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DIVINE COMMAND MORALITY AND THE AUTONOMY OF ETHICS

Robert Audi

This paper formulates a kind of divine command ethical theory intended to comport with two major views: that basic moral principles are necessary truths and that necessary truths are not determined by divine will. The theory is based on the possibility that obligatoriness can be a theological property even if its grounds are such that the content of our obligations has a priori limits. As developed in the paper, the proposed divine command theory is compatible with the centrality of God in practical ethics; it provides an account of a divine command morality as a set of internalized moral standards; and it is consistent with the autonomy of ethics conceived as a domain in which knowledge is possible independently of reliance on theology or religion.

Divine command morality has very commonly appeared to religious believers to provide the only correct view of moral standards. Among believers in the tradition of Western monotheism, particularly Christians, Jews, and Muslims, some version of it is often endorsed or presupposed. But there are many versions, and for some of them the degree of harmony with various non-religious ethical theories is unclear. What metaethical options are possible for divine command theorists? I am particularly interested in whether there is a kind of divine command theory harmonious with two major views: first, that necessary truths are not determined by divine will; second, that basic moral principles are necessary truths. A further concern of the paper is to explore what range of normative standards a divine command ethics may endorse, and how extensively these may overlap those of, say, a Kantian or utilitarian theory. I will present a version of divine command theory that apparently does justice to what is naturally called the autonomy of ethics. If the theory is sound, it may enable us both to avoid the Euthyphro problem and to account for the guiding role that some version of divine command theory should play for religious believers.

I. Divine Command Ethics

It is important to distinguish two possible kinds of divine command ethical theory—the theoretical basis of what I call *divine command morality* and take to be an overall moral position that includes normative standards for daily life. The two kinds of divine command ethical theory I refer to are semantic and ontic versions of it. On a semantic version, moral terms have theological *meaning* (and moral concepts are correspondingly theological).



For instance, 'obligatory,' in its central, moral sense, might be held to mean 'commanded (for us) by God.' Ontic versions deny a semantic equivalence, but, in the form of the ontic theory that seems most plausible, the *property* of being obligatory is identical either with that of being commanded by God or with some property closely related to this.¹ Most ontic versions assert something that is (in a way) stronger: that obligatoriness (for acts) is *constituted* by being divinely commanded, directly or indirectly. Here we have a constitutive relation of a kind that implies an explanatory connection between God's commanding something and its being obligatory. Identity relations are not (in the same way) explanatory. Consider, for instance the identity expressed by co-referential proper names. Cicero is not constituted by being Tully, and we learn nothing about his nature from discovering this other name.²

The suggested identity between the property of obligatoriness and that of divine commandedness would, then, be a case of ontic equivalence: equivalence at the metaphysical level of the nature of the elements in question, by contrast with the level of the meanings of linguistic terms that express or describe those elements. Similar identities would hold for the other deontic terms in the same family. Although I shall generally speak of obligatoriness rather than use the full range of moral terms in this family, for example 'permissible,' 'wrong,' and 'required,' what is wrong can be conceived as that which we are obligated to avoid, what is right as what we are not obligated not to do, and so forth. (We could also take 'wrong' as terminologically most basic, but here I see no advantage in this.) I defer the question whether all obligations corresponding to divine commands are moral, as opposed to, say, religious; but, for specificity, one might conceive moral obligatoriness as moral commandedness, religious obligatoriness as religious commandedness, etc.

The semantic and ontic versions of divine command theory are importantly different. If the semantic view is correct, someone who has no concept of God cannot even understand moral terms; they would be conceptually beyond the person's ken. Moreover, someone who has the concept of God but believes there *is* no God would have to deny that there is anything objectively obligatory. The notion of what is commanded by God would have to be considered vacuous. Such a person could regard some ascriptions of obligation by theists as excusable, perhaps even as rational given the evidences some people might have for them, but not as true. For apart from God's existence there would be no basis for objective obligation.

On the ontic view, however, the *concept* of the obligatory, like other moral concepts, need not be theological. One implication of this is that although an obligatory act could not fail to be divinely commanded at least implicitly, one could still *know* that an act is obligatory without knowing that it is so commanded. Identifying moral with theological properties does not automatically foreclose the number or variety of cognitive handles by which we can grasp moral properties. Just as one can know one is reading the author of *King Lear* without knowing one is reading the author of *The Winter's Tale*, or (to take a closer analogy) know one is drawing a circle without knowing one is drawing a plane figure whose circumference equals its diameter times pi, one can know that an act is obligatory without knowing that it is divinely commanded.

We might plausibly suppose that God intends us to have many ways of discovering our obligations. There are various reasons to suppose this. For one thing, the existence of many non-theological ways of ascertaining our obligations might enhance the probability of right conduct for non-believers; they would have more ways to discover what they should do. Second, a diversity of routes to moral knowledge might reinforce moral conduct in other ways. It might add motivation and understanding regarding them even if believers did not *discover* any obligations they were otherwise unaware of. Third, it might help them to determine what actions morality requires where, as is common, this is not clear from their understanding of their religious commitments. That may occur because these commitments conflict with one another or because they are insufficiently specific. Fourth, for anyone concerned with explaining and justifying moral conduct, it is often valuable to have more than one perspective from which to frame an explanatory or justificatory account. In practice, then, those who hold an ontic divine command theory—as some natural law theorists might—can take a point of view from which they can see moral issues in non-theological terms. In principle, they can view these issues much as do those who take moral properties to be independent of divine command or even divine will.

In the light of the points so far made about divine command ethics, it may be possible to bring the divine command and secular perspectives closer together. Suppose initially that we take the property of being obligatory to be the same property as that of being divinely commanded. Instead of stopping there, however, we might take “*both*” properties (i.e., the property expressed by the theological phrase ‘divinely commanded’ and the property expressed by the non-theological phrase ‘being obligatory’) to be (necessarily) consequential, in a strong sense, on non-moral, “natural” properties belonging to the type of obligatory act in question.³ For instance, acts of loyalty to one’s family or religious community might be both obligatory in virtue of one’s special relation to them—involving, say, one’s promising them support—and *also* (freely) commanded by God for that very range of reasons. The divine commandedness of an act, which on this view is the same property as its obligatoriness, is thus in a sense *embedded* in its non-moral grounds.⁴ The act is divinely commanded (at least in part) on the same grounds in virtue of which it is obligatory.

We now have both a kind of divine command theory—since obligatoriness is identified with divine commandedness—and something that not every such theory provides for: a necessary *basis* for such commands, in the light of which we can understand both their infallibility and their relation to certain kinds of natural properties. These natural (roughly, “descriptive”) properties are the same ones central for understanding moral concepts and moral properties outside theological contexts. This is as it should be on the plausible assumption that properties *F* and *G* (as expressed by different terms, such as ‘commandedness’ and ‘obligatoriness’) are identical only if anything possessing them has them *in virtue of* the same property or set of properties.⁵ In rough terms, they are identically grounded. Moreover, in the light of these properties we can see, even without relying on theological considerations, the appropriateness of the commands. The grounding of the moral properties in natural ones—natural in

the broad sense of ‘descriptive’—can be (and I think is in such cases and here assume to be) a priori as well as necessary. But the position that moral properties are consequential on broadly natural ones could probably also be worked out for a theory on which the grounding relations are empirical and perhaps even contingent.⁶ It may also apply to persons very different from us, but my concern is morality as applicable to human beings.

