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Tel: 616-387-4397

Fax: 616-387-4390

ethicscenter@wmich.edu

<http://www.wmich.edu/ethics>

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Morality and God

John Hare
Calvin College
Department of Philosophy

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John Hare

John Hare is professor of philosophy at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He is the author of *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance* (Oxford, 1996) and *Ethics and International Affairs* co-authored with Carey B. Joynt. Other books written by John Hare are, *God's Call* (Eerdmans 2000) and *Plato's Euthyphro*, (Bryn Mawr, 1981, 1985 (2nd Ed.)). His next book, on the subject of morality and God, will be published by InterVarsity Press in 2002.

Prof. Hare's forthcoming book will draw on material from the present paper.

Morality and God

My topic today is the connection between morality as we are familiar with it in our culture and, on the other hand, the beliefs and practices of traditional Christianity. My thesis is that morality in the tradition made sense against the background of a set of theological premises, and that in elite Western culture these premises have now been largely abandoned. The result is, I will claim, that morality no longer makes sense in the way it did. There are three problem areas in particular that I will stress. The first is the gap between the moral demand on us and our natural capacities to meet it. The second is the source of the authority of morality. The third is whether a commitment to morality is consistent with our own long-term happiness.

One good place to begin is the moral theory of Immanuel Kant, who lived in Prussia at the end of the eighteenth century. He is, as I see it, the dominant figure in Modern Western philosophy, not just in Ethics (though that is what I will talk about today). Ethical theory since Kant has been a succession of attempts either to recover his system or to reject it in the light of new conceptual circumstances. What I want to claim is that Kant still understands the dependence on Christian doctrine. And he sees that his system cannot work if this doctrine is discarded. His successors have tried to do Kantian theory without this doctrine. If I am right about Kant, we can then look to see if his successors have provided any substitute which can do the work which Kant needed Christian doctrine to do for him. If not, then their systems will be defective for just the reasons Kant described.

The interpretation of Kant in this area is controversial. What has happened in the secondary interpretive literature of the twentieth cen-

ture is that the Christian references in the great classics of modern philosophy have been systematically down played or ignored or excluded. If you think religious commitments are nonsense yourself, it is tempting to weed them out of your favorite authors. But it leads to distortion none the less. Thus we are told by a contemporary Kant scholar (Lewis White Beck) that whole sections of the First Critique, where Kant sounds theist, are only there because of clumsy editing, and that if Kant had been more careful he would have left them out. Or we are told that Kant is afraid of the Prussian censor, (Wood) 'Kant's statement of his argument seems encumbered with a certain tact, or even fear, which makes him reluctant to express with perfect candor what he really thinks.' All of these interpretations end up with Kant rejecting traditional belief, but saying what he did not really mean for reasons of carelessness or self-protection. I do not deny that this is possible. But this kind of interpretation should be a technique of last resort, if there is no other way to make sense of the text. In the case of Kant, there is a good way to make sense of these texts in which I will be referring to, if we suppose that Kant is quite sincere in what I shall call 'the vertical dimension' of his moral philosophy. He genuinely believes that the moral life makes no sense without God.

I will proceed by taking the three areas I listed in which I see an important connection between the practice of morality as we are familiar with it and the Christian religion. The first of these areas is what I call 'the moral gap'. This is the gap between the moral demand on us and our natural capacities to live by it. Morality is seen, in this picture, as a three-part structure, of which the first two parts are the moral demand and our natural capacity and the third is a possible being who can live by the demand and who is its source. I will start by

saying something about the nature of the demand. The center of the demand, as Kant sees it, is the requirement of impartial benevolence. This is not the whole of morality, but it is the heart of it. Kant gives various forms of what he claims is the supreme principle of morality, and I will mention two. When an agent proposes an action to herself, she does it with some account to herself of the reason why she should do it. Kant says that if her action is going to be morally permissible, she has to be willing to propose that anyone in her kind of situation should do that kind of action for that kind of reason. That would turn her proposal into a universal law for what should be done in such circumstances. Let me give you an example to make this clearer. Suppose she is a college professor, it is January and she has a huge stack of student papers to grade. Suppose she hates grading papers, she hates January in Michigan, and the thought occurs to her that she could leave the papers and fly to the Bahamas for a few days and soak in the sun. Then when she gets home she can take the whole pile of papers up to the top of the stairs and throw them down, and any paper which gets on the bottom step gets an A, and on the next step an A- and on the next step a B+, and so on. She could save herself hours and hours of time and have a lovely weekend. Now the question is whether this action together with this motivation is morally permissible.

