The Foundation of morality

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1. Abstract

In this project we have been working on the phenomenon of morality, more specifically the foundation in relation to religion. We have been looking into both psychology and philosophy, in aim to find answers to our research. As main objects of investigation we have worked with the philosopher and psychologist William James, along with the theologian Paul Tillich. Furthermore we have looked into the Divine command theory, along with several theories and arguments from various professionals within the field of psychology.
2. Problem definition

2.2 Motivation

Throughout the Western world there seems to be a universal sense of morality, a moral codex for humans to live by. It is our aim to investigate the foundation of this morality, in order to discover the foundation of its existence. We will explore both the field of philosophy and psychology, along with religion, as we believe it is of significant value to the quality of our result.

All religions have guidelines, occasionally demands, as to how its supporters should behave morally. However, it seems that atheists, evolutionists, and primitive populations mutually, to various degrees, honour the moral laws of religion. This factual matter brings us further on with the investigation of morality, and into the field of psychology.

In opposition to philosophy, it seems almost impossible to calculate moral correctness from a psychological viewpoint. A great psychologist (and philosopher) of the previous millennium, who has devoted a generous amount of dedication to the topic, is William James. Hence, James will be a main character in our project. The theologian Paul Johannes Tillich is another character, whose views will be examined in favour of our ambition.

As above mentioned, we wish to look for some of the answers in the field of philosophy. Countless philosophers through the ages have spent most of their career trying to figure out if and how an action is morally defendable. In result there are numerous philosophical theories on ethics that enable you to measure and calculate actions from which you will find different answers to the moral correctness of the action.

Basically morality is the codex that distinguishes between “right” and “wrong”. But what is it that defines morality? How is good or bad moral behaviour defined in contemporary western society and where does that definition stem from? These meditations among others are what we wish to elaborate in this project.
2.2.1 Research question
- If and how does religion influence the foundation of morality?

2.2.2 Sub questions
- What is the basis of religion according to William James?
- What are William James’ ideas about morality?
- Can psychology and philosophy of morality be combined?
- How does man obtain morality?
- Is the foundation of our morality dependent on religion?
- Are actions good because God commands them or does God command them because they are good?
- Does Tillich consider morals as conscious acts?

2.3 Research methods
In researching what the foundation of morality is we will look into the theories and opinions of different philosophers and psychologists. We will use recent material as well as older writings. We expect some of our sources to be quite old, but as our project is built on philosophy, which theories often handle aging very well, we do not think that that will be a problem.

2.4 Delimitation
The original project proposal was about comparative religion but that topic was too broad and could not fully cover the two dimensions we are focusing on. After discussion within the group and with our supervisor we came to the conclusion to go in a direction away from comparative religion but still write a religion-related project. We came to an agreement about concentrating on morality and decided to name our project Foundation of morality.
We are not focusing on a specific religion but on the meanings of religion and whether morals are built on religion or not. We are not going to look into rituals at all and we will not analyze religious texts.

We are considering both the philosophical part of religion as well as the psychological part.

2.5 Semester theme

In relation to our semester theme – structure and performance – our aim is to study the structure of morality as that is an important part of our society, and it controls in a way human performance. As it says in the description of the semester theme in our semester booklet: *Performance refers to what we do. Structure refers to the framework within which we do it.* Considering this we think that it fits well with our project.

2.6 Dimensions

We want to cover two dimensions in this project, *science and philosophy* and *subjectivity and learning*. As for the philosophical part we will among other things focus on the problem of “God’s commands” and look into philosophers as Janine Marie Idziak and Robert M. Adams.

We intend to cover the dimension of subjectivity and learning by concentrating on the psychological relation between religious experience and moral dispositions. Our main resources of knowledge about that will be psychologist/philosopher William James and philosopher Paul Tillich.
3. William James

William James (1842-1910) was an American psychologist and philosopher. He had a medical education but worked as a lecturer in physiology, psychology and later mostly in philosophy, at both Harvard and around Europe. After him lies profound work in psychology as well as philosophy, including lectures, essays and books. We chose to use him as one of the main scholars in our project due to the fact that he worked with both philosophy and psychology, which are the two main points of focus in the project.

In the first part of this chapter we intend to achieve a better understanding of what religion (and divinity) means to people in a psychological context. In the latter part we analyze an essay that James wrote about morals, in order to gain a comprehension of what morals are and on what they are built.

Most relevant of his works to this project, and the ones we use, are *The varieties of religious experience* and *The moral philosopher and the moral life*.

3.1 James’ definitions of religion and divinity

The following is based on Lecture II in *The varieties of religious experience*.

According to William James, the concept of religion cannot be defined precisely. He claims that the word religion is a collective name and that there are multiple different characters to be found in religion, many if not all equally important. He also argues that there is no such thing as THE religious sentiment, but that the concept of religious sentiment is, as well as religion, a collective name.

There are many feelings within the religious sentiment; there is e.g. religious joy, religious fear, religious love etc. But these feelings are not limited to religion, they are the natural feelings of man but directed to a religious object. James does not deny that religious emotions are psychic entities that can be differentiated from other emotions but as he puts it: “there is no ground for assuming a simple abstract ‘religious emotion’ to exist as a distinct elementary mental affection by itself, present in every religious experience without exception” (James, 2002, p. 27).

James still thinks it is important to pinpoint further what he is referring to when he speaks of religion. He makes a distinction between what he calls institutional religion and personal religion.
The basis of institutional religion is, in short, rituals. That is “worship and sacrifice, procedures for working on the dispositions of the deity, theology and ceremony and ecclesiastical organization” (James, 2002, p. 28). It revolves around winning the favor of the gods. In personal religion it is what goes on in the mind of the believer that matters. Approval of the gods and theology are also an important factor in personal religion but the believer deals with his god directly, not through churches, priests or rituals, “the relation goes direct from heart to heart, from soul to soul, between man and his maker” (James, 2002, p. 28).

The focus point in James’ writings is on the personal experience. He tries to ignore the institutional part of religion entirely. He also concentrates on the religious experience of firm believers, whose “religious spirit is unmistakable and extreme” (James, 2002, p. 36), but does not pay much attention to people with little religious commitment.

He admits that people may think that personal religion is merely one part of religion, therefore an incomplete element of religion as a whole and should rather be recognized as man’s conscience or morality. This shows, in his opinion, that the question of definition often becomes a mere debate about names and he does not mind if people prefer to call personal religion ‘morality’ or ‘conscience’.

James sums up his own definition of (personal) religion as “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine” (James, 2002, p.29). Then of course, there is the problem of defining the concept of divinity, which we will not go deeply into here, but try to explain it shortly.

When defining the concept of divine James sticks to what it means to firm believers, as he did when defining the concept of religion. He states that the definition of ‘divine’ has to be broad; it should be used when referring to “any object that is godlike, whether it be a concrete deity or not” (James, 2002, p. 32). The reason for this statement of his is a fact he claims is true; that some religions do not have a god, e.g. Buddhism where Buddha stands in the place of god but is not a god.

In his definition of the term, James starts by pointing out that gods are supposed to be the highest power. They are superior to human, they know and see everything, and their claims and demands are the basis of the truth. Even though he wants the definition to be broad he fears that this is too broad, therefore he continues to say: “The divine shall mean for us only such a primal reality as the individual feels impelled to respond to solemnly and gravely, and neither by a curse nor a jest” (James, 2002, p. 35). What he means by this is that a religious individual does not consider it a
burden to follow his god’s example and obey him, but it is the individual’s path of life and he willingly goes down that path in harmony.

We will end our speculations about the concept of divinity here, and make do with this definition as we do not consider it necessary for the sake of this project to go deeper into it, also in order to not complicate the matter further.

3.2 James’ thoughts on morality

The following is based on *The moral philosopher and the moral life*. In his essay, James speaks of ethical philosophy, whereas it is usually referred to as ethics and we do so here.

James believed that there can not be any final truth in ethics before the last man ever living will have shared his thoughts and experiences with the world. This claim he supported with his beliefs that everyone has a part in determining the content of ethics, in the same way as everyone contributes to the moral life of the human race. He also argues that the one who wants to study ethics has to give up all ethical skepticism before he can do so.

