

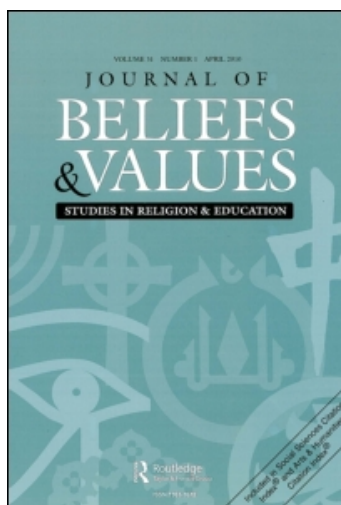
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Be ye perfect? Religious ideals in education

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This article explores the meaning of ‘religious ideals’ and their possible role in education. ‘Religious ideals’ are defined as ideals that acquire meaning due to a belief in transcendence or a divine being. Two kinds of religious ideals are being distinguished, namely ideals that are constituted by a belief in a transcendent being and ideals that are being determined by this belief. These types of ideals are illustrated by means of the Christian tradition. An example of the first is devotion to God and to the second belong the four cardinal virtues. The second part deals with two issues that are particular to the education of religious ideals. First, I counter the critique that people who have religious ideals are fanatics who pursue the realization of their ideals relentlessly. Secondly, I show that educating children with religious ideals may have positive effects, namely the influence on their development towards autonomy and moral commitment.

Introduction

During the last decades of the twentieth century there has been a decline in the importance of religious traditions in western Europe and after the flourishing of idealism during the sixties of that century ideals not only seem to have vanished from the public sphere but also seem to have lost their impact on the lives of people. This diminished import of ideals and religious traditions has had its positive and negative sides and in this article I will focus on one of the possible losses, namely that raising children with religious ideals might be beneficial for them.

When I started to explore the topic of religious ideals, I discovered that quite a lot of attention is being given to this subject. In contrast with my expectation there are an enormous number of Internet sites about ‘religious ideals’ (82,600) and ‘Christian ideals’ (96,500). What is striking, however, is the diversity of those web sites, which runs from spiritual texts of small religious sects via referenced and critical reflective texts of church organizations to academic articles or references to academic

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books. The last type is sparse, though. And if the concept ‘religious ideals’ is being used in those texts, authors hardly clarify why particular values are being called ‘ideals’ and if these are specifically religious ideals. Bibliographical searches did not provide a lot of useful information either. Therefore, this article is primarily an exploration of religious ideals and their role and position within education. I begin with an exploration of the meaning of ‘religious ideals’, which I will clarify and illustrate with religious ideals from the Christian tradition. The third section deals with two issues that are particular to the education of religious ideals. The first is the idea that people who have religious ideals are fanatics who pursue the realization of their ideals relentlessly. The second focuses on possible positive effects, namely the influence on the development towards autonomy and moral commitment.

Religious ideals explored

Ideals

‘Ideals’ can be defined as those values that people believe to be excellent, value highly and that have not been realized as yet. This description contains three conditions that I believe to be necessary for the appropriate use of the concept ‘ideals’.

First, ideals are imaginations or visions of situations or traits of character that are not existent in reality, at least not in the life of the person who has the ideal. Their status of ideas or dreams makes it possible that they refer to things that are not realizable, either. In constructing an ideal, the person can disregard the question of realizability. However, although a person does not make a conceptual mistake if she pursues an ideal that is in principle impossible to realize, for instance because it runs against the laws of nature, it might be expected that ideals are rational in order to make them sensible for a person to have. The characteristic of ideals, that they are (still) a person’s vision, makes possible that the situation or trait of character the person believes to be an ideal can be the best imaginable, which brings me to the second characteristic. Ideals refer to excellences or perfections. While something of excellence refers to the best, it does not need to be flawless, whereas something is only perfect if there is nothing that can be improved. In my view, there are two types of corresponding ideals. Here I depart from Rescher, who claims that ideals refer to ‘a perfect, complete, definitive instance of its type—a very model or paradigm that answers to the purposes at issue in a way that is flawless and incapable of being improved upon’ (1987, p. 117). For these ideals I use the term ultimate ideals. In addition, there are also what I call common ideals. Common ideals refer to those unrealized values a person believes to be excellent, which are not perfect but still superior. I call these ideals common, because in common language it is appropriate to use the concept ‘ideals’ for states that are excellent, but not perfect, whereas in philosophy and theology ‘ideals’ tend to be used for perfections only. This second characteristic of ideals also implies that ideals are difficult or impossible to realize, because they refer to something that is deemed to be perfect or excellent. Whereas ultimate ideals are unrealizable, common ideals can be realized with a lot of effort,