Kant says no, because she will find that she cannot will that anyone in such a situation should act so. Consider the hypothetical situation in which she is not the professor, but one of the students, perhaps one of the students whose admission to medical school is in the balance, depending on his cumulative average, and who has just put hours and hours into this paper as a result. Can she will for this situa-

tion that the professor grade the papers in this haphazard way? She cannot. What this Kantian test does is to require that any reference to a particular person, including herself, is eliminated. If she is willing the action for anyone in a certain kind of situation, she cannot preserve reference to herself or any other individual. So she has to will that the same action should be done if the particular people in her particular situation were to reverse their roles: if she were to become the student and the student were to become the professor. Kant's principle is thus a version of the golden rule that we should do to others only what we wish they should do to us. But Kant's version has this additional feature that it connects with the nature of reason itself. For it is the nature of reason in all its employments to seek the universal. In science, for example, reason looks for the universal law. It is not interested in whether this particular podium would make a particular sound if a particular lecturer pushed it over. Rather, science wants to discover the universal law governing the sound made by objects of a certain mass falling with a certain velocity onto surfaces of a certain structure. Kant tells us that reason is the same in moral life: it wants to discover the universal law governing situations of the kind we are in and what we should do in them.

So this is the first version of the supreme principle of morality. The second version is that we should treat humanity, whether in ourselves or anyone else, always at the same time as an end and never merely as a means. Kant goes on to explain that to treat another person as an end in herself is to share her goals and purposes as far as the moral law allows. He is not saying that I am forbidden to use another person for my purposes, as you are using me for your education. But he is saying I am forbidden to use another person merely for my pur-

poses. For example, you are at a restaurant and the waitress brings you your food. Do you think of her merely as a kind of conveyer belt on legs, to get the food from the kitchen to your table? Or do you consider that she too is a person, with goals and purposes of her own. She may be tired and she may have had a long day facing grouchy people like you. To treat her as an end is to share her purposes, that is, to make her purposes your purposes, as far as the moral law allows. She wants a friendly face, though not too friendly. Is there something morally wrong about this? No, then you should want to give it to her. Note that you have to treat humanity this way also in your own person. Kant is not saying that you treat yourself as a doormat, a mere means to supply other people's preferences. You have to respect also yourself, as having the same worth (but morally no greater worth) than any other human being's. To see why these two versions of the supreme principle of morality are so demanding, consider the following case. You are considering going to a movie for seven dollars, or so, and it occurs to you that seven dollars could keep someone alive for a week in, say, Zambia. You may doubt this, but there are actually a billion people in the world who live on less than a dollar a day. I myself lived in India for about a year, teaching, and my salary was the equivalent of about a dollar a day, slightly less. My daughter Catherine has just come back from working in Zambia for six months, where the per capita income is \$380 a year. Moreover the rate of HIV infection is about 30% and the country is full of orphans whose extended family cannot feed their own children, let alone take in extra. Now is the purpose of staying alive for a week morally permissible? Yes. So you should share that person's purpose. But which is more important, the movie or the life? If you did not know which role you were going

to play in this situation, the starving child or the upwardly mobile student, which would you choose? In Christian terms, we could put it this way. Christ says, about feeding the hungry, 'in as far as you do it to the least of these my brethren, you do it unto me.' So which is more important to Christ, the movie or the life? We can come back to this if you like after the lecture.