In his essay *The moral philosopher and the moral life* James writes about three questions within ethics; the psychological, the metaphysical and the casuistic questions. He insists that most debaters of ethics consider the only question that really matters to be the psychological one, which demands the historical basis of people’s moral ideas. The metaphysical question seeks the true meaning of the terms ‘good’, ‘bad’ and ‘obligation’, and the casuistic question “asks what is the measure of the various goods and ills which men recognize, so that the philosopher may settle the true order of human obligations” (James, 2003, p. 185). We will now analyze each one of the questions separately.

3.2.1 The psychological question

James thinks it is impossible to explain man’s moral judgment (of what is good and what is bad) in the simple way of associating it with bare physical comfort and/or discomfort, as many philosophers prior to him had done. He agrees that “association with many remote pleasures will unquestionably make a thing significant of goodness in our minds” (James, 2003, p. 186), but still thinks it is naive to think that all sentiments of man can be explained in that way and believes that at least some of them must have another origin. He claims that as long as psychology continues to investigate human nature, it will keep discovering clear evidence of other factors that connect “the
impressions of the environment with one another and with our impulses in quite different ways from those mere associations of coexistence and succession which are practically all that pure empiricism can admit” (James, 2002, p. 186). He takes humor as an example; an individual feeling which he says can not be explained by mere association with physical comfort/discomfort. He argues that it must stem from another origin, namely our brain, our “cerebral structure” as he calls it, and that it is therefore an intuitive feeling. The same goes with our moral feelings; he claims that some of them are definitely intuitive. James does not take the time to explain this any further but emphasizes that “purely inward forces are certainly at work here” (James, 2003, p. 188). His argument in short, is that even though some of our feelings, including moral sentiments, can be associated with physical pleasure, they originate from our brain and are therefore innate.

3.2.2 The metaphysical question
For the terms of ‘good’, ‘bad’ and ‘obligation’ to exist, there must, according to James, be sentient life. He asserts that in a purely material world, existing only of physical facts without sentient life of any kind and without a God, there would be no definition of what is good and what is bad, and no obligations. There would be no ground for one material thing to be called better than another material thing (besides from the fact that there would not be anyone to think anything, or call one thing better than another, in a purely material world), as “bettness” (James, 2003, p. 190) is not a material relation. Furthermore no demands would be made in a simply material world and therefore no obligations would exist.

James insists that “goodness, badness and obligation must be \textit{realized} somewhere in order really to exist” (James, 2003, p. 190), in a lifeless world that would obviously not be possible. That is the first thing to be aware of in ethics according to James, as moral relations can not exist without reference to something else, “their only habitat can be a mind which feels them; and no world composed of merely physical facts can possibly be a world to which ethical propositions apply” (James, 2003, p. 190).

As soon as there is a single sentient being in the world, the terms ‘good’ and ‘bad’ can exist. But for the term ‘obligation’ to exist, James claims that there would have to be at least two thinking beings in the world, because demanding something from a material object is not possible and material objects cannot make demands, and as mentioned before, there are no obligations in a world without any demands.
A world consisting of two thinking beings would however be problematic. With only a single thinking being in the world the meaning of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ would be decided by that thinker alone, anything he would find good would be good as there would be no opponent opinion to that. When thinker number two is in the picture things become more complex. The two thinkers might disagree on everything; that what One would find good, Two might find bad etc. and it would be a world without ethical unity. According to James such a world would not be “a moral universe but a moral dualism” (James, 2003, p. 192). In a world with moral dualism no opinion could be said to be right or wrong, the two thinkers have different opinions and there is nobody to judge whether one opinion is better than another.

With more than the two thinkers in the world James states that the moral dualism would change to a moral pluralism, but still no opinion could be said to be better or more correct than another. For that to be possible there would have to be some kind of superior or divine being to define and judge what in fact is good or bad, and furthermore to decide what is better or worse. According to James this is not an issue for those who believe in God, “the divine thought would be the model, to which the others should conform” (James, 2003, p. 193). In their minds God defines what is good and bad, better and worse etc. But even if we assume that there is a God who has his ideas of good and bad, what is it that obliges others to follow his example? James asserts that people imagine that there is an “abstract moral order in which the objective truth resides” (James, 2003, p. 194); therefore people believe that they should follow God’s (moral) ideas. James argues that this is what people tend to do, even though they would prefer to follow their own ideas and that God had made no demands to people to follow his example.

It should now be clear what James’ ideas about the terms ‘good’, ‘bad’ and ‘obligation’ are. In short he argues that they can not exist in solitude, there has to be sentient life in the world for them to exist. As soon as there are living thinking beings in the world, the world can be said to be ethical. To James it is clear that our world is ethical, whether there is a God or not. He claims that ethics have just as much grounds in a universe without a God, “where the highest consciousness is human” (James, 2003, p. 198) as in a universe with a God.

### 3.2.3 The casuistic question

For clarification purposes we start with the definition of casuistry: moral philosophy based on the application of general ethical principles to resolve moral dilemmas (www.dictionary.com).
In our world today, as in James’ world around 1900, there are different morals to be found. People around the world agree on many, maybe even most, matters but disagree on a whole lot of matters as well. The reason for different moral views can be traced to various things, e.g. race, temperament, circumstances and philosophical beliefs. According to James the ethical philosopher adds to this confusion by insisting that if he tries hard and painstakingly enough he can discover a system of truth existing above different individual opinions, and that is exactly what James is attempting to do in his essay.

As he mentions before it is not possible to be skeptic as an ethical philosopher; as you must believe that there is a truth to be found. He admits that this claim is though hard to hold on to as he himself has made clear that “truth cannot be a self-proclaiming set of laws, or an abstract “moral reason”, but can only exist in act, or in shape of an opinion held by some thinker really to be found” (James, 2003, p. 199). What is the solution then, when there is no one thinker above others in the world? Should the philosopher state his own ideals (of e.g. good and bad) as the rules that others should follow? James says no, the philosopher has to put his own ideals to the side and look for an unbiased test to find out what is really good (or bad).

One method to do this, which has been used by ethical philosophers through time, is to assume a common essence in everything good.

If it were found that all goods *qua* goods contained a common essence, then the amount of this essence involved in any one good would show its rank in the scale of goodness, and order could be quickly made; for this essence would be *the* good upon which all thinkers were agreed, the relatively objective and universal good that the philosopher seeks. (James, 2003, p. 200)

Because of this, different things have through time been pointed out to be the essence of good and therefore the basis for ethics. However, James claims that none of them has provided general contentment. In his opinion all of the measurements (of what is good) have flaws, some are unclear and others certainly can not be universal, so he comes up with what he calls “the *most* universal principle - that the essence of good is simply to satisfy demand” (James, 2003, p. 201). He goes on to say that this demand that needs to be satisfied can be the demand for absolutely anything, not just a certain thing or things, and therefore the only character various ideals have in common is that they are ideals. To clear his point he mentions that ethics are as complicated and have just as many elements as physics; therefore philosophers cannot be made to believe that casuistry can be measured simply by using a single theoretical principle.
If the question of casuistry would be a hypothetical problem, it would not really be a problem at all. In an imaginary world everything is possible and there every demand made could easily be satisfied and no problems would be caused. Such a world would without a doubt be a perfect world, as everyone would get their wishes fulfilled and everyone would be happy. But an imaginary world like that could obviously not function as it would include incompatible acts and experiences, and can therefore not exist. An example of those incompatible acts are “spending your money, yet growing rich; taking our holiday, yet getting ahead with our work; shooting and fishing, yet doing no hurt to the beasts […]” (James, 2003, p. 202).

The real world works quite differently; there is no possibility of everyone getting their will all the time, whether it involves other people or not. That is, in James’ view, the reason for the search of a casuistic scale, in his own words: “the ethical philosopher’s demand for the right scale of subordination in ideals is the fruit of an altogether practical need. Some part of the ideal must be butchered, and he needs to know which part” (James, 2003, p. 203).

James asserts that getting rid of some parts of ideals can be problematic. In our contemporary society, as well as in society a century ago when James lived, ideals have more or less already been tailored to fit the society’s needs. Consequently our ideals have largely been decided for us. If we choose to accept the ideal(s) that the majority of people follow we automatically butcher some other ideals that then disappear from our life scenery. If those butchered ideals would for some reasons resurface we would be expected, by our society, to ignore them. In that way “our environment encourages us not to be philosophers but partisans” (James, 2003, p. 203). He continues to clarify that this is very problematic, because if a philosopher is supposed to be impartial he can not ignore any ideal, no matter what it consists of. If he would be biased and follow his own instinct, and by doing so ignore any ideal, he would be contributing to the “mutilation of the fulness of the truth” (James, 2003, p. 203). The bottom line is that if the philosopher is to maintain his critical mind he can under no circumstances take sides with the disputants.