because they are not flawless in nature but the best a person can imagine to achieve in her life (in the short- or long-term). Thirdly, ideals refer to ideas that are highly valued by a person. Although both the belief that something is excellent or perfect and the value attached can be particularistic or shared by a larger group, it is typical for ideals that one's commitment to them is personal. Only if the person herself underwrites the idea of excellence or perfection and attaches high value to this, can she be said to have an ideal. This is a separate necessary condition, because persons can understand that something is deemed to be of excellence, but if they do not value this excellence, they cannot be said to have the ideal. For instance, while most people understand that for most adults it is an ideal to become a parent, not everyone highly values this herself.

All three aspects are necessary for the appropriate use of the concept 'ideals'. Persons can highly value a lot of things, but these can be quite ordinary or common and in the person's view not an excellence either. Equally, persons cherish things that are already present in their lives and therefore these are not ideals. It should also be noted that both the view that something is excellent or that it is highly valued are not necessarily shared by others and therefore ideals are person-related in character. They are, however, not merely subjective or relative. The reasons a person has for believing a value to be excellent or perfect as well as highly valuable can be discussed; we can question a person as to why she attaches these qualifications to a situation or trait of character.

Ideals can be categorized on the basis of two aspects. Firstly, they can be divided by the type of object they refer to, namely situations like global peace, a just society, being a harmonious family or being the best chess player in the world or traits of character like being just, creative, courageous or conscientious. Secondly, we can order ideals on the basis of the domain to which they (primarily) belong, i.e., the moral, social, economic, aesthetic and religious domain. Of course, these two types of categorizing overlap; we can identify the ideal of becoming the richest man in the world as a hedonistic or economic situation ideal, and the ideal of being a loyal friend as a moral personal characteristic ideal.

Religious ideals

Religious ideals can be defined as ideals that acquire meaning due to a belief in transcendence or a divine being. Only those ideals that are infused by such a belief can be called religious, or as Hudson states: 'The concept of god *constitutes* religious discourse ...' (1973, p. 169). This definition gives rise to two kinds of religious ideals, namely ideals that are constituted by a belief in a transcendent being and ideals that are being determined by this belief. The first category of ideals is only pursued by people who believe in transcendence or a transcendent being; the ideals have no meaning beyond this faith. These ideals are oriented towards the divine or are characteristic for one's relation with the divine. The second category of ideals is not unique to the religious, they are valued as perfections or excellences by non-believers as well, but these ideals get a specific religious meaning through the belief in a divine

being. Ideals like complete devotion to the divine, obedience to divine commandments belong to the first category, while the second category consists of ideals like being just, generous or conscientious.

Adams' theory of values or his theory of excellences (2002) implicitly alludes to the distinction between characteristics of a person that are constituted by the relation with God and those, particularly the moral aspirations of people, that are influenced by a relationship with God. His conception of the second category is, however, much more encompassing than I would wish to defend, for all things good should in his view be influenced by the Good, which in his theistic conception equals God. Following Otto he calls that which is so wonderful that it escapes our understanding 'the Holy'. The Holy can become visible in the ideals of human life and in the life and deeds of saints. 'The transcendence of the Good thus carries over from the divine object of adoration, the Good itself, to ideals of human life, and thus to human ethics' (2002, p. 53). I do not underwrite Adams' theistic conception of ideals, but I do have a lot of sympathy for his proposal that there are ideals that are not only unachievable, but also venture beyond the boundaries of our imagination and thus expand our thinking about the good. Of course, the moment this notion is secularized, these ideals can no longer be called religious.

Although the distinction between ideals that are constituted by belief and those that are influenced by belief is analytically plausible, in practice it may be difficult to determine to which category an ideal belongs. Take for instance a virtue like reverence. This might seem to be a paradigmatic example of an ideal that belongs to the first category, but this seems only true if 'for a transcendent being' is added. Woodruff's (2001) study about reverence, for instance, shows that this virtue is not particular to the religious. He defines 'reverence' as the acknowledgement of persons that there is something larger or mightier than themselves. In terms of a virtue, he claims that 'reverence is the well-developed capacity to have the feelings of awe, respect, and shame when these are the right feelings to have' (2001, p. 8). Reverence is characteristic for many religious people, but it is not necessary to be religious in order to have the virtue of reverence. Secular people can for instance have reverence for nature. According to Woodruff, reverence has more to do with the acknowledgement of human limits than with the recognition of a specific transcendent being, although it is reasonable to assume that believers do have reverence for the transcendent being. But even that is not necessary, argues Woodruff. Holy wars or people claiming that they are god-sent and suppress or even kill others in the name of a god, do not possess the virtue of reverence (see also Adams' position in the final section). Otto (1923), on the other hand, argues that there is something particular to such feelings within the religions. For this he introduces the concept of 'the numinous', which can be distinguished from 'sacred'. While sacredness includes an ethical dimension and refers to something 'good', the numinous is non-ethical. It is a *sui generis* category that refers to the ineffable, which is central to religions. Characteristic is the feeling of dependency, but not in a biological or natural sense. It is a feeling of insignificance in the sight of the supremacy of the divine. It is not a feeling of absolute dependency (that one is caused by the other) but of an absolute superiority of the transcendent.