II. Divine Commandedness Versus Divine Commandability

On the a priori groundedness version of divine command theory, standards of morality need not be construed as based on God’s commands, even if these standards necessarily *accord* with God’s will as, in moral matters, infallibly encompassing the right. Specifically, provided we consider an act’s moral properties to be necessarily possessed given their non-moral grounds—their *base*, in one terminology—we may assume that necessarily, to be obligatory is to be divinely commanded, or at least divinely commandable. For the property in question, which we can refer to *both* theologically and in purely moral language, is possessed in virtue of a single set of non-moral (and “descriptive”) properties.

Why speak of what is commandable rather than commanded? One reason is to allow for the possibility that general moral truths hold even in a world in which God issues no commands. Granted, it is an implication of most divine command theories that if God had issued no commands, there would be no obligations. But although it seems possible that God not have given moral commands, it does not seem possible that killing people not be (prima facie) wrong; and even devout theists may hold that God prefers our being able to see this moral truth through natural reason rather than only through divine command.

Indexed vs. General Commandability

It may seem, however, that divine commandability is simply the possibility of being commanded by *any* being that is (essentially) omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent—for short, *omnicompetent*—hence is an “ideal observer.” Call this modal property *general divine commandability*. This is not what is in question where we refer to ‘commandability by God’ as this phrase would be used by theists, who presuppose God’s existence.⁷ Call the modal property in question *indexed divine commandability*. The relation between these two properties is a complicated matter,⁸ but the main point here is simply that they differ. It is indexed commandability that I am suggesting as a possible candidate for ontic identity with obligatoriness.

An alternative position—open to divine command theorists whether or not they hold the a priori groundedness view I have outlined—is a commandedness view on which an act is obligatory provided it is of a type that, at *some* time, God commands, at least *indirectly*.⁹ Thus, suppose abstention from bearing false witness is commanded explicitly; and suppose further that, from the content of the command, it clearly follows that a form of bearing such witness is looking on without exhibiting any disapproval or doubt when one person accuses another of a crime one knows the second did not commit. Such complicity might be regarded as indirectly prohibited by the original command.

As this example suggests, it is not always clear what follows from a command, or, especially, what follows with sufficient clarity and has an appropriate character to be construed as indirectly commanded by God in issuing the original command. Moreover, I would stress again that on a command-edness view, if God had issued no commands, we would have no obligations. This seems implausible, especially on the a priori groundedness view of basic moral principles. To be sure, God's goodness implies God's in some sense wishing us to do the kinds of deeds that are obligatory. But it is far from self-evident that such goodness entails issuing commands.

The seriousness of these problems for a commandedness view is one reason to explore a commandability view.¹⁰ A morality must be capable of guiding action in practical affairs; and if what is obligatory is just what is actually commanded, there should be no avoidable unclarity about what that is. Some unclarity seems unavoidable in ethical matters, however, particularly where what is commanded is not itself an action, as in the case of love.¹¹ This kind of unclarity can help to inspire supererogation. Still, on the assumption that what is actually divinely commanded is commandable, focusing on the latter notion enables theistic moral agents to look *both* for what is actually but implicitly commanded and for different sources of obligation that meet the standard of commandability yet do not depend on the historical property of commandedness. This has both practical advantages in making moral decisions and theoretical advantages in understanding obligation.

The Property of Obligatoriness

Once commandability is seen as an option for divine command ethics, it may look promising to identify the property of obligatoriness not with that of being in accord with some divine command, but with some intentional and presumably volitional divine state or preference. On this view, the property of being obligatory might be conceived as that of accordance with divine will regarding the actions of persons like us. An act-type's having this property does not entail God's *actually* commanding it for us, even indirectly.¹²

It is not easy to specify just what kind of accordance with divine will is the best candidate here. Mere divine approval is not enough, for merely permissible acts may merit that. What of supererogatory ones? These might merit divine *gratification*, which does not hold even for all obligatory acts. Moreover, they contrast with obligatory acts in that their *non*-performance need not merit divine *disapproval*. To be sure, if one faces an exclusive disjunction of supererogatory acts, performance of exactly one might still be gratifying to God despite non-performance of the other. But here non-performance of *both* would not merit disapproval, as opposed, perhaps, to disappointment.

Two important points follow from the suggested property identification. First, it is metaphysically impossible that *being obligatory* (for human persons) and *being in accord with God's will* (for their actions), not apply to the same deeds, where accordance with God's will, in the relevant sense, is distinct from merely meeting God's approval. But, second, since the two concepts in question are different, we may still say both that the application of the property of (moral) obligatoriness to a type of

action can be known on non-theological ground—indeed on naturalistic grounds—and that theists as well as non-theists can make use of this point in conducting their ethical life. Indeed, the view shares with the commandedness view the implication that divine commands (or other religiously endorsed moral standards) may be *criteria* for right and wrong. The commandability view is even consistent with taking such criteria to provide metaphysically necessary and sufficient conditions; the property of obligatoriness, however, would not be taken to be, or to be grounded in, that of commandedness.

This commandability interpretation of divine command theory, then, provides both for the necessary coincidence of obligation with an aspect of the divine will and for a wider range of valid routes to moral knowledge than one would expect to find given a commandedness interpretation. One may still know what is obligatory through knowing what God commands. But some obligatory acts that are not commanded might *merit* God's command, roughly in the sense that, though they need not be commanded, given the divine nature and the relevant non-moral facts God's commanding them would be on balance a kind of injunction it is reasonable to expect; and here non-theological considerations concerning the natural grounds of obligation may be essential, and uniquely helpful, in understanding God's will.

The Euthyphro Problem and the Grounds of Obligation

It may now be apparent how the a priori groundedness view enables us to deal with the Euthyphro problem, which (in one version) is the problem of whether what is right, in the sense of 'obligatory,' is such because God commands it, or whether, instead, God commands it because it is right. Supposing that obligatoriness is the property of commandedness, we may deny *both* that the obligatory must be regarded as such because God commands it, i.e., as *grounded* in divine command, *and* that God commands it because it is obligatory. The first claim is mistaken because acts are obligatory on the basis of certain descriptive properties (not including commandedness¹³); the second is mistaken because it is in part on the basis of those properties that God commands the acts, not on the basis of their rightness. In rough terms, God commands certain acts not *because* they are right but (at least in part) because of *why* they are right; i.e., because of the elements in virtue of which they are the right thing to do.

God may be seen, then, as having a *reason*—indeed an a priori though prima facie one—for commanding certain deeds. This is not because there are moral principles *above* God; sound moral principles, as necessary and a priori, are instead *within* God. If murder is necessarily wrong, God cannot command it. But this 'cannot' reflects inconsistency with the divine nature; and it expresses no more limitation on omnipotence than is implied by the impossibility of a circle's not being a plane figure whose circumference is equal to its diameter multiplied by pi.