But how is that possible? Is the philosopher then never to come to any conclusion or will he just have to give in to skepticism and by that stop being a philosopher? James thinks that there is a way out for the philosopher, and that is to assume that what is best for the whole is THE best. What he means by that is in short that as it is not possible to gratify every single demand made in the world, “the guiding principle in ethical philosophy” (James, 2003, p. 205), must be to always gratify as many demands as possible. By doing so, as many people as possible are satisfied and dissatisfaction is minimum. Ideals who contribute to this outcome must, according to James, be the highest on the
casuistic scale. His solution is in his own words: “Invent some manner of realizing your own ideals which will also satisfy the alien demands – that and that only is the path of peace!” (James, 2003, p. 205). He claims that following this principal has made our society more balanced and that it has terminated various conflicts, e.g. the liberty to kill. He emphasizes that the philosopher has to built his casuistic scale in accordance to conventions in his society and thereby be conservative. On top of all this James argues that for a philosopher to be true to his role, he has to take into account that nothing involving ideals and their balance is permanent. New ideals will always keep surfacing and either replace former ideals or be terminated.

In wrapping up his discussion of the casuistic question James states his belief that “the highest ethical life […] consists at all times in the breaking of rules which have grown too narrow for the actual case” (James, 2003, p. 209). He speaks of one “unconditional commandment” (James, 2003, p. 209) worth following and that is basically to always seek the way to make as many people content as possible.

3.3 James’ deduction

In his conclusion James restates that morals can only exist in a world with sentient life but also affirms that ethical relations could indeed exist in moral solitude. This would be possible if the solitary thinker had different ideals that he would shift to and from. Some of the thinker’s ideals would be important and tyrannical while others would be gentle. He goes on to say that “obligation can thus exist inside a single thinker’s consciousness; and perfect peace can abide with him only so far as he lives according to some sort of a casuistic scale which keeps his more imperative [tyrannical demands] goods on top” (James, 2003, p. 211).

Next he claims that the biggest issue in man’s moral life is “the difference between the easy-going and the strenuous mood” (James, 2003, p. 211). When in the easy-going mood, man’s main concern is to get out of a present bad situation, but when in the strenuous mood man does not really mind the bad situation of the present if it leads to a better one (a greater ideal). James thinks that every man has the strenuous mood inside of him but it takes more to awaken it in some than in others. It requires strong feelings or passions, and for a single thinker who has nobody to encourage the awakening in him, it might be impossible for the strenuous mood to be activated.

According to James this is also why, “in a merely human world without God, the appeal to our moral energy falls short of its maximal stimulating power” (James, 2003, p. 212). He asserts that it
would be the opposite in a world with belief in God and goes on to argue that “even if there were no metaphysical or traditional grounds for believing in God, men would postulate one simply as a pretext for living hard […]” (James, 2003 p. 213). James says it is much easier for believers to handle whatever bad situations life brings along, than it is for non-believers, and the reason for that is their religious faith; the faith that they go through difficult times for the sake of a divine being superior to them. This is why, in James’ opinion, a man with strenuous mood will always have the upper hand in a battle with a man with an easy-going mood, and “religion will drive irreligion to the wall” (James, 2003, p. 213).

James’ final conclusion is that the ethical philosopher’s dream world, a balanced and systematically moral one, can only exist if there is a divine being present to set standards for others to follow. His demands would be at the top of the casuistic scale and therefore nobody would argue against them. He closes his discussion by stating: “In the interest of our own ideal of systematically unified moral truth, therefore, we, as would-be philosophers, must postulate a divine thinker, and pray for the victory of the religious cause” (James, 2003, p. 214).

3.4 Conclusion

From what here has been written about James’ ideas, of religion and ethics, we come to the conclusion that he believes religion to be the foundation of morality. He speaks of religion to be “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine” (James, 2002, p.29), meaning that religion is a personal matter between man and his god. Divinity is in James’ opinion a superior being, the highest power, which (religious) people should, voluntarily and happily, follow and obey.

When it comes to ethics James argues that every single person contributes to the definition of what is ethical (moral) and therefore they can never, as long as there is sentient life in the world, be final. He is convinced that morals can not be explained solely by associating them with physical comfort/discomfort. They must have, at least some of them, another origin. That other origin, James claims, is the brain and therefore morals (some of them) are innate.

He elaborates on the existence of the concepts ‘good’, ‘bad’ and ‘obligation’, and his result is that there has to be sentient life for them to exist. He then goes on to consider what the basis of ethics would be in a world without divinity, without someone to decide what is good and bad. He figures
that it would be very problematic because the world needs a solid definition of what is good and bad, without it there would be chaos. Everyone would want all their demands fulfilled and that is simply not possible. His solution is that if there was no divinity in the world then people would have to live by a single principle, which is to assume that what is best for the whole is THE best, that way as many demands as possible would be gratified.

James finally states his opinion that people need a God to encourage them to live a moral life. As he puts it: “in a merely human world without a God, the appeal to our moral energy falls short of its maximal stimulating power” (James, 2003, p. 212). He closes his argument by asserting that it is necessary to postulate a divinity in order to have a unified moral truth.
4. Moral Psychology

4.1 Basic theories dealing with morality from a psychological point of view

Within this paragraph we are going to explain two different theories concerning how you acquire morals. The first theory has an extrinsic worldview and the second represent the intrinsic. We are going to discuss these points trying to validate the points they put forward.

The “Moral network theory” (p.25) is a theory that states that morals are acquired. “Moral network theory” also states that it can vary, in different societies and cultures. It states that a child learns about what is wrong and right by being rewarded or punished accordingly. The child is so to say being “programmed” within a society. It is important to realise what the “Moral network theory” believes to be the major problems within the society in order to know how it suggest solving it. The society has many very different and complex codes that the child has to acquire. This could e.g. be that lying or not telling the truth is sometimes the right thing to do, even though it generally isn’t considered right e.g. not telling someone that they do look fat in that dress. Every time, according to the “moral network theory”, a person experiences a morally ambiguous situation it will result in a re-evaluation of his moral standards and possibly a dialog with others, which in the end results in a corrected version. The theory implies that every time the morals of the certain person become inadequate he discards them in favour of a more improved version. It is of course important to realise that there might be different reasons why people act correctly. They might do it because there is a law within the certain field that the person feels inclined to follow or because of a genuine moral concern. I am going to present two different theories that have two different ideas of how you acquire morality. The first was in the “Moral network theory” that has an extrinsic worldview. Meaning that it has the view that the person is being mainly affected by views coming from the world outside. The second viewpoint I am going to describe is the “Normative school” that has its focus on an intrinsic worldview.

Within the “Normative school” Churchland (page 32) argues that the human being is not merely adapting to the surrounding world, it is the sign of something greater. He does not imply that some sort of divinity is affecting you or that the pure genes are affecting you. He believes that man has
developed a personal ability to adapt and personally reflect upon the input given. This results in every individual having it’s own way of coping and relating to the world surrounding it.

I have now stated two different viewpoints that might be individually correct or it might be possible to combine the two. I have tried to describe both ideas as if I was convinced of them both in that way it makes the theories easier to understand. There are two forms of personal morality the intrapersonal/intrinsic and the interpersonal/extrinsic (page 34). “[…] the intrapersonal, concerned with individual flourishing, personal goodness etc..” And “[…] the interpersonal, concerned with social stability, coordination, prevention of harms, and so on.”

It is important to notice that there might be competing interests in a society. Just being a morally good person might not be the way you will gain the most success. Interests such as “economical, social, and sexual success, and much else besides.”(Page 34) It is therefore up to the individual (or the genes or the social contexts) to decide which values will be the most prominent. When taking “Moral network theory” into account, some people might feel that the society enforces their negative moral behaviours and therefore develop negatively. This might mean that the society develops into the directly opposite position than the morally good one. It is also important to state that a society also is affected by uncontrollable forces e.g. natures forces that might shape people to take some other considerations that is not morally right.