This, then, is the moral demand, the first part of the structure of the moral gap. If I am right about this structure, the second part is our natural capacities, those we were born with, and those capacities are not adequate to the demand. Kant has a version of the traditional doctrine of original sin. His version goes back into the history of the pietist Lutheranism that he grew up in. It comes to Luther through Ockham and Scotus and behind him Anselm, and behind him Augustine. The way Duns Scotus puts it is that there are two basic affections of the will, if you like, two pulls. There is the pull towards one's own advantage, and the pull towards what is good in itself. We humans are born with, and will always experience both pulls. But the key moral question is which we put first. Kant explains this in terms of duty and happiness. Do we put duty first, and do what will make us happy only if it is consistent with duty? Or do we put happiness first, and do our duty only to the extent that it will make us happy? To think this second way is to be under the evil principle, which subordinates duty to happiness. And Kant says we are all born this way. This means we cannot be impartial, for we put ourselves first. And this also means that we cannot make ourselves impartial. For the evil principle, he says, is our root principle, and if the root is corrupt it cannot heal itself. My experience in talking about this view to people is that some of them think it is too pessimistic. They think, for example, that we

are born basically good, and we do such horrible things to each other mostly because we do not understand what we are doing. My reply to this is to point to cases where people know perfectly well how much they are hurting each other, but do it anyway. My wife used to supervise recess at an elementary school. She noticed that these children, who had been together for several years, had established a pecking order, like chickens in a coop; and that those at the bottom of this hierarchy were bullied into a state of misery, which she thought, might leave permanent psychological damage. My point is that the kids doing this damage knew precisely how to torment those beneath them. Or consider a dysfunctional marriage, in which the two partners have refined to an art-form the techniques of wounding each other. Even if we discount what you might think are extreme cases, think again about the movie. There are some initial responses to this dilemma. Movies are an art form, and art has its own deep value. But suppose it is Rocky VI? I am an interpreter of the culture, I may say, and I need to see the movie to do this job well. But perhaps Rocky I, II, III, IV and V were enough? I need some relaxation, I might say, otherwise I will grow weary with well-doing, and burn out. But am I really on the verge of burnout when I go, and what about a walk in the woods? I need to spend time with my family, I may say, and indeed I think I can justify spending more resources on my own children. But is the movie really the best way to spend time with them? I think that after we have given all these sorts of reasons, we will realize that there is something unjust about the way we are spending our money. And this is not just the movie, but also the CD player, the new couch, the down jacket. Impartiality, as Kant lays this out, turns out to make a demand on us that we reduce significantly our standard of living. And I think

the demand is too high for us by our natural capacities. I find myself switching off when the pictures of starving children come on, because I just cannot face it. Moreover our culture is full of devices to weaken any inclination we originally had. The retailers in the Mall do not want us to think about justice while we are shopping. In Grand Rapids, the largest mall has just stopped even the Salvation Army from collecting at Christmas time.

These two features of the gap-picture, namely the demand and our defective capacities, have been repeated by most of the theorists of morality who followed Kant. The remarkable fact is that they have also repeated a third feature of this picture. They postulate a being who could exist, even if it doesn't, who is able to live by the demand, and whose prescriptions about how we should live are authoritative for us. This postulated being is given many different names and descriptions. What is typical of all these postulated beings, however, is that they are without the usual human limitations. This pattern needs explanation. Why should morality be presented as having this shape, rather than what we might otherwise have expected - a purely human institution, tied to our human conditions of limitation? I think the overwhelmingly plausible answer is that this gap-shape is a remnant, a relic. It is the remains of a traditional view, according to which human beings are subordinate to a divine being, who is without their limitations and whose prescriptions about their lives they are supposed to obey.

I do not want to limit this traditional view to Christianity, or even to the three great monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. There is already in Aristotle the description of a gap-shaped morality. The best life, he tells us, would be superior to the human

level, but we ought not to follow the proverb writers, and ‘think human, since (we) are human, or think mortal, since (we) are mortal.’ Rather, as far as we can, we ought to be immortal (NE X, 7). The gap picture, I think, goes beyond Western culture. Chu Hsi, a Chinese neo-Confucian of the Twelfth Century, held that for most of us our good nature ‘is like a pearl lying in muddy water’, which means that we cannot see through to the right principles. (Conversations, 4).

