beliefs can be

carried. If we wish to talk not only about some general understanding

of the will of God but about the will of God for a particular individual

in some particular circumstances, and if we believe that we have criteria

for discovering that will (e.g., reading the Scriptures in a certain way,

consulting the tradition of the Church, meditation, waiting for the inner

light, etc.), and if we arrive at a conflict with what seems to be right

on other grounds, then we do not even have to revise our methods, but

only to acknowledge that as carried out by fallible men they are not

completely reliable.

Before considering cases in which conflicts occur between what

an individual believes to be the will of God and autonomous moral judg-

ments it should be pointed out that for such a conflict to be signifi-

cant for our purposes it must occur within the system of beliefs of one

individual. Such a conflict does not necessarily occur in the case

in which what the believer regards as the will of God conflicts with

what other people conclude on the basis of an autonomous method, for

if the believer had used the same autonomousmethod his results might

have been different because of differences in his beliefs about reality,

attitudes, or psychological states, some of which may have been brought

about by his religious life, practices, experiences, or beliefs. Let

us suppose, therefore, that a particular individual is led to believe

that not-X is right on the basis of his own moral beliefs and attitudes

but then on the basis of his theological criteria concludes that God wills X. We have already claimed that there does not seem to be any prima facie reason to suppose that one should always make changes in his theological beliefs rather than rejecting an autonomous moral judgment. The fact that moral disagreements are widespread among those who claim that they are trying to be objective indicates that autonomous moral judgments may be almost as fallible as claims to know the will of God. Why should not an individual on some occasions reject such a judgment? If he rejects such a judgment he may also have to reject some principle from which it follows, and in turn he may have to reject one of his most basic principles. So if this conflict directly or indirectly involves a very basic moral principle, then the individual may have to make radical adjustments in his whole moral outlook. But may it not be the case that many people's total moral outlook needs radical revision? Perhaps the basic moral principle has never been challenged by the individual's use of the qualified attitude method. We have already indicated that this method seems to be supported both by the very concept of morality itself, which seems to presuppose some sort of ideal consensus, and by the Christian's belief that man is created in the image of God so that in so far as he could approximate the conditions, such as impartiality and adequate knowledge, for attaining the status of an ideal observer, his judgments would tend to coincide with the will of God. We may not, therefore, be in a position to abandon such a method completely, at least in principle, and still use moral language. The rejection of a particular moral judgment, or even of a moral principle of the most fundamental kind, because it conflicts with what seems to be the will of God, does not, however, require that such an independent method of

arriving at moral judgments be abandoned entirely, but only that its fallibility and the possibility of its leading us into error be recognized. Even as the Christian has within his set of beliefs a belief about man's being created in the image of God which gives some theological backing to the expectation that ideally men's attitudes should reflect God's will, he also has within his set of beliefs one that explains why in fact they do not. The first belief is that man is a creature "whom amid the rest of creation /God/ has determined to be His image, i.e., the mirror and the reflection of His own being."[1] The second belief is that on the other hand man "is the sinner who perverts this determination by trying to determine himself for equality with God."[2] That man is a sinner who would like to be his own god implies that he has dispositions, attitudes, prejudices, a lack of sensitivity to the feelings and interests of others, etc., which not only hinder him from successfully getting close to meeting such conditions as impartiality, but also hinder him from even wanting to do so where he senses that the results might conflict with his own interests or prejudices, and also allow him to deceive himself into thinking that he has done so, when in fact he has not even tried. In the light of this belief about human nature, and in particular about himself, the believer has good reason in many cases not to repudiate the authority of what he believes to be the will of God because it is in conflict with his autonomous moral judgments.