There is also the problem, especially in the area of globalisation that you can belong to several societies simultaneously. This posses the problem it two different societies can have different moral standards. Then the individual is caught between the two. It could be argued that this is just a part of the process developing your own morality, but first of all does this make the individual think that other persons living by other standards (in the belief that they live correctly) are immoral? And second how should the individual react? Should you follow the largest societies rules or choose the society that has the closest personal network connection? Both incidents will result in some societal problems if the person chooses to be true to the norms of the largest community. It might end up feeling like he is abandoning his original beliefs and moving away from family and friends. This could lead to the making of an unstable personal frame. This might result in the person’s general moral confusion and new personal moral dilemmas might occur. On the other hand if, the individual chooses to follow the small personal network it might end up in an undynamic society that doesn’t interact with the surrounding society or worse, break the legal and moral boundaries of it.
Morals has the function of "modify, suppress, transform or amplify"(s.21) certain social or animalistic behaviours, but there might develop a great confusion within the individual of how to act. It is the prime concern of morality to keep the individual fixed in the correct path. Even though this is a complicated assignment it is necessary for the society, that there exists morality and the mere act of pondering on morality helps understanding and live morally. The “Moral network theory” and the “Normative school” are both trying to answer the eternal question on how man can live a morally correct live. Our guess would be that to combine the two areas might create a more correct and complete impression

4.2 Why combine moral psychology and moral philosophy?

In this paragraph we are going to discuss whether the psychological and philosophical understanding of moral can be combined. We are also going to discuss Johnson’s understanding of metaphors and Held’s criticism of his points. We will finally discuss very briefly the effects of religion to morals.

Within this project it is important to see the exact difference between what role moral psychology and moral philosophy play when concerning morality. Philosophy of morals is generally regarded as having the role of finding out what is morally good and bad. It takes it departure in the idea of good and bad is the act good from an essential universal point of view. While psychology is regarded as researching the individuals perception of what is good and bad, it might also tell us what is involved in taking a moral decision (page 46). The fear of uniting Moral philosophy with psychology is that they might not be able to be combined properly.

But in “Mind and morals” Mark L. Johnson states that the importance of moral psychology in general has been underrated. That moral philosophers has viewed moral psychology as being merely descriptive and therefore not having any real claim of being important at all to moral psychology. He states “Almost everyone today would say, at least, that we cannot ignore moral psychology in our moral philosophical considerations (page 47). He mentions several modern thinkers that he believes has made a proper attempt unifying the concepts, he mentions resent thinkers as Flanagan and Scheffler, but he also mentions Dewey and James the last of which we are
going to have a section on later in the assignment. He says that the idea of morality is not as universal as it was first thought to be, because it only deals with human thoughts, believes and ways of life. Therefore it is natural to see it from an area concerning mainly with the mentality of man. He claims that this will make the subject of “Morals” more of a whole entity, because it takes also takes the human psychic into account.

One of his arguments is, as stated, that it is necessary to combine moral philosophy and psychology to some degree. This is to have an well rounded perception of morality. The six points that he himself finds most important within psychology of morals are these "Personal Identity", "Human ends and motivation", “Moral development”, “Conceptualisation”, “Reasoning” and “Affect”. This is of course not the complete list of all necessary points; it is just to show his basic ideas and some examples supporting his theory.

It is very important to be able to project yourself into how other people might see the world. Therefore it is of major importance that you are able to realise what people actually believe both in philosophy (trying to realise if a certain way of looking upon a certain object is universally covering) and in psychology (To be able to understand why people act in a certain way or even understand what they mean). Studies have shown (page 51) that people do the most of their understanding through metaphors. The metaphor helps people understand exactly what is meant. There are certain terms that people use to describe different moral states of mind, and to mention some there is debt (an economical way of describing “owing” some moral good dead), strength (having a strong moral), balance (being a well balanced person), straying (finding yourself away from the “narrow” path of goodness).

But why is this important one might ask? That is answered by Mark L. Johnson himself “Metaphors on this level define our moral framework and fundamental moral concepts”. It helps us to define why we “ought” to do something, and it helps us being the person we “should” be. But these metaphors also help us to explain why we do morally wrong deeds for instance if you feel like you “owe” something negative to someone (understood as someone has done something negative to you then you “owe” a negative deed to that person) That could result in you revenging yourself, to “get even”, because then the moral account. But still you have wronged someone and that is therefore an unmoral thing to do, yet people tend to accept morally wrong deeds if it is the result of
an act of revenge (such as the farther killing the man who raped his child). It is essential that the receiver can understand the metaphors; therefore it is important that it is a universal and logic metaphor. Metaphors are not only just a way of describing the morals, it is also the aspect defining the certain concepts of morals, and the very metaphors we use are also defining what earthly subject we, as persons value the highest (wealth or health, strength or obedience etc.). To conclude on this section “our morality is a human morality, one that must work for people who understand, and act, and think as we do. Consequently, if moral theory is to be more than a meaningless exploration of utopian ideals, it must be grounded in human psychology.” (Page 63)

It is of course important to be able to see that Johnson has a very firm understanding of the relation between psychology and philosophy. He is challenging the established philosophical world with his ideas of combining the two disciplines of philosophy and psychology. We think that his understanding of philosophy is limited. He puts too little emphasis on the fact that a normative science can help. Firstly by understanding the concepts that they are using (metaphors) and secondly having an understanding of the purely descriptive discipline (understanding a psychologist view upon morality). But in the end it is the job of the philosopher to investigate and describe their relation, to which degree the descriptive understanding can be used. Finally it is also his responsibility to make a distinct definition on what morality is. But his basic idea of what theory of morals should be is still valid; ”a theory of morality should be a theory of moral understanding. Its goal should be moral insight and the guidance and direction that come from a deep and rich understanding of oneself, other people and the complexity of human existence. At the heart of moral reasoning is our capacity to frame and to realize more comprehensive and inclusive ends that make it possible for us to live together with others.”(Page 66)

One who criticises Johnson’s insistence on integrating psychology in philosophical investigation is Virginia Held. She thinks that it is extremely important to separate the two. She states that the single most important objective of philosophy is to make a clear normative evaluation of a certain concept. She is against something Thomas Nagel has called “scientism”. In my words scientism is the problem concerning when combining scientific research or ideas into a philosophical inquiry. She states that there needs to be a very firm split between normative evaluation and descriptive investigations. She says that you can make a psychological investigating within philosophy, but that it is extremely important to keep the investigation rooted in philosophy. She gives an example on
how this could be done, if “…moral psychology deals with how we ought to cultivate the right kinds of moral attitudes and tendencies, to achieve the morally best outcomes, and to express the morally most admirable ways of living human lives, then it is a branch of moral philosophy.” (Page 70) There by Held stresses that the most important aspects of philosophy is to evaluate and make recommendations and that any other subject taken into account, when doing a philosophical investigation, needs to be limited to the boundaries of philosophy. Held sees mixing normative and descriptive nature as a trend that is destroying the intended outcome.

To sum it up Johnson believes that the framework of morality needs to be building upon of both by psychology (investigating e.g. why morality is important to humans at all) and philosophy in order to be able to hold a proper definition of morals and this is what Held disagrees with. If philosophy doesn’t take into an account that all the valued filled observations stem from some degree of person evaluation it will become one-dimensional. Held believes that not keeping to the essence of philosophy, by mixing philosophy and psychology, will result in a devaluation of philosophy. Johnson argues that it is necessary to understand that psychology needs to investigate not only what people do and what they feel, but also what their deepened understanding of both metaphors and morals are. It is of course also important to understand that what we are doing in our project is in no way trying to lay new grounds for psychology or philosophy or the connection of the two, but solely to clarify and account for the basic structures we have found.
5. Philosophical problem of “God’s command”

Religious minded people claim that the basic moral principles they uphold originate from God, as opposed to human thought. A notion, which would imply, that our moral foundation is based on God’s commandments.

In the view of the Divine command theory our morality is solemnly dependent upon God, and this moral obligation would entail a complete obedience to God’s command.

This claim has generated several philosophical debates which date back to Socrates.

In Plato’s *Euthyphro*, Socrates asks, “Is what is holy holy because the Gods approve it or do they approve it because it is holy?” (VanArragon, 2004, p. 290)

In other words are actions good because God commands them, or does God command them because they are good?

Plato's *Euthyphro* questions the foundation of morality. It points to the problems of the view, that actions are good because God commands them. Furthermore, it points to the problems of defining what is good in terms of God's commands.

John Corvino presents statements A and B which highlight these problems. With the assumption that whatever God commands (X) is good, there are two possibilities:

(A) X is good because God commands it, or

(B) God commands X because it is good.