The Euthyphro problem may also be stated in terms of commandability and then approached similarly. Indeed, this approach seems preferable because God's reasons for actually commanding a kind of act need not be those in virtue of which (since they ground its obligatoriness), it merits command. We must distinguish between God's reasons for *issuing* a command

at a particular time, as where God might command a deed in order to motivate the agent to perform it, and God's reasons for taking the content of a command, performance of the relevant act-type, to be obligatory for us. The latter, divine commandatory attitude, is possible both apart from God's issuing a command at all and after a command is issued.

There is a further reason for taking a kind of commandability, in roughly the sense of 'meriting divine command,' to be central for divine command ethics. At least the majority of the moral principles that guide everyday life—including some apparently having a kind of Biblical endorsement—express *prima facie* rather than absolute obligations. The obligation to avoid lying is an example; and, at least on the assumption that the obligation not to kill is restricted in content to non-self-defensive cases, even that obligation seems to be *prima facie* rather than indefeasible. As Ross and many other philosophers have stressed, *prima facie* obligations can conflict; and when they do, it may not be clear what one's final obligation is, i.e., what, overall, one ought to do.¹⁴ If we take a commandability view, we can treat particular acts representing what one is finally obligated to do as meriting divine command even though they are not always actually commanded. A similar case occurs where two competing acts are equally choiceworthy; there may be no unclarity about this, and here neither is commanded even if their disjunction merits divine command and is commanded. Once again, we have deeds that meet God's approval, yet are not commanded.

This approach allows taking what God has actually commanded as also commandable, on the assumption that God would not command what does not merit command. But commands to obey principles, such as the injunction to honor our parents, may be understood as creating *prima facie* obligations and hence, in some possible cases, as not representing those commandable acts that are our final obligation. What constitutes our final obligation may, owing to a conflict of *prima facie* obligations, be determinable only by reflection. Where two or more actions are equally good ways to do our duty, only their disjunction need be taken as meriting divine command; each, to be sure, intrinsically merits performance, but an act that competes with one that is equally good does not merit being divinely commanded, since that implies that performing the other merits disapproval.

In this context, it is significant that the two commands Jesus singles out as primary are to love God with all our hearts and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22: 38–40). These do not even purport to specify act-types, and their connection with action is indirect. Loving our neighbors is not an act or set of acts, though there are of course acts of love and—more important here—acts of nurturing and communicating the kind of love in question. We are to discover the appropriate acts, inner and outer, by (among other things) appropriately internalizing scripture and following the right role models, above all Jesus himself. The commandments stand as a challenge to human freedom.

If, moreover, we take knowledge of necessary truths to be inherent in the divine nature, we can also say that obligatory actions are those that are in a certain way in accord with God's nature. The accord, moreover, is not merely with God's cognitive nature—with the divine intellect. On the assumption of omnibenevolence, we may take it that God would

wish us to fulfill our moral obligations and that doing so accords with the divine will.

III. Commandability and the Motivational Autonomy of Theological Reasons

Suppose that, by taking an act's obligatoriness as identical with the property of meriting divine command, we move from a divine command theory strictly so called to the kind of divine commandability theory I have outlined. This property, as contrasted with merely meeting God's approval, seems at least equivalent to, and perhaps identical with, being in accordance with God's will. The concept of such accord is different from that of meriting divine command, but both concepts can express the same property yet still play different roles in motivating moral conduct. Even if the *ontic* grounds of obligation (the grounds of the truth of moral principles) are not determined by divine volition, the *motivational* grounds of moral *conduct* can be religious, and the more concepts a religious believer has that connect motivation with divine will and commands, the wider the range of possible motivating considerations.

To see this point, consider how finely motivational attitudes are individuated. Even if the property of being obligatory is the property of (indexed) divine commandability (of meriting divine command), doing something, such as distributing food to the poor, in order to fulfill God's command (or to act in accord with God's will) does not entail doing it in order (say) to help the poor as required by the obligation of beneficence. These are different purposive properties of the act, and neither entails the other: one could be motivated to do something by its meriting divine command (where the command might or might not have been issued) independently of being motivated to do it as obligatory under beneficence. Indeed, suppose I *believe* that deontic properties and other normative properties are not grounded in divine will but only harmonious with it in a certain way. I can still be motivated in my moral life by desires to do what accords with God's will. Divine commands can be written in the heart and derive motivational power from devotion, even if, intellectually, I take their grounds to be descriptive and non-theological. I would then have a divine command *morality* even if my divine command ethical theory is ontologically moderate in the indicated way. Perhaps, then, such a moderate theory is fully compatible with true piety.

Two Dimensions of Divine Will

We should now distinguish (as Aquinas did) between God's antecedent will and consequent will, i.e., "God's preference, regarding a particular issue considered rather narrowly in itself, other things equal ...[as opposed to] God's preference regarding the matter, all things considered."¹⁵ What God antecedently wills seems analogous to what is *prima facie* obligatory: such deeds have an obligation-making property but are finally obligatory only if there is no overriding *prima facie* obligation.¹⁶ A finally obligatory act is commandable; but this does not entail that it is divinely commanded or willed in any sense implying that it must occur—at least on the assumption that it would then not be free. Let us assume that, given omnipotence, what God wills in this third way—*imperatively*,

we might say—must occur. We cannot, then, plausibly regard obligatoriness as equivalent to what God wills in *that* way. Plainly, not everything obligatory is actually done.

This second interpretation of accord with God's will—namely, being harmonious with God's antecedent will—leaves open, however, the possibility that some actual divine commands, such as the command to Abraham to sacrifice his son, either do not directly reflect God's consequent will or do not reflect it in the way they appear to. For instance, one might say that what accords with God's will in this case is just *deliberative obedience*, obedience at the level of intention-formation (and perhaps preparatory acts), not *behavioral obedience*, actually carrying out the deed. This would parallel the distinction between the *issuance of a command's* being in accordance with God's will and its *execution's* being in accord with God's will. Using that distinction, we might say that commandedness of an act does not entail its commandability in the sense implying accordance with God's consequent will; it is the *commanding*, and presumably Abraham's deliberative obedience, that accords with this. Whatever we say here, the case raises difficulties for the view that obligatoriness is or is *grounded* in commandedness. Rather than pursue possible resolutions of those difficulties,¹⁷ our purposes are better served by proceeding to the question of the connection between the right and the good in relation to the suggested moderate form of divine command ethical theory.

I have already spoken of divine commands as *creating* (moral) obligations, as where God commands honoring our parents.¹⁸ Divine creation of obligations may seem incompatible with moral obligations' being necessarily consequential on natural properties. It is not. Suppose that in virtue of our special relationship to our parents, we ought to honor them (and owe them gratitude). This does not prevent God's command to honor them from both entailing that we have this (prima facie) obligation and creating an additional obligation to honor them. The command both exhibits the obligatoriness of the indicated conduct and authoritatively calls on us to act accordingly. One way to see this is to take God to be providing a ground for doing the things in question *by* commanding them and—given our owing obedience to God—thereby creating a further *source* of obligation for doing them.

