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Robert Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. Pp. xiv, 410.

In *Finite and Infinite Goods*, Adams develops a sophisticated and richly detailed Platonic-theistic framework for ethics. The view is Platonic in virtue of being Good-centered; it is theistic both in identifying God with the Good and, more distinctively, in including a divine command theory of moral obligation. Readers familiar with Adams's earlier divine command theory will recall that in response to the worry that God might command something evil, Adams introduced an independent value constraint, claiming that only the commands of a loving God were fit to constitute moral obligations. In *Finite and Infinite Goods* he develops this notion of a loving and good God in what is now a fundamentally Good-centered ethical framework with a subordinate divine command theory of moral obligation. There is much of worth here, especially for theists wishing to think through the merits of a good-based theistic ethics, but also for those nontheists like myself who have a general interest in the nature of value and obligation.

In part 1, "The Nature of the Good," Adams develops his theistic conception of a transcendent Good. The argument has two parts. First, he explains the sense in which God and the Good are identical. Distinguishing between the semantics and metaphysics of ethical discourse, he claims that while 'good' and 'God' do not mean the same thing, they may in fact refer to the same entity. In his view, the meaning of 'good' determines only the *role* the good must play. The best candidate for this role will determine its *nature* (15–16). For both nontheists and theists alike, Adams thinks the meaning of good includes a commitment to realism and the idea that goodness is the object of admiration, pursuit, and successful recognition (18–20). In his view, a Platonic understanding of the good is a strong candidate for this role, and he spends much of part 1 arguing that the good is both transcendent (against naturalistic theories) and a form of excellence (against welfare-centered, and particularly desire satisfaction, theories). In defending his theistic interpretation of the transcendent Good, Adams does not first attempt to prove that God exists; instead, he simply tries to show how his account would illuminate central ethical concepts such as the good, ideal motivation, and obligation.

In part 2, "Loving the Good," Adams articulates a Platonic-theistic ideal of motivation centered around love of the Good. His chief aim here is to address the concern that ideal love might be so exclusively concerned with excellence in the beloved that it could not appreciate the beloved for his or her own sake. To dispel this worry, Adams develops a nuanced account of nonteleological, qualitative reasons for love that is meant to capture both love's reason-responsiveness and its noninstrumental character. In part 3, "The Good and the

Right," Adams departs from this Good-centered theory, arguing that a distinct account of obligation is required because, unlike the good, obligation concerns what we *have* to do and is essentially tied to social requirements and sanctions such as guilt (232–33). Having an obligation, he thinks, consists in being commanded by another person to do something and appropriately subject to sanctions for failing to obey. For an obligation to count as genuinely *moral*, however, the relationship, the commander, and the commands themselves must be judged excellent according to independently established moral and nonmoral value criteria (244–45). In his theistic version of this approach, divine commands constitute facts of moral obligation provided that the divine-human relationship, the deity who issues commands, and the command themselves are good (252–55). This appeal to independently established values to determine the authority of divine commands makes it clear that Adams's divine command theory is importantly subordinate to an independent conception of the Good. It is not the case that *whatever* a deity commands constitutes a binding moral obligation; rather, a divine command is fit to constitute an obligation only if it and its divine source are judged to be excellent. Finally, in part 4, "The Epistemology of Value," Adams appeals to both general and special revelation to explain how values and obligations can be known.

I have two concerns about this account. To begin, given the method that Adams uses to discover God's nature, it is unclear whether his claim that God is the best candidate for the Good has any content. Instead of attempting to determine God's nature by appealing to religious scriptures and tradition, inferences from nonmoral phenomena, or any other nonethical reflection, he begins with the idea that 'God' is the supremely perfect being and attempts to establish God's nature through substantive ethical reflection about which qualities are excellent. His nearly complete reliance on ethical thinking to establish God's nature, especially in his account of divine love, makes the claim that God is the best candidate for the Good appear trivial. Nor is his divine command theory able to provide independent input, since divine commands must themselves be evaluated by beliefs about the Good (256, 264, 284). Despite Adams's explicit acknowledgement that it would be inappropriate to use prior standards of excellence in thinking about what God is like (49 n. 46), this appears to be how he proceeds.

This is related to a less philosophical, more religious, worry some theists will have regarding the extent to which ethics limits theology in Adams's framework. Epistemically, a vision of the Good—and God as the Good—is supposed to "control" reflections about God's nature (284). The result is that a conception of God's nature will be answerable to current human beliefs about goodness. Likewise, as indicated above, the authority of a deity depends on that deity's being a good candidate for the 'Good' (281), which places ethical limits on divine sovereignty.

My second criticism concerns Adams's divine command theory. As explained above, he rejects a traditional divine command theory according to which God's will, however arbitrarily exercised, provides the ultimate ground of both value and obligation. He claims instead that God's commands constitute moral obligations only if the commands, deity, and divine-human relationship are good (252–55, 281). The first of these conditions is particularly important. For a command to be "good," Adams thinks it must be grounded in something of real value; likewise, he thinks wrong action as such is opposed to the good (232). While this distinguishes Adams's view from the traditional theory, it also threatens to eliminate any essential role for divine commands to play in constituting moral obligations, for it highlights the sense in which in commanding actions as obligatory God's will must respond to values that provide reasons for willing and commanding one way rather than another. In Adams's framework, the reasons that make commands good are normatively prior to those commands and ground their authority. Thus, it is these reasons, and ultimately God's nature, that seem to provide the normative foundation for moral obligations, not God's will or commands.

Adams offers two responses to this kind of objection. First, he suggests that knowledge of which divine commands have *actually* been issued is necessary because there is no unique set of commands that a good God would issue. However, his two examples of where a good God might appropriately exercise discretion in commanding are at the far edges of morality, one where core moral values are not at stake (religious ceremonies), the other where their balance is very unclear (euthanasia) (255–56). They are not cases where God has discretion to require actions that oppose important values. If reasons for commanding are so determinate that discretion is very narrowly restricted, commands seem left with no central constitutive role. Second, Adams suggests that actual commands have more "motivational or reason-generating power" (256). However, it is difficult to see what additional normative force *actual* commands should be thought to have beyond what they possess in virtue of being *appropriately* commanded.

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