Both these statements would present further philosophical questions:

(A) X is good because God commands it, is the viewpoint of the Divine command theorists, which include: William of Ockham, Janine Marie Idziak, and Robert M. Adams. The Problem with this statement is that it would make God's commands arbitrary. For instance, if God commands us to kill, then doing so would be good. In addition, this would make the claim "God is good" false. To claim that God is good would mean that God does whatever God commands. Furthermore, it would confuse goodness with sovereignty.
This problem has led philosophers such as Plato and Thomas Aquinas to endorse (B) which states: **God commands X because it is good.** Again, the problem with this statement is that it would imply that there is a moral standard of goodness above God. Furthermore, who would the commander behind these moral commands be?

Some religious people claim that they have avoided this dilemma by the argument that, “God’s commands must be consistent with absolute moral norms but that these norms themselves have their origin in God’s nature” (Peterson, 1996, p. 525)

According to divine command theorist Janine Marie Idziak, “The act is morally right because God commands it and morally wrong because God forbids it” (VanArragon, 2004, p. 290) and she defends this viewpoint in her discourse *Divine Commands are the Foundation of Morality*. Divine command ethics draw on argumentations from the realm of metaphysics. Philosophers and theologians up through the Middle Ages into the Puritan era invoked God as *first and uncaused cause* and in John Preston’s reasoning, “God is the first cause” (VanArragon, 2004, p. 291). Idziak elaborates on Preston’s reasoning,

> God’s status as *first* cause implies that God is *uncaused*: that is, that God cannot be causally affected by anything. If God were to choose something because God perceived it to possess goodness or justice, then God would be causally affected by something external to himself, which is impossible. (VanArragon, 2004, p. 291)

Idziak concludes, “Therefore, it is not the case that God wills something because it is good or just; rather, something is good or just because God wills it” (VanArragon, 2004, p. 291)

Andrew of Neufchateau draws an analogue between, “The metaphysical notion of God as “first being” and the ethical notion of God as “first good”” (VanArragon, 2004, p. 292)

In the claim that the ethics of divine commands is founded on the Bible, Carl F.H. Henry argues,

> This notion of an “intrinsic good” is alien to biblical theology, the God of Hebrew-Christian revelation is the ground for ethics. He is the supreme will of right. He defines the whole content of morality by his own revealed will (VanArragon, 2004, p. 292)

Furthermore, in contrast to the natural law tradition, he argues that, “The good in Hebrew-Christian theistic ethics is not that which is adapted to human nature, but it is that to which the Creator obliges human nature” (VanArragon, 2004, p. 292)
Idziak too views the contents of the Bible as the grounding, which serves for an ethics of divine commands. She refers to some cases where holy people perform in ways, which are normally perceived morally wrong. For instance, the cases in the Old Testament such as the Binding of Isaac, where Abraham is preparing to kill his son Isaac on the command of God and Samson committing suicide.

According to her, these are actions which violate the Ten Commandments, but still if performed under a divine command they would not be perceived morally wrong. Formulated in another way, “Divine commands can and do determine the moral status of actions” (VanArragon, 2004, p. 292) Andrew of Neufchateau refers to these actions as, “Actions which, known per se by the law of nature and by the dictate of natural reason, appear to be prohibited” (VanArragon, 2004, p. 293) claiming that, “It is possible that such actions not be sins with the respect of the absolute power of God” (VanArragon, 2004, p. 293)

Grounding would also be found in the New Testament and according to Philip Quinn “Loving thy neighbour” which is a central theme, “Does not seem to be derivable from our human nature” (VanArragon, 2004, p. 293) So this obligation to love others as we love ourselves would have had to have been God’s will made possible through Jesus and thereby it would be perceived as a divine command. In defining an ethics of divine command one would view it in terms of what is right and wrong in relations to God’s will. Van Zeller suggests, “That the merit attaching to any work is measured solely by its conformity to the will of God” (VanArragon, 2004, p. 294) This is essential in the defense of an ethics of the divine command and it would lead to another biblical theme of “Doing Gods will”. In her view of God as the Creator and sovereign over all, Idziak claims, “That there cannot be anything which is independent of God, to which God might be an subject and which would constitute a limitation on God” (VanArragon, 2004, p. 295), and therefore should He be the supreme focus of our loyalties. According to Idziak God’s character is defined as perfect in knowledge, justice and love this means that His commands can neither be arbitrary nor would he command acts that would inflict pain. Furthermore, “God wills in accord with the divine nature as loving” (VanArragon, 2004, p. 299) which discards the possibility of God commanding immoral actions.

To sum it up, the Divine command theorist believes that an ethics of divine commands is based on the Bible. Actions, which are normally regarded as morally wrong, are made right to do by the command of God, as in the case of the incidents in the Old Testament. Loving thy neighbour, which
is a central theme in the New Testament, goes against our nature, therefore it is a duty imposed on us by divine command.

Another central theme for the Divine command theorist is the theme of doing the will of God or in other words, conforming to the will of God which is essential in Western spirituality. The Divine command ethics in its grounding, “Follows from certain beliefs we [they] have about God’s nature and status and about the character of relationship between God and human beings” (VanArragon, 2004, p. 295)

Furthermore, the ethics are related to the beliefs of its supporters and to their dependency on God as the Creator as well as their view of Him as sovereign. It is also related to the requirement, that believers should be loyal to Him. This would entail that it would be impossible to do ethics without referring to God.

The critique which suggests that the Divine command theory allows reprehensible acts to be made morally right by Gods command, is addressed in Idziak’s conclusion. In her final words, she states, “The beneficent and loving God who does the commanding would simply not give such commands” (VanArragon, 2004, p. 299)

Robert M. Adams supports the Divine command theory but he differs from Idziak by not believing, that all that God could command is automatically right.

He argues with the example that, “It would not be wrong for us to refrain from practicing cruelty, even if we were commanded by God to commit cruel acts” (Peterson, 1996, p. 527)

He criticizes the notion that all theories are indefensible in terms of God’s commands. Moreover, he states that his modified Divine command theory renounces certain claims made by others, in their analyses of God’s commands in ethical terms. He uses an example of ethical wrongness, according to the widely held God’s command theory, in which ethical wrongness or being wrong consists in being contrary to the commands of God.

In this theory it would be implied that the two statements are “logically equivalent”:

(1) **It is wrong (for A) to do X** (explained in terms of (2))
(2) **It is contrary to God’s commands (for A) to do X** (prior in concept to (1))
In his objection to this common theory of ethical wrongness, Adams suggests three possible answers regarding the (abbreviated) hypothesis, “Suppose God should command cruelty for its own sake” (Peterson, 1996, p. 528)

(1) If it is logically impossible that God would command cruelty for its own sake it would be impossible to consider the “wrongness” of it and disobey God’s command. Furthermore, this would make it senseless for humans to worry about a logically impossible scenario. If one takes the standpoint of Thomas Aquinas who believed: 1. “That what is right and wrong is independent of God’s will” and 2. “That God always do right by the necessity of His nature” (Peterson, 1996, p. 528) it would be wrong for God to command in this manner and therefore logically impossible. From the Divine command theorist’s perspective, which does not agree with Aquinas, there would not be a reason for rejecting that it is possible for God to command cruelty for its own sake.

(2) This assumption made by the Divine command theorists that it is possible for God to do so, would imply, “That it would be wrong not to practice cruelty for its own sake” (Peterson, 1996, p. 528). Some theorists have been prepared to accept this act. William of Ockham stated that acts of theft, adultery, and “hatred of God” would have been “meritorious” if commanded by God.