Now the description of the life in this moral gap, without anything added to it, would be (Kant thinks) incoherent. This is because of another feature of morality that is to be found in Kant and his descendants, and in the traditional view as well. This feature can be expressed succinctly as the view that ‘ought’ implies ‘can’, though there are some senses of ‘ought’ where this view is incorrect. I think the best way to put the correct view is that the question whether you ought to do something does not arise unless you can do it. To see the appeal of this principle, consider this example. If my son cannot yet control his bladder, and has an accident, it is not merely stupid to blame him, but it goes against the whole point of blaming. It is a cardinal principle of child-rearing that you should only hold children accountable to standards that they are able to reach. And another way to put that is to say that ‘ought’ implies ‘can’. But then if our capacities are really inadequate to the moral demand, it is not the case that we ought to live by it. It is incoherent to put us under a demand we cannot reach. Yet Kant is sure that we are under the moral demand. This is what he calls ‘the fact of reason’, and it is his axiom, his starting point.

Christian doctrine has something to add to the gap-picture of morality to help with this difficulty. The gap-picture has three compo-

nents; first, the demand, second our capacities, and third the at least possible holy being. What Christianity adds is that the third part of this picture (namely the at least possible holy being) intervenes in human affairs so as to change the second part of this picture (namely our capacities) so that they become adequate to the first part of the picture (namely the moral demand). Just how God is supposed to do this is the topic of another lecture. My point today is, as I already mentioned, that this feature of Christianity has completely dropped out of the professional literature in moral theory. But this means that contemporary moral philosophy is faced with the threat of the incoherence I have just described. It has responded to this threat in essentially three ways.

First, there are philosophers who exaggerate our initial capacity so that it becomes adequate to the demand, which is held constant. One conspicuous example is the utilitarian theorists who hold that if we were only vividly aware of the effects of our actions on other people, we would tend to do what morality requires. It is thus ignorance which holds us back, they say, not any radical evil of the will. Such theorists need to explain how it is that people who know perfectly well how much they are harming the people affected by their actions nevertheless persist in the most horrifying contempt and cruelty. John Stuart Mill, the great utilitarian, thought that the twentieth century was going to be one of moral progress through education and public opinion, but it has been the bloodiest in human history.

The second strategy is to hold our capacities constant, and adjust the demand downwards in order to meet it. This is typical of the type of moral theory which diminishes the moral demand by saying that we are not, after all, required to be impartial, and our moral obliga-

tions are just to particular people, who are embedded within the special relations we have to them as friends and family and members of our community. We do not, for example, have moral obligations to starving children in Africa, because they are not related to us in the right way. This makes the moral demand much closer to our natural tendency to restrict our care to those close to us. But theorists of this kind have to explain our perception that we do have these moral obligations outside our special relations, and that reducing the moral demand in this way will make the world a worse place than it already is. One example is that kind of evolutionary ethics which holds that the good is the desirable, and the desirable is what humans generally desire taking their history as a whole, especially during those periods of hunting and gathering when evolution was operating on them. Thinking of the good this way may get us to altruism towards kin and tribe. But it will not get us to impartial benevolence of the kind I have defined.

The third strategy is to hold both the demand and our capacities constant, and then to try to find some substitute for divine assistance in bridging the resultant gap. One example here is a different type of evolutionary ethics, like that of Teilhard de Chardin, who thought that our genes were going to change because the kind of aggressiveness and tribalism we now display are no longer adaptive for us. Here natural selection is most helpfully seen, I think, as a substitute for divine assistance. But there are other candidates. Perhaps, as for Rousseau, love of the country given the right kind of state, will change our capacities. Or perhaps, on the contrary, it is the withering away of the state and giving the working class ownership of the means of production that will give us new capacities, as Marx thought. To discuss this

strategy carefully requires going through these alternatives, and examining whether they work.

I need to go on to the second area I distinguished at the beginning of this talk. The first was the picture of the moral gap. The second is the source of the authority of morality. We can ask the question, 'Why should I be moral?', where this is not the question 'What do I get out of being moral?', but the question 'Why should I accept the moral demand as a demand upon me?'. Why shouldn't I go down to the Bahamas? One response is to say that this would in the end make me unhappy. But the present question is a different one. Why should I keep to the moral demand, regardless of my happiness? To put this another way, why is morality trumps?