The a priori groundedness view, then, implies only that God does not create the grounding *relation* between the broadly natural base properties and the obligation consequential upon them; it does not imply that God does not create the grounds that, in accordance with that relation, actually yield obligations, possibly including some we do not have apart from receiving the commands. That the necessary connections between the natural grounds of obligation and the obligatoriness of certain kinds of acts is part of the divine nature does not in the least prevent God's doing an unlimited number of things that result in our having both moral obligations and reliable ways of ascertaining them. Indeed, an act, for instance distributing food to the poor, can even be properly said to be obligatory *because* God commands it so long as this is understood consistently with the command's generating obligation in virtue of the basic, non-volitional grounds of God's moral authority over us, such as creating, sustaining, and loving us. Commandedness is not the basic ground of obligation, as

on some divine command views, but a command may be supported by such a ground and thereby generate obligation.

The Centrality of God on the Commandability View

We now have the raw materials for answering a further question raised by any divine command theory that identifies obligatoriness with commandability or a similar (indexed) theological property. What does the proposed commandability theory add to the general idea that obligatoriness is simply the property of meriting command by any omniscient being? Why should it be of any more interest to theists than that kind of theological ideal observer theory?

First (as I have already suggested), obligatoriness can be a kind of accordance with God's will without being grounded in it, and the proposed theory allows God's will for human action to be motivationally central in human conduct. This enables one's moral practices to be theologically grounded; that holds even on an a priori groundedness metaethics. On the divine command view outlined here, ascriptions of obligation are, in a referential sense, *about* God. They need not be *seen* to be, since the concept of obligation is not theological; but one may still think of the property of obligatoriness under its theological description and be motivated by moral considerations within the appropriate theological framework.

Second, on the supposition that God's consequent will is in question, one may take it that doing the required deed for the right reason(s) merits divine approval, just as (inexcusable) non-performance merits divine disapproval. This provides theists with an incentive not available through an ideal observer theory. Here the right motivating reasons may or may not include devotion to God; but in a person of piety they should at least indirectly include it.

Third, the role of motivating reasons appropriate to a theist who accepts the commandability theory can be brought out by recalling Kant's distinction between actions having moral worth and those merely in conformity with duty. Let us say that an action has *theological worth* provided it is performed from an appropriate theological motive. A paradigm would be serving the sick *because* one takes this to be commanded by God. One could do this on the basis of a sense of the duty of beneficence as well. The action would then *also* have *moral worth*, but religious people might be strongly motivated to cultivate dispositions whose realization gives optimal theological worth to their conduct.

Observing these distinctions between kinds of commandability and kinds of worth leads to a fourth point: theists may consider theological reasons for action more valuable than, or at least of a higher order of value than, moral reasons; theists might even take them to be the best kind to act on. The idea would be that it is even better (other things equal) to serve the sick out of obedience to God than for a moral reason. It may be rare that these two kinds of motivation can act separately in the mind of a theist who respects both kinds of reason; but this seems a contingent matter. Theists might, then, take a *theological paramountcy view*, on which theological reasons for action are the "highest" kind, in the sense of the best kind to act from when one or more other reasons favor the same act.¹⁹

The suggested divine commandability theory is compatible with the *motivational autonomy of theological reasons*. That, in turn, makes room for a kind of extreme piety in conduct. It also provides for a theological answer to ‘Why should I be moral?’ It might seem that such an answer requires grounding morality in divine will, but the force of divine will in providing both normative and motivational reasons for action does not entail that grounding. Devout theists can live by a divine command *morality* in the sense that every obligation they fulfill—though in conformity with morality—has theological *worth*, perhaps even purely theological worth.²⁰

A fifth point is implicit in what has been said about the grounding of action. *Thinking* of obligatoriness as (indexed) commandability provides a wider perspective on it than one would have apart from, say, a specific theology or a particular scriptural tradition or both. One can, however, also understand and identify commandability in relation to *non*-religious grounds. Non-religious considerations can help in understanding the theological attribute of (indexed) commandability, just as religious considerations can help in understanding that same attribute viewed from the point of view of understanding and identifying moral obligatoriness. Given how often morality requires deciding which of two or more conflicting obligations is final, a religious route to moral decision can be both morally instructive and motivationally energizing. That one of two such acts is a better expression of love for one’s neighbor, for instance, can be both a motivating and a religiously cogent basis of choice.

We can now see a sixth point: in the not uncommon cases in which moral considerations, understood non-theologically, allow two or more resolutions of an ethical problem, the fact that there is religious evidence for divine preference for one of them may yield good reason to prefer it. The reason would not be moral, but would have normative force consistent with any moral truth. Here, then, is a kind of reason that is at once normative, being traceable to divine preference, and potentially motivating, yet not available to a mere ideal observer theory. Taking all these considerations together, we can perhaps say that the suggested divine command theory provides for moral freedom within a framework of necessary principles, but enables devoted theists to exercise that freedom not only in determining their final obligation where it mandates a single act but—often—to avoid having to make arbitrary choices in the many cases in which an ideal observer view provides no better alternative.

One further question remains for this section. It is natural to say that God’s treating us like a loving parent creates an obligation to honor God, by virtue of a kind of connection similar to the one that determines our having ordinary filial obligations toward our parents. But if the base of such an obligation includes God’s actions, is it not *theological*, even if it mirrors a moral obligation? One might say this. But if natural properties in the broad sense are simply descriptive, certain theological properties should be included, and we can speak of a *moral* obligation to God. This is theological in both *content* and *object*, hence also a kind of theological obligation. It essentially embodies the concept of God and its fulfillment requires God’s existence. But it is not a theological obligation in a sense implying grounding of a kind radically different from the kind that is the

basis of ordinary moral obligations. Its violation, then, counts as a moral wrong as well as a theological wrong.

So far, I have suggested that *if* an obligation is purely moral, one has it in virtue of the non-moral properties that ground it, for instance being loved and sustained by a creator having great concern for one's happiness. But this leaves room for doubly grounded obligations, in the sense that there can also be theological grounds yielding an obligation to do the same deeds. If knowledge of basic moral truths is indeed part of the divine nature (since knowledge of them is an essential property of God), it should not be surprising if there is a close analogy between the grounding of theological obligation and that of purely moral obligations. Consider a specifically theological obligation, such as an obligation owed to God as requiring one to worship in a certain way. This obligation could be grounded in elements of a personal relationship with God not fully characterizable in non-theological terms, but having fiduciary elements similar to those constituting analogous ordinary moral obligations.