But surely, the proponent of the strong autonomy thesis might reply, even if everything that has been maintained up until now is true, it must still be the case that for one to have good reason to treat the

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[1] Karl Barth, Dogmatics, II, II, p. 560.    [2] Ibid.

will of God as an authority which can override one's own moral judgment, that will must correspond with one's autonomous moral judgments in a significant way at some points in one's life. Otherwise the believer would not continue to hold his theological beliefs, or at least he would either not be rational or not be moral in doing so. This would seem to be true. Even if the believer in so far as he is a believer is not in the position to pass judgment on God's commands, it is still the case that in order for him to be and to remain a believer he must "accept as right what God does,"[1] He certainly does not trust in God's action because God commands him to nor accept it as right because he is ordered to do so. To acknowledge this, however, does not mean that one must accept the view that God's will must be judged to be good on the basis of criteria that an individual would have accepted even if he did not accept certain religious beliefs, or have certain religious experiences related to these beliefs, or engage in certain practices of that religion. Suppose in fact that a particular individual does criticize his moral beliefs using something like Brandt's qualified attitude method. Since his preferences, feelings of obligation, sense of injustice, etc., are then important factors the results he achieves may be very different if he accepts certain religious beliefs and recognizes their significance, or engages in some practice, or undergoes some experience, than they would have been otherwise, and may actually have been if the influence of this religion is a new element in his life. This is because these preferences and feelings are different, for there are psychological as well as logical relationships between religious beliefs and practices

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[1] Karl Barth, _Dogmatics_, II, II, p. 579.

on one hand, and moral beliefs on the other. Religious doctrine or
experience, or religious life and practice (such as prayer and worship),
may by changing a person's frame of mind lead him to accept a different
"autonomous" method of reaching moral conclusions than he used previously,
e.g., one that qualifies his own preferences to a greater extent, or may
allow him to use any method more impartially and objectively, or may
change some of the attitudes, preferences, and feelings which he uses
as data.[1] In the case of Christianity, for example, a person who pre-
viously would have regarded with scepticism or disdain the claim that
he ought to forgive his enemies, or show mercy toward the weak, or
accept all men as his brothers and equals without their having to demon-
strate that they have "earned" that privilege, might, under the influ-
ence and practice of the Christian faith, come to see himself as the
weak and sinful one who has not earned any status before God, but who
is nevertheless the recipient of the forgiveness and mercy of God and
who would be lost without it. This could certainly change his whole
perspective in a number of ways. First, the humbling experience of
seeing such relationships from a different end could change his judg-
ments in ways suggested above. Secondly, where he sees that his own
hopes are tied to God's unearned benevolent action toward him he would
find it very difficult not to acquiesce in, approve, and "accept as
right" God's intention toward him, and therefore mercy and forgiveness
in general. Thirdly, where the mercy and forgiveness of God toward

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[1] See R. N. Smart, "The Perfect Good," _Australasian Journal of
Philosophy_, XXXIII (1955), pp. 190-192. This is in reply to C. B.
Martin's paper of the same title which is now incorporated in his
_Religious Belief_.

him are presented as dependent upon a larger total purpose of recon-
ciling men to God and to each other and so establishing the Kingdom
of God, he should find it difficult not to accept this total purpose
as right (with the consequences indicated in Chapter III, section E).

Suppose in such a frame of mind a person comes to affirm that
God, as portrayed by a particular religious tradition as having a cer-
tain purpose toward man, is supremely good, and so trusts in God as
thus portrayed. Suppose that later, in a different frame of mind or
psychological state, when his faith in God and his religious beliefs do
not have such a strong grasp on him, the moral judgments he makes on
the basis of his attitudes, dispositions, etc., no longer always co-
incide with what he believes to be the will of God according to his
theological criteria. Is it irrational for him to believe that it was
at the time when his own moral judgments and intuitions did coincide
with what he accepted as the will of God that he saw matters correctly,
so that now he should treat the will of God as an authority which can
override his own moral judgments? I do not see the slightest reason
to answer that question affirmatively, especially since the believer
has, as indicated above, a belief--in this case a belief about his own
sinfulness--to account for this discrepancy and to justify letting
God's will as he understands it override his autonomous moral judgments.
We should, however, take note of several things. First, we are talking
about situations in which to make further adjustments in the criteria
for knowing God's will would be a fruitless and self-defeating under-
taking. In Christianity, as we have understood it in agreement with
Barth, what the individual is commanded to do is to act in accordance