Contemporary moral philosophy has tried various answers to this question. One is that reason demands it. As I said earlier, Kant himself thought that it was the nature of reason to will universal law, and it demands this not only in theoretical thinking about science (for example) but in practical thinking about what to do. But he thought he could base morality on this, and this is one place where I think his argument fails. I cannot go into all the details here. But I think morality is not in fact exclusively universal. I think there are particular moral obligations that we have to particular people, which are not just obligations that anyone would have to anyone else in this sort of situation. For example, there are duties we have to God which are not just duties to anyone who was like God in the relevant respects. A second difficulty is that there are universal laws which eliminate reference to the agent in the way Kant requires, but which would be im-

moral to will. An example would be the homophobic principle which prescribes hatred of all homosexuals.

Another answer we might propose is that the source of the moral obligation is the community we belong to. We have grown up in a community that respects the moral law, and our identity as agents is at least in part formed by that community. Socrates says that the city is like a parent; it has made us what we are. Perhaps to be true to ourselves, therefore, we have to acknowledge the authority of the moral demand which our community instilled into us. The problem with this is that it is relativistic. I grew up in a community that was socially stratified by class. My nanny told me that gentlemen polished the backs of their shoes. Ordinary people polish the fronts, but only gentlemen the backs. My family on my mother's side has lived in the same enormous house for about six hundred years. But I have become increasingly uneasy with this stratification. It does not follow from the fact that I grew up a certain way, that I am obliged to continue that way. The community does not have that sort of authority.

A third possibility is that nature grounds the authority of morality. Some theorists think that you can derive normative conclusions about how we ought to live from factual premises about what kind of people we are and what we are naturally inclined towards. One problem with this is that if you have a robust conception of the evil in us, then you will think that some of the lives we naturally aim at, with power and prestige at the heart of them, will not be good even though we do naturally aim at them. For power and prestige are competitive goods, in the sense that one person can only have them if other people do not, or at least have less of them. One variant of this strategy of founding ethics on nature is to claim that evolution can provide a

foundation for ethics in the way I already mentioned. This line of thought, which derives the good from what humans generally desire, is not wrong to think that we do naturally desire the competitive goods like power and prestige. But it is wrong to think that just because we generally desire them, they are good.

Finally, we might say that it is simply self-evident that morality is authoritative. Perhaps morality is like perception. It is self-evident, we might say, when I see a goldfinch in good light, that I am justified in believing that there is goldfinch there. I have no objection to the notion of perceptual beliefs like this being properly basic. If everything had to be justified, then it would turn out that nothing could be. We do have to start somewhere, and perception seems like one good place. But the problem with this answer is that it is no help in those cases where I do not feel the force of the moral demand. Morality is unlike perception this way. I do not have the experience of waking up in the morning and just not trusting my senses. But I do have the experience of moral apathy or listlessness, of simply not feeling the authority of the moral demand. I know my duty, but I turn over and go back to sleep.

Christianity has an answer to the question 'Why should I be moral?' which is different from any of the above. It says that I should be moral because God tells me to be so. This is the divine command theory of ethics. In one way this is like the previous answer. For if you ask me, 'Why should I do what God tells me to do?', I may answer, 'Because God is the end or goal of everything.' But if you ask me to justify that, I may not be able to do so, except by referring to Scripture and the tradition, whose authority you might not accept. So I have ended up in the same position of starting from a premise I have

not justified. But I don't think there is anything wrong with this in principle. And I have taken the justification a couple of steps further. If I am indeed having difficulty being moved by my duty, it may help to think that this is what God wants me to do. It will help if I care about what God wants.

There is an objection that is often made to divine command theory. It was made by Socrates. Paraphrasing Socrates slightly, he presents us with two options. One is that the good is good because God wills it, and God makes it good. The other is that God wills the good because it is good, and it is the goodness of a thing that makes God choose it. Socrates opts for the second option: God wills the good because it is good. His argument for this is unclear, but his preference is clearly to say that the good has an intrinsic character of its own: it is not made good by God's willing it. The worry here is that if God did make something good just by willing it, the good would be arbitrary; for God could make just anything at all good in this way. I think there is a solution to this if we see that God and we share the purpose of our good, which is union with God. But the route to this end, which is the second part of the Ten Commandments, is chosen by God from many possibilities, and is good because God chooses it. If this is right, then the dichotomy proposed in the Euthyphro dilemma is a false dichotomy. The good is good because God wills it and God wills it because it is good. Kant's language is that God and we belong together in the kingdom of which God is the head and we are merely members, and in this kingdom we share each other's morally permitted purposes. In particular, we share the goal of everyone being morally good and everyone being happy. But this does not always mean that I understand how this goal is going to be reached by doing what I think God is tell-

ing me to do. I have been in situations where I thought God was telling me to do something and I did not understand why God was telling me to do it. But I believe God is not arbitrarily making the good good, but he is choosing a route to something that I also value, to a purpose that we share, even if I do not always understand how the route is going to get me there.