A puzzle that arises here is how a divine commandability view accounts for the difference between the obligation of (say) veracity and the obligation to observe the Sabbath on Sunday rather than some other day that, apparently, God could as easily ordain. If both are commanded, one would expect both to be commandable, so what is the difference? If it is *a priori* and necessary that lying is *prima facie* wrong, this truth will be intrinsic to the divine nature; but there is no reason to think that a preference for a particular day for the appropriate devotions is likewise intrinsic, if intrinsic at all. The veracity principle, then, merits divine command by its very nature, in the sense implying that contrary behavior merits disapproval even apart from being prohibited by a command actually issued; but the choice of a sabbatical day is a candidate for divine command in accord with God's sheer preference—which could also be called *discretionary* if 'sheer' is seen as implying the impossibility of reasons. The latter does not imply that contrary behavior merits disapproval *apart* from being commanded; but by virtue of our relation to God, the command is itself a ground (and an essential one) for such disapproval. With ordinary moral obligations, by contrast, there are necessary facts that ground the obligatoriness of the acts in question; they are commandable in the light of those facts, but their obligatoriness does not depend on God's *issuing* commands to perform them.

In the light of these points, we may distinguish several kinds of theological obligations. We have seen cases in which an obligation is genetically theological: their source is God's issuing a command to do the deed in question. Their content may be entirely non-theological, say *to honor one's parents*. Second, an obligation may be conceptually theological, say *to carry out God's will in helping the poor*. A conceptually theological obligation need not be genetically such. Third, an obligation may also be objectively theological, as where it is *to worship God*. This obligation is not only conceptually theological but such that its object is doing something toward God. The third obligation calls for deeds that are *religious*, in a sense implying that their proper intentional performance presupposes a far-reaching theistic commitment. None of these obligations must be grounded in properties that are not broadly natural, but in the grounding of the first and third

God's specific commands or other theological elements must be central in the grounding elements. We may, however, speak of three kinds of obligation rather than three concepts of obligation because the reasons for action central in each case are grounded in the kinds of relationships that are central for ordinary moral obligation.

In the case of theological obligations as just described, it is easy to see that the commandability view allows that these are *owed* to God, in a sense implying that violation is a kind of wrong, or even offense, to or toward God. Perhaps part of what makes divine command views attractive to many theists is its capturing this idea. It is important to see that the commandability view outlined here can also account for the idea. Indeed, the a priori necessary groundedness of moral properties in broadly natural ones leaves open both that obligations are owed and to whom they are owed; and if obligatoriness is meriting divine command, it seems clear that (whether one sees it or not) doing what is obligatory may be viewed as owed to God, and violations should be seen as a kind of offense to God. So viewing obligation is both appropriate for theists (certainly for biblical theists) and tends to contribute to moral motivation. Moreover, *given* God's creating and sustaining us, and given elements in God's loving relationship to us, divine (issued) commands also have normative authority for us. There are various ways to determine whether the authority is specifically moral or specifically theological. The commandability theory leaves several possibilities open and provides for a central role for actual divine commands in the lives of the religiously committed.²¹

IV. Divine Commandability, Obligation, and the Good

In part because there is an apparently essential connection between, on the one hand, rightness and other deontic notions, and, on the other hand, axiological notions like that of the good, something should be said about how the suggested a priori groundedness view of obligation bears on axiological concepts. One might expect a divine command (or commandability) theory of moral obligation to be extendible to the good, for instance to take good states of affairs to be those grounded in some divine attitude or likeness to some divine property. One might specify God's antecedent will as determinative here, as opposed to God's consequent will. For there are evil states of affairs that God would surely not "finally" will, as opposed to permitting them (these might include certain malicious intentions, the performance of certain wrongful free actions, and perhaps some resulting bad states of affairs). But there is no inconsistency in holding a divine command theory for deontic properties and a different kind of theory for goodness.²²

Indeed, if the concept of goodness or some other far-reaching axiological notion is not conceived as appropriately independent of divine will, then ascriptions of goodness to God become problematic, and we apparently encounter difficulties in understanding even what it means for God to be loving. Clearly, being loving (toward someone) entails a disposition to seek or care about the good of the beloved (for its own sake, not merely instrumentally). Granting that God is infallible about what constitutes our good, there are a priori limits (vague though they are) on what this is,

much as there are such limits on what can be morally right. It cannot be for our good that we be manipulated so that we habitually lie, steal, and mutilate others or ourselves; or that we be tortured for no purpose other than to make us suffer (I take this to exclude punishment and voluntary sacrifice of oneself in order to save someone else from death or suffering).²³ Thomas Hardy could not have been speaking of an omnibenevolent God when, in "Hap," he wrote:

If but some vengeful God would call to me
From up the sky and laugh, "Thou suffering thing,
Know that they sorrow is my ecstasy,
That thy love's loss is my hate's profiting,"
Then would I bear it, clench myself, and die.

This attitude is malevolent; it is incompatible with God's nature.

As these examples suggest, the notions of the good and the right are intrinsically connected. For instance, one kind of goodness—moral goodness in persons, which is arguably the basic kind of moral goodness—is constituted at least mainly by a suitable kind of commitment to pursue the right.²⁴ (The connection is even closer if a consequentialist ethics is sound, since on this kind of view right conduct is equivalent to action that maximizes the good.) Thus, (adequate) learning of what is right and what is wrong, whether by a secular or a religious route, is essential for being morally good. But if the concept of goodness were equivalent to that of what accords with divine will, then moral standards could not be independent of divine will in the (qualified) sense in which they apparently are. We would have in effect an axiological counterpart of the semantic version of divine command theory. The concept of moral goodness would be explicable entirely in theological terms, and the concept of being morally good would be analyzable in terms of pursuing fulfillment of divine command or of divine will. These positions seem implausible for many of the reasons that weigh against the counterpart semantic version of divine command theory as applied to moral obligation.

Even the weaker view that goodness is ontically (though not conceptually) equivalent to a theological property raises difficulties. Consider the words "God saw that it was good," so prominent in Genesis. On this view, they are at best puzzling.²⁵ Even apart from the problem of determining the theological authority of such utterances, their applicability is at best difficult to account for on the view that goodness is a theological property. It is presumably in large part on account of the intrinsic character, including the beauty, of the creation that God sees it to be good, not owing to its relation to the divine nature, such as expressing God's creative will.²⁶ Certainly God knows this relation, but it is not naturally describable as "seen" by God, and the *basis* of seeing the goodness of the creation is apparently its intrinsic character rather than its relation to God. It appears, moreover, that just as God sees certain kinds of acts to be obligatory in virtue of their natural properties, God sees certain kinds of things to be good in virtue of *their* natural properties. In both cases, the relation between the different kinds of properties seems to be necessary. But just as any necessary truths are in some sense part of God's intellectual nature, any necessary goods

are in some sense part of God's volitional nature. Like the necessary moral truths, the necessary truths about goodness are *within* God, not *above* God. God may indeed be considered its highest possible exemplar.

None of this denies that our *conception* of goodness depends on God in being God-given, as life itself is. But that entails neither that the concept or the property of goodness is theological, nor that there is any theological reason to think they should be. A divine command theory of moral obligation does not require a counterpart account of the good.