with attitudes that reflect God's intention to men and therefore also
to the individual, but a necessary condition (although perhaps not a
sufficient one) for having faith is seeing God's intention, as portrayed
in a particular way, as good. To reject God's command, therefore, is
to reject either that God's intention or purpose is what it is portrayed
to be, that it is good, or that God should have commanded me to reflect
that intention in my attitudes and actions. To adjust the criteria for
knowing the intention of God in such cases so that I do not have to
believe that He commands me to do what I don't want to do, however, is
self defeating, for it is precisely because I did understand the inten-
tion of God in that particular way that I came to trust in God and to
affirm and accept as right what He does in the first place. To reject
the goodness of God's purpose, or to regard His will that I reflect that
purpose as misguided or wrong are also alternatives that undermine the
grounds for belief. Secondly, in such situations the extent to which
one is unwilling to let God's will override his autonomous judgments
is the extent to which one ceases to be a believer. Thirdly, this is
not merely a matter of inductive generalization so that if my autonomous
judgments coincide with what I understand to be the will of God more
often than not, I am rational in following the purported will of God
in the minority of cases in which they conflict. Perhaps an individual
needs to be convinced that he has clearly seen the goodness of God's
purpose and therefore of the command to reflect it and witness to it
only once, for him to allow that command to have authority to override
the judgments based on probabilities that come forth out of what is per-
haps the confusion of his conflicting inclinations and feelings. How
is one to say that this is wrong or irrational?

Whether or not we have accepted the autonomy thesis and whether
or not we have refuted it depends on what one takes it to be.  If the
autonomy thesis is simply a claim that one can make some valid moral
judgments without reference to God, His will, or His purpose, then it
seems to be true.  This is what we have called the weak autonomy thesis.
It is less clear what the strong autonomy thesis is.  If it asserts
that one can have a complete system of morality which is valid without
reference to the existence, purpose, or nature of God, then whether it
is true or not depends upon whether in fact God exists and what His
purposes are.  If God is as He is portrayed by Christianity, then no
system of morality that fails to take account of Him can be ultimately
valid, for it would fail to take into account a major part of the con-
text of the individual's actions.  If it means that for us to have
reason to accept the will of God, God has to command in accordance with
an obligation to achieve the good which he is under, however that good
happens to be understood by an individual, or by a consensus of man-
kind, then it seems to be false.  If it means that there are things
which we could imagine a very powerful "supernatural" being commanding
which we ought not to do, then it seems to be true.  If it means that
there is something impossible, irrational, or immoral about a particular
person accepting what he regards as a divine command as an authority
which at a given time can override his own autonomous moral judgments
then it seems to be false.  If it means that in order to be rational
the believer must have judged God's will to be good while sharing only
the beliefs and presuppositions and attitudes of a secular sceptic and
while not under the influence of religious experience or practices, then

it seems to be false. If it means that the believer can only be rational in allowing God's will to override his own judgments if he can make an inductive generalization from the number of times that God's will was right in the past to the conclusion that it is probably always right, then it seems to be false. If it simply means that at some points in the life of the believer what he understands God's intention or will to be must coincide with what he judges to be right according to his qualified attitudes, feelings, dispositions, etc., then it seems to be true, for otherwise how could a person be a believer, that is, one who trusts in, loves, and praises God, and acquiesces in and accepts as right what God does. But if that is all it means, then it seems to be both trivial and obvious. If it means that in order to be rational the believer must keep open the possibility that on some occasions he may have to allow something within his set of theological beliefs to be rejected in the light of his autonomous moral judgments, then it would seem to be true, but it would assert no more than that a criterion of rationality that applies to all of a person's beliefs applies here also.

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