We can now go for the remainder of the talk to the third area I distinguished at the beginning. I am going to discuss the idea of moral faith, taking the term from Kant. I have already discussed in the first part of this paper the point that a moral agent needs to believe that she can, over the course of her life as a whole, will what is morally good. She has to believe that her capacities have been transformed inside her, so to speak. Now I want to add a different point, that she has to believe that the world outside her is the kind of place in which happiness is reliably connected with a morally good life. To put this another way, she needs to believe that she does not have to do what is morally bad in order to be happy. The internal transformation is where Christian doctrine talks about atonement and justification. For the remainder of today's lecture I will be talking about the external conditions for the moral life, the agent's moral faith in Providence. Providence is a moral order behind or within the universe, which allows it to make moral sense. The moral agent who has moral faith in Providence can foresee her happiness as reliably connected with trying to do her duty and she can see this connection possibly working for all human beings, so that the world could be a place in which everyone is both virtuous and happy. This does not mean that the moral agent does her duty in order to be happy, or that she views her duty as

a means to her happiness. This would be inconsistent with a proper respect for morality, for she cannot really do her duty unless she does it for its own sake. But the question for this talk is why a moral agent should have to have this kind of moral faith in Providence at all.

What is the importance of the belief that the world is so ordered that it is possible for every person to be both morally good and happy? I think this possible state of the world functions for us as an ideal, and so inspires us to engage with the world as it actually is. But for it to function in this way as an ideal, this state of the world does have to be possible. Consider the expression of the psalmist (85:10), that righteousness and peace, or righteousness and shalom have kissed each other. There is here the vision of a world in which we are all happy; but that is too flimsy a word, if it means merely that we get what we want. In such a world we not merely have what we want, but what we want is what it is morally good to want. That is why it is righteousness and peace that kiss each other. This is a vision by the psalmist of the full kingdom of God. This vision has the power to sustain us as we try to bring the actual world closer to the vision than it now is. When we do see glimpses of the kingdom, the vision allows us to hold them together into a pattern, and to recognize them as significant. The possibility of the world being this way thus has a direct impact on our moral lives.

I am going to proceed by arguing first that the moral agent has to believe in what I will call 'self-rewarding morality', and then I will try to show that this belief is not enough, and we need to believe in Providence as well. Self-rewarding morality is a system in which everyone's virtue is what makes everyone happy. I will start by showing that we do think that if we were all good, we would roughly all be

happy. This belief is woven into the fabric of morality as we are familiar with it in our tradition, and cannot be torn out without substantial damage to that fabric. Consider the two beliefs on your sheet that the moral agent has to have about her own life. There is the belief which I discussed in the first section of this lecture, the belief that she can, over the course of her life as a whole, will the good. This belief is hard to sustain because of the gap between the moral demand and our initial capacities, but the problem is eased by the traditional doctrines I mentioned earlier. The second thing she has to believe, I think, is that she can achieve most of the time, the good things she aims at. She has to believe this, because otherwise there would be no point in aiming at them. To make this vivid, imagine that there was an evil genius with enormous power to manipulate our circumstances. Suppose he brought it about that whenever we tried to do good we ended up doing harm. I think we would stop trying to do good. There would be no point to it. So we have to believe that the world is not like that, and that we can actually do the good we try to do.

I think the moral agent has to have these two beliefs not only about her own life but about the lives of other people as well. She has to believe that they are capable of willing the good over their lives as a whole, and that they could then achieve most of the time the good things they would be aiming at. Why does a moral agent have to believe that other people could be morally good? One answer to this is that morality requires us to think of each other as people who could be good people. The moral agent has, we might say, to respect other people. This idea is contained in Kant's second version of the moral demand which I described at the beginning. This principle does not mean the agent has to regard other people as actually virtuous. But

she cannot respect them if she does not regard them as capable of virtue.