V. The Moral Authority of God and the Autonomy of Ethics

If these metaethical reflections are sound, a religiously committed person can take moral properties to bear an a priori, consequential relation to broadly natural ones. This is compatible with moral properties' being identical with theological ones, as well as with the omniscience of God, which supports God's moral authority. It is also compatible with the idea that God's issuing commands to us both creates obligations on our part and provides a basis for our knowledge of those obligations. This point goes beyond affirming God's infallibility in moral matters. The impossibility of a truth not known to God has no specific implications about God's issuing commands.

One more aspect of the commandability theory developed here should be clarified: its fit with other kinds of ethical theory. Is it, for instance, compatible with noncognitivism, and can it explain how that view might accommodate religious commitment? Many philosophers consider noncognitivism a major option in ethics (as it is for some writers in philosophical theology²⁷). Suppose that moral judgments are not cognitive. Imagine that whatever is expressed by moral sentences used in making moral judgments, it lacks truth value. Then there are no moral truths to be known, omniscience will not imply God's knowing them, and divine moral commands must be understood noncognitively, say as expressions of attitudes. The normative authority of the commands may be undiminished.

There need be no strict inconsistency between a noncognitivist ethic and a religious commitment. Perhaps even a certain kind of classical religious commitment can be squared with ethical noncognitivism. I will not try to show this, however, because for any plausible noncognitivist ethical view, it makes little normative difference. Any plausible noncognitivism will distinguish justified from unjustified moral judgments. This distinction will be connected with the justification of the attitudes these judgments express. Thus, if my moral judgments do not take account of relevant differences and similarities, they are not justified. Consider a simple case. I must make the same judgment about the moral character of exactly similar agents, such as psychological duplicates. My judgments must also respond to relevant facts. I cannot justifiably hold that someone deserves punishment for a crime if I have no evidence that the person committed it. Being omniscient, God knows both such facts and their moral relevance. Relevance may be considered a cognitive matter even on a plausible noncognitivist view. If we now take God's omniscience and perfect goodness to imply wisdom, divine attitudes toward actions would apparently be an unerring guide to what *our* attitudes toward them should (in the objective

sense) be, just as divine knowledge of propositions is an unerring guide to what *beliefs* we should (in the objective sense) have.²⁸

A noncognitivist ethics may, then, be adapted to a classical theistic commitment (for which God is omniscient). In principle, it leaves open the same range of moral standards for human life as does cognitivism. Still, since noncognitivism is neither the ethical position I think most plausible nor standard among thoughtful theists, I will assume that moral judgments are cognitive.

So far, I have mainly concentrated on metaethical questions. What about normative matters? Some normative theories are incompatible with one or another religion. But what range of normative positions suits a commitment simply to classical theism combined with the commandability theory? It might seem that apart from a particular theology, religious scripture, or tradition, classical theism so interpreted does not rule out any normative ethical position. But this does not follow. One way to show that is to argue for substantive moral truths that can be accounted for only by a certain range of normative theories. Here I want simply to suggest why it holds on the assumption that God is not only omnibenevolent, but also loves us.²⁹

If God loves human persons, then they must have a kind of worth, a value they possess in virtue of their intrinsic nature and not merely instrumentally. It is not possible to love a being just for its instrumental value; and supposing this were possible, such love would be at best imperfect and God, as supremely perfect, *could* not so love us. Even the worst of us might be inherently redeemable. That we must have a kind of inherent worth if we are loved by God is perhaps not implied by God's omniscience alone—though it would be if loving someone should imply *believing* the person to have worth. But we can take God to be unerring in a wider, non-propositional sense as well, extending to love and to related attitudes and emotions. This point is implicit in the idea of perfection, even if not deducible from omniscience alone.³⁰

On the additional assumption that we are created in God's image, the point is even more clearly entailed, and the degree of implied human worth might be plausibly taken to be higher. To be sure, from persons' having worth in the eyes of God, nothing highly specific follows about how they should be treated. But it seems clear that what has worth in the eyes of God—whose judgments of value are infallible under any plausible construal of omniscience—must be treated with respect. Here again, it is possible to see the *object* of the obligation as human beings while taking the obligation to be *owed* to God.

It will be clear that one implication of God's viewing us as having genuine worth is that we may not be treated merely as means. So far, one of course thinks of the negative requirement of Kant's intrinsic end formulation of the Categorical Imperative. But what about its positive injunction: that all rational beings must be treated as ends? On any plausible understanding of this, freedom of worship is essential; and if we add that God takes us to have worth at least in part because we are—in our natural state as created by God—free agents, it would be reasonable to think that proper standards for human conduct should support a more extensive liberty than is implied by freedom of worship by itself.

The Categorical Imperative is not the whole of Kantian ethics; and even on a charitable reading of Kant, the intrinsic end formulation is by no means clearly equivalent to the other formulations of the Imperative. But the Imperative is the core of Kantian ethics; and the worth of persons—sometimes called *dignity* by Kant—is an essential element in its basis.³¹ Since Kant was Christian, it is no surprise that his ethics is consistent with classical theism. It also seems to bear a plausible interpretation on which it is highly consonant with Christian ethics, but that is a question for another occasion.

Critics of Kantian ethics have noted that it is far from clear what specific normative principles follow from the Categorical Imperative, even if we abstract from the diversity of its formulations.³² A kindred theory that attempts to circumvent this difficulty is intuitionism, particularly as articulated by Ross in *The Right and the Good*. Ross believed that no overarching principle accounts for all our duties. Instead, he proposed a list consisting of duties of justice, non-injury, beneficence, promissory fidelity, veracity, reparation, self-improvement, and gratitude. A case can be made that these are very much the duties that a conscientious interpretation of the Categorical Imperative would yield as applications. But rather than pursue that point,³³ I simply want to stress that on any plausible interpretation of the Rossian duties, embracing them as basic moral standards is consistent with religious commitment combined with the kind of divine commandability theory described above.

By contrast with both Kantian ethics and intuitionism as deontological views, utilitarianism is consequentialist. These classifications are difficult to explicate briefly, but the contrast important here is between the deontological emphasis on ascribing moral significance to act-types *as such* and the consequentialist commitment to deriving the moral significance of actions from facts about their consequences, paradigmatically the hedonic consequences central for utilitarianism. For a broad consequentialism, the pleasure or pain of performing an action can be considered a consequence, even though simultaneous with the action; and non-hedonic consequences may also be morally relevant. But the intrinsic character of the action, such as its being a lie, is not. If there is inconsistency between consequentialism and classical theism, this is the main point at which it occurs. Let us just consider Mill's utilitarianism.

Can Mill's utilitarianism accommodate the inherent worth of persons? If one takes pleasure and freedom from pain as the only intrinsic goods, one might think that the worth of persons must be instrumental to realizing these hedonic values. But that does not clearly follow. If pleasure on the part of persons must be realized by their experiences, these experiences are *constitutive* of pleasure, not means to it; and the person having the experience is essential, not instrumental, to its occurrence. The pleasure of playing an instrument *requires* playing it and entails a person's experiencing the playing. The pleasure is constituted by the experience's being of a certain kind.