(3) The argumentation of the Divine command theorists that if God commands cruelty for its own sake, it would be wrong not to obey, is unacceptable to most believers. It also depends on how one uses and defines the word wrong. In conclusion, “It would be logically possible for God to command cruelty for its own sake” (Peterson, 1996, p. 529). But the view that, “If God commands cruelty for its own sake, it would be wrong not to obey” (Peterson, 1996, p. 529) would imply that “wrong” means “contrary to Gods commands” and this would leave out the possibility that in certain circumstances, “It would not be wrong to disobey God” (Peterson, 1996, p. 529)

The modified Divine command theorist believes that, “It is logically possible, that God should command cruelty for its own sake; but he holds that it is unthinkable that God should do so” (Peterson, 1996, p. 529)
This assumption is founded on the trust of God’s love, “To have faith in God is not just to believe that he exists, but also to trust his love for mankind” (Peterson, 1996, p. 529)

Furthermore, “The believer’s concepts of ethical wrongness and permittedness are developed within the framework of his (or the religious community’s) religious life and therefore within the framework of the assumption that God loves us” (Peterson, 1996, p. 529)

Adams elaborates on this assumption on which, in his opinion, the concept of God’s will would function, “[It] is that the love which God is believed to have towards men arouses in the believer certain attitudes of love toward God and devotion to His will” (Peterson, 1996, p. 529)

The modified Divine command theorist would in addition value some things independently of his relations to God’s commands. He would not say that it would be wrong to practice cruelty for its own sake if God commanded it, as he would value kindness and reject cruelty, which is somewhat independent of his belief in God commanding kindness and forbidding cruelty. According to Adams, “The believer values some things independently of their relations to God’s commands, but […] these valuations are not judgments of ethical right and wrong and do not of themselves imply judgments of ethical right and wrong” (Peterson, 1996, p. 531).

The believer’s concepts of “right” and “wrong” would break down if he were to believe that God commanded cruelty for its own sake because the believer would not use these concepts in order to value His action.

Overall the believer’s accept of divine command ethics is dependent on his positive valuation of what God is believed to command. However, this does not mean that the believer has an existing non-theological concept of ethical right and wrong apart from the modified Divine command theory. For instance, an action such as killing someone is ethically wrong, whether or not one actually believes that it is wrong. It is wrong because it is contrary to the commands of a loving God.

In conclusion, if supporters of the Divine command theory (modified or not) are right in their claims it would seem that there is no standard of being morally right or wrong, apart from God's command. This would mean that God could command us to do anything and it would be right for us to do so. Whatever God commands would become the standard of moral rightness. There would be no moral values outside of God and thereby no restrictions to what He could command. For instance, if God commanded a person to kill their son, as in the case of the Binding of Isaac, according to the Divine command theorist this killing would be morally defendable because doing
the right thing is logically equivalent to doing what God commands. Furthermore, what counts as moral behaviour for Divine command theorists, would appear very subjective and ultimately dependent upon God's whim. Even if one would use the argument that it would be impossible to imagine, that a loving God could command such wrong acts.

Furthermore, it is in response to Socrates’ question, “Whether actions are good because God commands them, or does God command them because they are good?” that the Divine command theory would fall short of a satisfactory argument. A believer of the Divine command theory would argue that an action is morally right because God commands it. However, the implication would be that if God commanded that we should kill someone, then doing so it would be morally right. We would be obligated to do so, because God commanded it. This would be due to the reason that killing someone is wrong because God commands us not to do it. However, if God commanded us to kill someone, doing so would become the morally right thing to do. Ultimately, God’s commands and therefore the foundations of morality would become arbitrary, which then would allow for morally reprehensible actions to become morally obligatory. The Divine command theory would therefore only work if we are prepared to have faith in God and trust that His loving nature would be reflected in His commands.

A simpler version of the arguments and counter arguments for the Divine command theory by Stephen O. Sullivan and Philip A. Pecorino

Argument for the Divine Command theory -

1. God created the universe and everything in it, including human beings.
2. If God created human beings, then God has an absolute claim on our obedience.
3. If God has an absolute claim on our obedience, then we should always obey God's commands.
4. Therefore, the Divine Command theory is true.

Argument against the Divine Command theory -

1. If the Divine Command theory is true, then we should always obey
God's commands, no matter what they are.

2. If we should always obey God's commands, no matter what they are, then we should do so even if God were to command us to commit atrocities, such as to create as much pain among innocent children as possible.

3. It is absurd to think that we should create as much pain among innocent children as possible, even if God were to command us to do so.

4. Therefore, the Divine Command theory is not true.
6. Paul Tillich’s Morality and Beyond

On the question of the difference between morals and ethics, Tillich classifies the term “ethics” as the “science of the moral” (Tillich, 1999, p. 21) or the “theory of morals” (Tillich, 1995 p. 22). The word “moral” have gained a lot of connotations. He would like to us the term “moral” to “describe the moral act itself in its fundamental significance” (Tillich, 1995 p. 22)

In his book “Morality and Beyond” Tillich describes “the moral” in three different aspects; the religious dimension of the moral imperative, the source of the moral demands and the element in moral motivation. Here follows a summary of essential parts of the three.

6.1 Religious dimension of the moral imperative

According to Paul Tillich “we must distinguish three basic functions of the human spirit: morality, culture and religion” (Tillich, 1999, p. 17) when we are to look at moral imperatives in humans. It is impossible to look at one of these functions and not the other two (Tillich, 1999, p. 17) – they are intertwined. The following will show a brief introduction to the three functions.

According to Tillich we all have the moral imperative incoded in us. It is the chance to become what we were meant to be (Tillich, 1999, p 20), but already have in us. We all have the possibility “to become a person” (Tillich, 1999, p 20).

The moral act establishes man as a person, and as a bearer of the spirit [See short explanation of the word “Spirit” on p. 33] It is the unconditional character of the moral imperative that gives ultimate seriousness both to culture and to religion. (Tillich, 1999, p. 18) whereas “the moral imperative is the command to become what one potentially is, a person within a community of persons.” (Tillich, 1999, p. 19). The imperative tells you how to act morally within a society.

According to Bjarne Lentz, a “temporarily appointment as a spirited person presuppose that the individual is part of a community or society.” (Lentz, 1994, p. 151 Our translation). So we cannot be just an individual. We have to have other persons to relate to in order to exist.
6.1.1 Spirit, act and the moral imperative

Morals are to Tillich not an act, in which some human or divine law is obeyed, but the kind of act in which the human is temporarily appointed as spirited person – a never ending task (Lentz, 1994, p. 151 Our translation)

The Danish word “Åndsperson” is translated into spirited person in the sense as a form of enlightenment, but Tillich explains “the term “spirit” as designating a natural quality of man.” (Tillich, 1999, p. 17) – the word mind has too many intellectual connotations.

The opposite of a moral act is, according to Tillich, an action that is in opposition to the individual’s chance of becoming a person. Because “His true being shall become his actual being – this is the moral imperative” (Tillich 1995, p 20)

But how we act is not something that is in compliance with a law outside ourselves. Tillich states that the imperative is within us, and guides us to what is “right”.

Tillich says that apart from few cases (Tillich, 1999, p. 23), the moral imperative is somewhat unconditional. (Tillich, 1999, p. 22) You can do what you want, but according to the circumstances, your act might be “antimoral” (See Tillich, 1999, p 22). Tillich gives a great example of conditional versus unconditional acts; if you don’t leave now, you’ll miss your plane. (Tillich, 1999, p. 22) But maybe you want to stay even so. However if you are a doctor and someone’s life is dependent on your departure, “the conditional imperative becomes unconditional.” (Tillich, 1999, p. 22)

According to Bjarne Lentz’s interpretation of Tillich’s writings, when you consciously act out a “law” you are not acting morally. Moral is a set of rules, which, when you unconsciously follow them, you either come closer to divinity or you become more enlightened. So this state is not something you can work to achieve if you try to, but something you gain without knowing.

Tillich’s response to whether or not morality stems from religion is both for and against. Tillich writes that in many ways the moral imperative can have a religious character (Tillich, 1999, p. 23), however, seeing the moral imperative as the “Will of God” makes it unconditional. And if it’s the “Will of God”, then the “command” to act in a certain way is an outside law and not an internally generated act. A conscious act.

Tillich sees a different way to understand the term “Will of God”. If you see it as “our created nature declared as “very good” by God,” (Tillich, 1999, p. 24) you is able to see the term as a sign
of approval rather than a demand. “It is not a strange law that demands our obedience, but the "silent voice" of our own nature as man, and as man with an individual character.” (Tillich, 1999, p. 24)

Mans greatness and weakness (Tillich, 1999, p.19) is that he is able to choose how he wants to act. It will be the “silent voice” that tells him if it is right – but he can still choose to ignore it. He does have the possibility to squander himself (Tillich, 1999, p. 24) sincere there is no “External prohibition against self-destruction” (Tillich, 1999, p. 24)

Another discussion in the text is of the moral aim (Based on Tillich, 1999, p. 27). As we have established it is “Becoming a person within a community of persons” (Tillich, 1999, p. 27) but Plato stated that “telos” was “to become as much possible similar to the God” (Tillich, 1999, p. 28). “Telos” being the aim, goal or purpose of life. So God or divine law plays an important part according to Plato. As earlier described (See page Error! Bookmark not defined.) Plato questions the foundation of morals, which might be why he sees the purpose of life to become as close to divinity as possible.