The other belief she has to have about other people is that she has to believe that if everyone were virtuous, they would be able to accomplish most of the time, the good things they try to accomplish. Our intentions are massively interconnected with other peoples' intentions. It is hard to think of any intention I might have that does not require me to trust that others have the ability to carry out most of what they choose to do. Consider, for example, the intention which I formed to write a lecture and read it at Western Michigan University. Think of all the hundreds of other people whose intentions and actions were involved in the eventual fulfillment of this intention, the people who made this paper and my computer, and all the drivers who avoided my car on the highway. Then think of the hundreds of thousands involved in those peoples' intentions being fulfilled. You throw a stone into the pool and eventually the ripples reach the edge, the whole human race.

Now if we add these two beliefs about other people together, we get the belief in self-rewarding morality which I started with. The best way to see this is to suppose that these two possibilities are actualized. Suppose everyone not merely can be virtuous, but is virtuous; and suppose we all not merely can achieve most of the time the good things we aim at, but we do achieve it. Then roughly everyone will be happy. In such a world the happiness of others is what we will all be aiming at; and if we are achieving what we are aiming at, we will be achieving each other's happiness. If we are collectively virtuous, on this vision of the good, then we will collectively secure each other's happiness. It is true that even if everyone is virtuous, there can still be

tidal waves and arthritis and severe depression. But such natural evil will not be, for most people, sufficient to destroy their happiness. This is because they will be embedded in loving relationships with other people, and surrounded with compassionate and competent caregivers. What we have here is an idea of self-rewarding morality, because the idea is that it is everyone's virtue which results in (roughly) everyone's happiness.

But the belief in self-rewarding morality is not enough. Here is the turning point in this argument. We have to be able to persevere in morality even if we do not believe that most other people are in fact morally virtuous. We need the belief in Providence, the belief that the world is so ordered that a person's own virtue is reliably connected with her own happiness, whether other people are virtuous or not. I do not know how high an estimate you make of other peoples' virtue. My own estimate is not stable, but varies with my mood and my most recent experience. But what can be demonstrated is that there is very widespread gloom about the decline of virtue, and decreasing trust (at least in the countries I know well) in the general goodwill of other people. What is important for my present purposes is not how virtuous other people actually are, or even what the general belief is about most peoples' virtue. The important thing is that the moral agent's commitment to morality does not depend upon her belief in the virtue of others. Consider the fact that we try to teach our children to be moral. We also want them to be happy. If we thought that being virtuous would make them miserable, we would be more ambivalent about teaching them virtue than we actually are. But many people persevere in the attempt to bring up their children to be morally good people even though they do not think their children will be living in a

society in which most of their fellows are morally good people. If the idea of self-rewarding morality were the only kind of moral order we could believe in, this perseverance would be quite mysterious. What lies behind such perseverance is surely a belief that the world is so ordered that when their children grow up, they can be both morally good and happy, and that this is secured not by general human virtue but by something else. The nature of this something else is often, I think, left indeterminate. My purpose today is just to get to this 'something else'. Eventually we need a more ambitious account of how this kind of moral order could have been achieved.

I have said that we need this kind of moral faith if we are to persevere in the moral life. But it is also true that the belief in Providence is not clearly supported by experience. This is why moral faith is the right term here. Experience gives us all sorts of cases of morally bad people who are to all appearances happy, and morally good people who are to all appearances unhappy. Our experience is thus consistent with a much bleaker picture of how the world is. This is the kind of picture which Bernard Williams locates in the worldview of the ancient Greeks. He says, of Sophocles the ancient playwright, that he represents 'human beings as dealing sensibly, foolishly, sometimes catastrophically, sometimes nobly, with a world that is only partially intelligible to human agency and in itself is not necessarily well adjusted to ethical aspirations.' He identifies this as the ancient sense of tragedy and the vulnerability of human life to the caprice of fortune. There is here a competitor to moral faith, and a much darker picture of our destiny. Actually, I think Williams is wrong about both Sophocles. He is reading Nietzsche back into the ancient world, because he finds the Nietzschean picture congenial himself. But I will

not get into that here. He does present us with an alternative to moral faith, and that is what is important for now, rather than his historical judgment.