It is true, however, that for any consequentialism, the value of persons is *dependent*, as opposed to being intrinsic to their nature; their existence by itself would yield neither pleasure nor have any other good consequences. The value of persons is realized in what they bring about or in

what is brought about, or occurs, in them. By contrast, for deontological views (as for at least Christianity among world religions), an act of lying—and presumably even forming an intention to lie—can degrade the worth of the agent quite apart from any consequences; and treating people disrespectfully can be incongruent with their intrinsic worth regardless of its consequences. One might insult them in words audible only to oneself and quickly forgotten. This action is still disrespectful.

Do these points show that utilitarians cannot recognize the full worth of persons that is implicit in viewing human persons as created by God conceived as loving them?³⁴ It is true that, at least for a consequentialism of the kind utilitarianism represents, such properties of persons as their virtues or the benevolent state of their wills have no intrinsic worth, whereas for other ethical theories these are valuable independently of their consequences. The problem (which I cannot pursue here) is how a theistic consequentialist can avoid conceiving persons as merely of instrumental value in virtue of producing, as a consequence of their actions, some quantity of the good.³⁵

Two other ethical perspectives should be mentioned: natural law theory and virtue ethics. Clearly a natural law theory is compatible with classical theism. Indeed, it may not be plausible apart from that worldview, since the normative authority of natural patterns otherwise seems insufficiently justifiable. Such a theory may also allow for the epistemic autonomy of ethics, as it apparently does in for Aquinas. As to classical virtue ethics, one possibility of special interest here is an ethics of virtue that takes love as the central virtue. Certainly a central role for love in human conduct is suggested by Jesus's treating 'Love thy God' and 'Love thy neighbor' as the greatest commandments. In any case, the worth of persons is primary in virtue ethics. It is exemplified by a virtuous nature; and persons—as virtuous—are the basic standard of moral conduct. Respect for freedom can also be accommodated to this framework. There is much left indeterminate—or to be determined in context—by a virtue ethic. But what is determinate in it is consistent with the divine command ethical theory developed here.

There is, then, much latitude in normative ethics for classical theism combined with a divine command ethics of the kind suggested here. This does not imply that just any ethical theory comports with classical theism. I do not see how an egoistic theory could (assuming that should be counted as an ethical theory at all); and it may be plausibly argued that consequentialist theories do not comport as well with it as deontological theories or virtue ethics. But the latitude here is still wide. As to the metaethical latitude possible for classical theism, and for Christianity in particular, I believe that a divine command theory of the kind suggested here is a possible option consonant with religious reverence for God and Scripture, but also compatible with giving to natural reason the kind of major role in ethical thinking that, on the leading metaethical theories, it appears to have.³⁶

NOTES

1. Even here I speak mainly about philosophical theology as pertaining chiefly to Christianity and Judaism. I leave aside the rejection, e.g. by process theologians, of omnipotence.

2. I consider it arguable that a *kind* of constitution relation can also be an identity relation. Being water is arguably both identical with and constituted by being H₂O; but being constituted by a certain piece of bronze with a particular shape is not identical with being (say) the Rodin statue in question. In the latter case, however, perhaps we have a composition relation that is not a constitution relation (or not the kind that is also an identity one).

3. Note that not all non-moral properties are non-natural in any narrow sense. Suppose God saves my life on a given occasion. God's saving my life is a non-normative property and is natural in the broad sense of 'descriptive,' but it is also "supernatural." To rule that this act cannot ground an obligation of gratitude begs the question against theism. Consider also a religious obligation, say to worship God. Arguably, if this is moral, its basis is broadly natural properties, e.g. omniscience, indicating God's having grandeur of the worship-demanding kind. I should add that where I use 'consequential' some would use 'supervenient'; the former is preferable in carrying on its face the main idea I am invoking, and for some people supervenience connects only types of properties, say the moral and the natural, and not specific instantiations of properties. It is very difficult to specify what constitutes a *moral* property, but nothing in this paper turns on leaving that unanalyzed. An indication of how one might characterize the moral point of view (as opposed, e.g., to the prudential) and moral properties is provided in my *Practical Reasoning and Ethical Decision* (London: Routledge, 2006), esp. pp. 173–76. Moral obligation will be connected with theological obligation, which it can overlap, below.

4. This notion of embeddedness is suggested in my initial essay in Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Religion in the Public Square: The Place of Religious Convictions in Political Debate* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997), n. 21.

5. I take this suggestion from "Determination and Property Identity" (MS), by Paul Audi (and should note that he allows vacuous satisfaction of the clause for any property that is basic in the sense that what possess it does not have it in virtue of *any* other property). The other necessary condition he proposes for property identity (apparently also satisfied by the suggested divine command view proposed) is that whatever being *F* grounds is *also* grounded by being *G*, and conversely. This is not the place to defend a criterion of property identity. I might add, however, that virtually any such criterion implies that $F = G$ *only* if they are necessarily equivalent, and that condition is clearly met by the property equivalences I consider plausible.

6. In at least the former case, the question of how the view preserves divine freedom arises, but this kind of question confronts any view on which God does not determine necessary truths. I see no more reason to take the unalterability of necessary truths to undermine God's freedom than to take it to undermine God's omnipotence. (This is not to deny that there is much to puzzle about here.)

7. Theists also commonly hold or presuppose that God is a necessary being. I assume this here; but note that even supposing there is a Godless possible world in which certain act-types are obligatory for persons, that world would not contain *us human beings* if we have the indexical property of being created by God.

8. At least on the assumption that there can be at most one omniscient being (and that God exists necessarily), indexed and general commandability would be equivalent, but this would not imply their identity as properties.

9. Cf. the view that "Principles of moral obligation constituted by divine commands are not timeless truths, because the commands are given by signs that occur in time. People who are not in a region of space-time in which a sign can be known are not subject to it." See Robert Merrihew Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 270. It appears that the constitution relation here intended by Adams, as opposed to the relation posited in what I call divine commandability theory, precludes a priori status for the relevant moral principles. Cf. John Hare: "Divine command theory, as I shall defend it, is the theory that what *makes* something obligatory for us is that God commands it." See *God's Call* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), p. 49 (italics added).

10. If a consequence does not clearly follow, and if for this reason rational conscientious people may disagree about whether it does, it is not clear that it should be taken to be commanded (at least for ordinary people). There are also logical consequences that clearly do follow but involve long disjunctions and red herrings; these seem inappropriate to constitute divine commands. In technical language, the class of divine commands is apparently not closed under entailment or even self-evident entailment. Even the class of prima facie obligations does not seem closed under either condition, particularly the entailment condition; but it does seem true that closure is less restricted for obligations than for commands.

11. I argue for this point and discuss how the Biblical love commands may be obeyed in "The Ethics of Love and the Love of Others," in progress.

12. Presumably any plausible divine command ethics should take account of this point, since it will seek to make sense of our possibly discovering the moral status of an action regarding which there is no divine command—unless, of course, it is supposed that God has already set forth a complete set of moral axioms and implicitly commands any act implied, by however many intermediate steps, in the axioms. We should also note that what *accords with* God's will here must be more than simply *consented to* by God, since otherwise evils whose existence is contingent (which is perhaps all of them) would have to be conceived as divinely willed.