6.2 The religious source of the moral demands

“Becoming a person within a community of persons” (Tillich, 1999, p. 27) implies some sort of encounter. The encounter could be person-to-person (Tillich, 1999, p. 36), but it could also be man’s encounter with nature. This kind of encounter is analogous to natural law, but “in our context is the law of moral reason” (Tillich, 1999, p. 33). But the other kind of encounter is a bit dubious, since this needs clarification if we are talking about the encounter human vs. human. Because as Tillich states, ‘human’ can be many things, infant as well as adult etc. (Tillich, 1999, p. 37). Furthermore there are many different possible settings. Is it two people with different cultural backgrounds who are encountering each other?

Conclusion [is] that there is no common ground in ethical thought among separated cultures. Ethics according to this view, is culturally conditioned, and therefore ethics of different cultures are as different as the cultures themselves. (Tillich, 1999, p. 32)

But Tillich also states that

Cultures are wholes, and that we cannot compare parts of them with parts of others, but must understand the significance of the particulars in the light of the whole. Then we may discover
that the contrast of ethical demands in separated cultures is not a contradiction, but a different expression of a common fundamental principle. (Tillich, 1999, p. 32)

This implies that we all have universal concepts of morals, despite cultural backgrounds.

According to Tillich the content of moral imperative is just as important as whether or not the imperative is unconditional or not (Tillich, 1999, p. 31). It urges us to become the best person we possibly can (Tillich, 1999, p. 20). But how does one do that? The phrase about ‘becoming what we essentially are’ doesn’t offer any advice on how to accomplish this. (Tillich, 1999, p. 31). But the question remains; are there any concrete advises?

### 6.3 The religious element in moral motivation

Tillich perceives the rational human being in two different ways. He distinguishes between the person that that human actually is and the person he should have been. In Tillich’s view the law cannot be obeyed by man, as that is not how we as human were created. By having a law, man is aware of his imperfection and the closer he gets to obeying the law, the closer he is to his essential being (and thereby to Divinity) and is in that aim acting morally, as the law equals moral correctness.

In view of his situation one must agree with the apostle who was the most critical of the commanding law – Paul –that “the law is good” for it expresses the created goodness of man, which man must face because he is estranged from it. (Tillich, 1999, p 52).

An element awoken by the law, namely the commandments, is the phenomenon of sin. Sin was a dead element till the actions were accounted for as wrong, morally incorrect -sinful. In Tillich’s studies of the apostle Paul, he quotes: “In the absence of law, sin is a dead thing” (Tillich, 1999, p 53). With sin as a strong opponent to the essential being, man stands weak, as he will have to fight desire, which in these theories is beyond human ability. In the apostle Paul’s evolution of the law, we are commanded by the law to do the good thing, which we are unable to accomplish because we are separated from it and underlie a power that is in contradiction with our true (and amoral) self.

[…] The commanding law produces “all kinds of wrong desires” but does not motivate the conquest of these desires and the reunion of his actual will with his essential will: “What I do is the wrong which is against my will. (Tillich, 1999, p 53)

The experience and perception that God punishes those that trespass the law he has laid down for human, and that nobody can fulfil, awoke ambiguity and expression of hate in Luther. Man feels
tyrannised and is unable to recognize the connection between his own essential being and the law. According to Tillich, this personal experience of Luther led to the discovery Paul’s experience and its theological implications (Tillich, 1999, p 54). Mutually Paul and Luther are able to see God’s relation to man, as the right expression of the law, due to the right relation to God is love and fear, which provides the moral motivation.

Further in Paul’s interpretation, he concludes that all systems are determined by the law and it is valid for the individual, the group and the society, along with being embodied in state law, conventional rules and educational principles. This occurs with or without participation of religion. “In this way the commanding law has the power to produce moral action in an institutionalized form” (Tillich, 1999, p 55) According to Tillich, the Reformers called this “the first use of law” and claims that it is the obedience of the law, that makes it possible for a society to exist. These methods of motivating moral action are compromises, seen in the view of the unconditional moral imperative, along with love as “the ultimate principle of moral commands” (Tillich, 1999, p 55). These elements are far from away from morals true nature, however it is nonetheless inevitable considering the human quandary.

This is not true only because of the universal human estrangement, the struggle between mans essential and existential nature, the ambiguity of good and evil in every life process, the mixture of moral and amoral motives in every moral act[...] (Tillich, 1999, p 55).

If morality becomes a thread in pre-moral forces, the law does in fact provide us with moral motivation.

### 6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter we have found several different aspects of ‘law’. Tillich explains the moral imperative as an act that enables us to become what we were meant to be – a person. These acts are either conditional or unconditional. In many cases this might be somewhat of a problem, because if your “Silent voice” (a kind of ‘inner voice’) tells you that an act is morally wrong – you might have to do it anyway. In an extreme circumstance you might be forced to kill another person in order to save the majority, but you will still hear the “silent voice” telling you not to, and later you might feel even further from your essential being.
These theories are hardly applicable in reality because the ‘law’ is unconscious. There is also the dilemma of the closer you get to fulfil the law, the more impossible it gets. What makes us moral beings is based on our actions, but since it’s so difficult to live up to these laws (because the human weakness is desire in opposition to moral correctness) we are never be able to reach the extreme of divinity – which is becoming our essential being.

Also it is unconditional for us to break the laws, unless it is under extreme circumstances (because if the situation is acute enough, the law or the imperative becomes conditional) where it becomes tolerable to break the law. The question now remains when and how you judge a situation to be extreme enough for you to be allowed to break the law.
7. Discussion

In following discussion part we intend to discuss and reflect upon the work we have done with this project. We will attempt to clarify the results we have gained in our research and try to hold some of the theories up against each other.

In this project we have dealt with the question concerning “the foundation of morality”. In our investigation of the matter we have written about different philosophers and psychologists. We did so in aim to cover a broad perspective of the dimension of morality. In our research we have had special focus on two different scholars; the theologian and philosopher Paul Tillich and the psychologist and philosopher William James. Besides we have had a section dealing with the problems of “Gods command” theory and a section describing the possible correlation, if any, between moral psychology and moral philosophy.

William James writes about the basis of religion as well as pondering about ethics. In our understanding he believes the basis of morality to be religion. He speaks of the necessity of having a God to maintain moral order in the world, and that even if we can not proof there is a God we must assume that there is. This is evident in his writings, for example where he states, “In the interest of our own ideal of systematically unified moral truth, therefore, we, as would-be philosophers, must postulate a divine thinker, and pray for the victory of the religious cause” (James, 2003, p. 214).

Another part of his writing that we found interesting are his ideas of what it takes for the concepts ‘good’, ‘bad’ and ‘obligation’ to exist. First of all he claims that they have to be realized in order to exist, and for that to be possible there have to be thinking beings in the world. Second of all he believes that the world can be ethical whether there is a God or not, but that a world without a God would be problematic as there then would be no one to decide what is good and bad. However in a world with a God, “the divine thought would be the model, to which the others should conform” (James, 2003, p. 194).
Paul Tillich is a renowned theologian and philosopher. His Basic idea is that only God is perfect. This makes his ideas on morality seem rather harsh, because he believes man to be a moral being, who has to live up to the law. However he will never be able to do so perfectly, as it is not within mans abilities. Therefore it is the aim of man to strive towards living up to the law, despite success being unachievable. However the mere striving is what makes you a good and moral person. The quest of seeking to be a morally good person is to aim to obey the laws. This could be seen as a theoretically unstable situation because man will never succeed in his quest, and therefore might give up the project of being a good person or become enraged. This, Tillich would argue, is the burden that man must carry. It is a part of the very nature of man to be burdened by what he should do as well as what he has done of good and bad. We believe that there in man is a profound desire to do good and the mere desire may result in him succeeding the quest of becoming a good person. Tillich refers this eternal seeking after being a morally good person with a quote from the apostle Paul: "What I do is wrong, which is against my will".

He uses the reformers ideas to explain his own. The reformers believed that a society could not function without a law. Tillich uses the three chapters to explain 1) the human behaviour, 2) the demand behind the act and 3) the closer you are to morally good behaviour the closer you are to the divinity.