This ancient sense of tragedy has a certain appeal. It can seem that Sisyphus shaking his fist at heaven has certain nobility. By contrast, it can seem that the moral faith in Providence is a bit weak-kneed or lily-livered. It is the hope that the universe fits our moral aspirations, and this can seem a kind of self-gratifying fantasy, a failure to look harsh reality fully in the face. It can seem that only a fool or a bigot or a weakling would go on believing that the world is so ordered that we can trust that if we meet the moral demand we will be happy.

Here I think it is relevant to look at the lives of those who have experienced great evil, and have yet persevered in their faith in God. What do these lives show us? That the experts in the experience of evil have not always found that this evidence forces them to reject their faith. I talked with a woman named Eva while I was writing my book The Moral Gap who was a survivor from the concentration camps of World War II. She said that her experience was that those who went into the camps with a strong faith in God came out, if they came out at all, with their faith stronger. It is not that they understood why God permitted the suffering, but that their faith in him is what held them and kept them through it. Eva was Jewish, and I do not know whether she believed in an afterlife or not. My sense is that she did not. But she did have a basic attitude of trust that God was in charge; and that the good was more fundamental in the world than the evil in it, and would in the end win. There is a large biographical and autobiographical literature here. Elie Wiesel, for example, says that he has been angry with God, and has not answered the question of

why God allowed the Holocaust. But he claims to have become closer to God through his protest. It is important that the lives of people like Eva are admirable. Their lives carry conviction. They have a reading of the enormous evil which they experience. This is not merely logically consistent with their faith (though that is important to argue). My point is, rather, that this reading lies behind lives which are obviously praiseworthy, whose goodness it would be perverse to deny. There is a difficulty here, that we have to avoid begging the question. The sceptic will resist the notion of obvious goodness. I am thinking of Christopher Hitchens who was at Oxford with me, and wrote a book trying to show that Mother Teresa was a fraud and a fascist. He has devoted his life to finding the worm in every bud. But I am content to rest on the claim that there is such a thing as an obviously good life, even though not everyone will agree about every case; and I want to add the claim that such lives will tend to be familiar with suffering, and to display what I have called moral faith.

I will end with one instructive case, that of Ivan and Alyosha in Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*. Ivan tells the story of the Grand Inquisitor, which is often used in philosophy textbooks as the paradigm case of the argument against faith in Providence. Ivan ends up, after telling a number of horrifying stories of evil, saying to God that he respectfully returns him the ticket. But we have to ask what Dostoyevsky is doing in putting this powerful section in the mouth of Ivan, with Alyosha as its audience. The philosophy textbooks take the passage out of its context, and miss its point. What happens to these two brothers? Ivan, who does not fudge either the moral demand or his own radical incapacity, ends the book by going crazy and holding conversation with the devil. Alyosha ends the book declaring his faith

to a circle of adoring children. Dostoyevsky is trying to show us something. The story of the Grand Inquisitor is powerful, but it is not decisive. The life of Ivan, who is a man in the moral gap but without moral faith, is doomed; but the life of Alyosha, who retains his faith without pretending that evil does not exist, is bound for glory. We can see in his life the character of the full kingdom of God towards which he is headed.

What I have shown, if my argument has worked, is that morality requires the moral faith in Providence in the form of the strong belief that virtue is consistent with happiness whether other people as a general rule are virtuous or not. The next step would be to ask what is the mechanism of Providence. How is it supposed to work? All I have argued so far is that we need the belief in something more than the virtue of other people. But what could this 'something more' be? This is where the Christian doctrines come in about God's work on our behalf. I have not tried today to prove these doctrines true; but I have tried to show you, so to speak, the space for them: where they are needed in a satisfying analysis of the moral life. Suppose we do not want to change the picture of the moral gap significantly. We want to preserve a high moral demand, and we want to be realistic about our natural capacities. Then if we want to drop the theology, we will have to find a substitute to do the same job. It is not going to be easy to find one.

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