13. If obligatoriness *is* commandedness, it is not also grounded in that. So although commandedness is a "descriptive" property and can ground some properties, it cannot (on the suggested view) ground obligatoriness.

14. See W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), esp. chap. 2.

15. Here I follow Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, p. 259. For further discussion of how to conceive God's antecedent and consequent willing in relation to divine command theory see Mark C. Murphy, "Divine Command, Divine Will, and Moral Obligation," *Faith and Philosophy* 15, 1 (1998), pp. 3–27.

16. One might wonder how supererogatory acts fit this classification. Since they are not obligatory (commandable in the relevant sense), are they still prima facie obligatory, since (apparently) in accordance with God's antecedent will? I see no difficulty in saying so. If they are *beyond* the call of duty, should they not also *encompass* it? Consider the paradigms: doing good for one or more others beyond what they can expect on the basis of one's (final) obligations. There is in such cases a prima facie obligation of beneficence; but it does not predominate in cases of supererogation: other obligations or one's rights give one moral freedom to abstain. We might see God as unwilling to command such deeds in any blanket fashion (presumably owing to the

complexity of the situations the relevant agents face), but as subject to disappointment at their non-performance, though not the kind of disapproval appropriate to failure to fulfill what, as according with God's consequent will, merits divine command.

17. Philip L. Quinn addresses this difficulty in "Divine Command Theory," in Hugh LaFollette, ed., *Ethical Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), esp. pp. 54–63. Quinn also discusses Adams's competing view, on which God's commands are morally central. Cf. Richard Swinburne's view that "There are certain minimal duties to one's fellow men which are duties whether or not there is a God" and "As all actions that are good for other reasons [besides being objects of a divine commandment] are also commanded by God, in each case there are two reasons for doing the action and two good desires which we could indulge by doing it." See *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 123 and 134 respectively.

18. Suppose honoring our parents is an a priori and necessary prima facie obligation; then God's commanding it would, by virtue of our special relation to God, be an additional source of obligation and would hence create an additional degree of obligation to do this; this may be called an additional obligation so long as it is not taken to imply a different behavioral object. For much discussion of how God creates obligations, see Richard Swinburne, "Morality and God," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 225 (2003), pp. 315–28.

19. Here I draw on chap. 6 of *The Architecture of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), in which I called the view that moral reasons for action are the "highest" kind the *moral paramountcy view*. Note that the theological paramountcy view formulated in the text does not entail that theological reasons are *supreme*, in the sense that in a conflict between a theological reason and any set of different kinds of reasons, the former is always preponderant. If, however, obligatoriness is commandability, it is at best unclear how a final moral obligation could conflict with an overall, as opposed to prima facie, theological reason.

20. This view may be fruitfully compared with John Hare's point (with which it seems compatible) that "there is nothing heteronymous about willing to obey a superior's prescription because a superior has prescribed it, in a discretionary way, as long as the final end is shared between us, and we have trust also about the route" (op. cit. p. 115).

21. My project does not require distinguishing sharply between the moral and other points of view. The same kind of theory will apply to any normative 'ought,' including even the prudential 'ought,' if one takes God to care about us in such a way that anything we ought to do is commandable in the relevant sense.

22. Adams, in "A Modified Divine Command Theory," in *The Virtue of Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), notes this view and cites Locke as a case in point. See esp. pp. 108–09.

23. Cf. Linda Zagzebski's view that "Value in all forms derives from God, in particular from God's motives. God's motives are perfectly good, and human motives are good insofar as they are like divine motives." See "Morality and Religion," in William J. Wainwright, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 359. Since this is an exemplarist virtue theory, the goodness of God's motives is not to be understood in terms of the goodness of anything else. But since "being loving is one of God's essential motives" (p. 360), the Euthyphro problem is solved without the arbitrariness that (she holds) Adams's view incurs, since "There is no intrinsic connection between a command and the property of being loving, so to tie morality to the commands of a loving God is to tie it to two distinct properties of God" (p. 360). On my view, which (like Adams's), coincides with hers

in taking God to be loving, there is an intrinsic connection: being loving *is* in part being strongly and intrinsically disposed to care about the good of the beloved for its own sake, where this good is in part a matter of flourishing in familiar ways that involve well-being, e.g. in the happy exercise of rational capacities and the absence of pain and suffering. Such caring does not dictate, but does constrain, what a loving being will command.

24. This is surely Kant's view in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, first section.

25. This is not to deny that these words may be puzzling in any case. But if the goodness of something depends on God's will as it would on a certain sort of axiological voluntarism, then what God sees is a certain kind of relation to God's will, as opposed to the character of the creation that God has brought into being.

26. It must be granted that if God's seeing that it was good is taken to entail *discovering* this, then *Genesis* would apparently be presupposing a lack of omniscience. My assumption is that even an omnipotent being might not necessarily see, in the relevant, partly perceptual sense, everything it *knows*, and might have a sense of the goodness of what is seen that is grounded in *its* properties and is difficult to account for on a strongly voluntaristic view of the goodness in question.

27. See, e.g., D. Z. Phillips, "Philosophy, Theology, and the Reality of God," *Philosophical Quarterly* 13 (1963), reprinted as "Grammar and Religious Belief," in Brian Davies, ed., *Philosophy of Religion* (Blackwell, 2000), pp. 108–14.

28. For a detailed case that one might have an ethics that is at once realist and prescriptivist, see John Hare, "Prescriptive Realism," forthcoming. My points to reconcile a noncognitivist ethics with a version of divine command ethics seem to apply even more readily to the kind of nondescriptivist theory he outlines.

29. Perhaps a case can be made that, *given* God's omnibenevolence and certain facts about the creation, God's creating us implies a kind of love toward us, but here I simply assume (with Adams) that the most important conception of God appropriate to a divine command theory is of a *loving* God. This approach is entirely consistent with my case for a set of substantive moral principles in *The Good in the Right: A Theory of Intuition and Intrinsic Value* (Princeton University Press, 2004).

30. God's taking us to have worth would follow from omniscience on the assumption that such worth is consequential on a natural base of properties we possess and God knows this fact. Insofar as it is plausible to think that it is thus consequential, we might say that our inherent worth is at least not wholly *constituted* by God's loving us—as opposed to its basis being owed to the intrinsic properties we are endowed with through the creative power of that love.

31. For a major statement of Kant's position on the notions of worth and dignity, see the *Groundwork*, Sect. 2.

32. A full-scale critique of Kant on this and related points is given by Derek Parfit in *Climbing the Mountain* (forthcoming).

33. Considerable discussion of this point is provided in my "A Kantian Intuitionism," *Mind* 110, p. 439 (2001).

34. Critics of utilitarianism have said that it does not take persons seriously. See, e.g., John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

35. For a careful attempt to show utilitarianism consistent with theism, see James A. Keller, *Faith and Philosophy*, 1 (1980). Cf. chap. 4 of *The Good in the Right*, which provides reasons to doubt that any maximizing consequentialism can do full justice to the value of persons.

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