William James and Paul Tillich can gainfully be compared in both oppositions and similarities. James argues that human interaction is essential to the definition of moral action. That the validity of a moral action is measured in the reflection of an opponent and equal agent. Equally to Tillich, James speaks of the necessity of having a moral superior object. In James theories, God is the one who maintains moral order in the world, where as it in Tillich’s view is an abstract and complex law human must aim to obey. An obvious difference in these, otherwise similar views, is the consciousness of obedience. As James believes the moral motivator to be God, commandments appear to be a natural element in the morality. The rules of which human must obey in order to act morally becomes tangible, as the rules are listed carefully in the number one bestseller of the world, namely the Bible. As above mentioned, Tillich’s views is more complicated, given the unconsciousness of the correct and moral behaviour. Man must act morally in order to be closer to his essential being, and thereby divinity. The law is abstract unknown to the acting agent. It is a feeling of consciousness, an inner voice if you will, that motivates the moral action rather than fear of
consequents. Man’s task in acting morally is therefore somewhat easier to achieve and define in James view, rather than Tillich’s unachievable law of morality. Another parallel that can be drawn between the two professionals is James’ concept of ‘good’, ‘bad’ and ‘obligation’. Tillich mutually distinguished between three elements, that each matches one of James’ concepts. The eternal inner struggle of human, between ‘good’ (morally correct) and ‘bad’ (give into desire and sin) makes an obvious comparison. Obligation is the law, the one goal that man can never achieve, however is obliged to strive for.

On the subject of the foundation of morality some people claim that our morality is based upon God’s commands. In the chapter called “Philosophical Problem of God’s Command” we have investigated whether the arguments of the supporters of the Divine command theory would work when held up against the ancient question asked by Socrates in Plato’s Euthyphro. We have discussed several philosophical statements such as whether X is good because God commands it (meaning whatever God commands is right?) or whether God commands X because it is good (meaning that God commands it because it is right) A dilemma which appears to be somewhat unsolvable. Janine Idziak, Divine command theorist believes the first statement to be true and we investigate her arguments in depth. Robert M. Adams arguments for his modified Divine command theory, which differs somewhat from Idziak’s. In his critique of the belief that “Being morally wrong consists in being contrary to God’s commands” he uses two statements: (A) It is wrong for A to do X (being morally wrong) and (B) It is contrary to God’s commands for A to do X (opposing God’s command or being morally wrong) which would be logically equivalent according to the common Divine command theory. Adams also suggests three possible answers to the hypothesis, “Suppose God should command cruelty for its own sake”. Ultimately, their common ground is the faith in a loving God. In the course of our inquiry we have found that the argumentations of Idziak and Adams does not suffice in convincingly account for the God’s command theory.

In the section dealing with the basic theories of morality from a psychological point of view we found two theories opposing each other. The first one was the “Moral network theory” and the second was called “Normative school”. The moral network theory was from our point of view a theory focusing on the social aspect of what the
The main form of influence is, when developing your moral. The normative school focused on the individual developing an inner idea of what is good and bad. The first theory’s focus on the social moral development had some defaults. If a person is surrounded by evil and is encouraged to do evil, does this person develop into a morally bad individual? There was also the aspect of people being raised in multicultural countries, of how they are supposed to develop. The normative school had the problem of having a very vague explanation on how this moral intuition developed. We have found that even though both fields of understanding morality from a psychological point of view both can be applied. The best solution to the moral network theory and the normative school theory would be to combine them. If man is borne with a basic understanding of what is wrong and right, but he is being corrected in some of his social behaviour, it would make his sense of morals stronger.

In the section of trying to find out whether or not it is possible to combine psychology and philosophy, we aimed at understanding the arguments of opinions for and against this combination. Our researches lead us to the two thinkers Mark L. Johnson and Virginia Held. Johnson. These two are emphasising the need to combine psychology and philosophy. M. Johnson argues that it is essential for understanding the normative field of philosophy properly that you need to understand the background of your words. Your life experiences are what teach you the definition of words and without having this in mind you will end up doing research on an unclear theory. Virginia Held disagrees with his opinion. She sees the mixing of normative and descriptive fields as a way of polluting the basic of philosophy. If philosophy is mixed with descriptive fields of work you will loose the meaning of philosophy, which is to make definitions and understanding of life that is universally applicable. She is afraid that if we end up mixing the two fields we will end up loosing the meaning of philosophy, thereby ending at a point where it is neglected as an important field of study.
8. Conclusion

Within the field of morality the different theories are countless. Our researches have let us to different answers to the question whether morality is dependent on religion or not. Some has found that morality is based on personal social experiences others on an innate intuitive understanding of morality.

From our study of James idea on the matter, we conclude that morality is built on religion. As he claims that we have a god to assist us in keeping focused on morality. Tillich on the other hand states that we don’t necessarily have to have a God in order to act morally. Here our inner, unconscious self makes us act according to a moral codex that might strive for becoming divine, but this will never be possible as this, due to the desire - morality-dilemma is not possible to reach. However, this does not necessarily have to do with Religion. It is, as earlier explained, an imperative embedded within us, from culture or it might be stem from ourselves as humans, from our conscience.

Whether or not we can use our newly found knowledge in practise is doubtful. We have been equipped with theories on how human should act, interact and react and to some extend answers to cognitive and behavioural patterns. However, we do not succeed in finding actual and unyielding rules for human to live by, in order to act morally, unless you are a profound Christian, who can then live by the commandment. Tillich does not provide us with guidelines to our moral behaviour. He enlightens us, in explaining the process and dilemma in humans aim to act morally, but as human act towards this unconsciously, his views are not applicable in everyday life.

From what has been written about James’ ideas, of religion and ethics, we come to the conclusion that he believes religion to be the foundation of morality. He, as well as Tillich, explains how morality can be achieved and how to find it. In his studies of solitude, dualism and pluralism in relation to feeling, measuring and defining moral, there once again are no guidelines, merely theories and studies.

So in conclusion this project has been interesting, educational and enlightening. However the applicability is limited to theoretical usage rather than practice.
9. Summary

Vi har i dette projekt arbejdet med begrebet moral, ud fra dimensionerne psykologi og filosofi. Projektet har haft to fremtrædende teoretikere, mod hvilke vi har rettet vores research og søgt vores svar. Disse to er henholdsvis psykolog og filosof William James, samt teologen Paul Tillich.

Vi har i projektet undersøgt, hvorvidt religion er fundamentet for moral. Udover ovennævnte faglige eksperter, har vi udforsket den guddommelige befalings teori, samt adskillige psykologiske antagelser. Vi har i denne proces nået en abstrakt konklusion, der dog overvejene argumenterer for religion som et væsentligt element i begrebet moral.
10. Bibliography


11. Process Report

All the group members share an interest in religion and the differences between various religions, which brought us together as a group together. At first we wanted to build our project around comparison of religions but as we also wanted to cover the two dimensions, namely philosophy and science and subjectivity and learning, we soon realized that we had to go in another direction. This was a short semester which has had an obvious effect on our group work. Our process of finding a common focus took much longer and much more work than expected. But in the end it led us to a very interesting place which differed from where our initial ideas pointed towards. As a result of personal problems, a member of the group chose to leave the project about a month before deadline. That event was difficult for the unity of group and the process of the project.

We started with a project proposal called “A Comparative Study of Religion” but ended up with our current project “The Foundation of Morality”. In the process leading up to this we went through many different stages, which was somewhat frustrating at times. From our very first meeting with supervisor Ursula Renz, we agreed to use the writings of psychologist and philosopher William James as a vital part of our project. He comes from a psychological background and is able to combine the two dimensions (subjectivity and learning/philosophy and science) which make his theory very complex and interesting. Later we introduced Tillich as the philosophical aspect of the project. He, in opposition to Kant, has a fresh yet valid take on not only philosophy but also religion. With the “God’s commands” chapter we looked into the foundation of morality. We investigated if our sense of morality is dependent upon God. Furthermore, we agreed that in the project there needed to be a chapter investigating if it was possible to combine psychology and philosophy. This was interesting, however hard to find relevant material.

We met at least once a week and also had meetings on Skype. We had meetings with our supervisor once a week, where she guided us in the project work and gave us feedback on our writings.
Overall, the process has been interesting and educational and though many of the things that we have concentrated on have been discarded, the process of finding the final focus has been a triumph. It was of course difficult for us to see a member of the group leave us, however, the experience of coping with all kinds of difficulties has forced us to work harder on the project, and in the end this proved to be a valuable thing.