With regard to the ideals that are determined by faith the question another question needs to be addressed, namely whether they can be sufficiently demarcated from other domains to call them religious ideals. Are virtues like justice, generosity, honesty, etc, religious or moral ideals? I want to suggest that they are religious conceptions of moral ideals and therefore a combination of religious and moral ideals. They belong to the domain where religious and moral ideals overlap.¹ This is the broad morality, in which moral principles and ideals can be conceptualized and justified by religious views. They are in my view moral ideals that are given specific meaning on the basis of religious beliefs and therefore can be called religious too. I will return to this overlap in the final section.

Finally, it is important to mention two other characteristics of religious ideals. Firstly, it should be noted that religious ideals belong to the category of ultimate ideals, i.e., ideals that cannot be realized because they refer to perfections. This does not mean that people need to refrain from attempting to realize the ideal and trying to come as close to the perfection as possible. Ultimate ideals can be perceived as regulative ideals, that are defined by Dorothy Emmet as 'both a standard for the unrealizable completion of a practice and also has a role in directing practical reason in advancing towards this, and thus it orients a practice' (1994, p. 17). Perceiving an ideal as a regulative ideal means that a person acknowledges that it cannot be realized but that it can nevertheless guide her action towards the best possible. As we will see later on, this may also prevent people from fanatically pursuing the unrealizable. Secondly, although religious ideals are shared normally within a community, they have the same person-related characteristic like all ideals. People can only be said to have a religious ideal if they subscribe to this ideal themselves. Since ultimate ideals tend to be vague and multi-faceted, for they refer to traits of character and situations that have many aspects which are not all necessarily known at the moment (see for instance Van der Burg, 2001), people can and have to give their own interpretation to the ideal. Thus, within religious communities it is likely that one finds a diversity of conceptions of religious ideals.

Christian ideals as an example

In order to give a more concrete idea about the concept of religious ideals, I will give a few examples of ideals that are aspired towards within the Christian tradition. Since I am not a theologian, I feel most secure on my own turf and also in a position to make critical comments about these ideals. Furthermore, ideals seem to fit well within the Christian tradition, which is being characterized as a perfectionist faith.² Christians are being commanded to live up to God's image, to be as perfect as God is (for instance St Matthew, 5: 48). This is obviously an ideal: it is a regulative principle that Christians can use to mirror their actions and to strive to approximate. Perceiving it as such does not make Christianity necessarily harsh, cruel or over demanding, for the fact that the Christian ideals are unrealizable means that persons should only judge themselves or others with regard to their attempts to do their utmost to come close to the ideal, not for being unable to achieve the ideal.

One of the most central ideals in relation to the characteristics of a person seems to be that Christians should be loving persons. Love is a central virtue (for instance 1 Corinth, 13). Christians are being called to love God as well as their neighbours as they love themselves (St Matthew, 22: 37–40; St Mark, 12: 30–31; St Luke, 10: 27). I believe that this is an ideal, because it is an excellence that is extremely difficult or impossible to achieve. It is also a complex value, because it has many aspects and contains highly diverse ways in which one can or should love the Other and the others. The first part of the commandment is inherent to the Christian faith. The love for God is expected from Christians only. It leads to other ideals in relation to God, namely reverence, devotion and obedient to God. The second ideal is not specific for Christians, but is given a specific interpretation within the Christian tradition. The clearest examples being the Christian conception of the four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, courage and modesty that are defend by Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica*.

The ideal situation for Christians is heaven. Heaven can be characterized as a utopia: it is the best situation imaginable for everyone. The hope to actualize this situation has been translated into many different ways of action, the two end poles being to believe in the predestination and the inability of human beings to influence God's judgement versus actively pursuing heaven on earth. What can be typified as passive hope leads to conceptions of the Christian tradition that I find difficult to defend. Where contemplative monks or nuns may be challenged to explain how their way of life can be interpreted as working in the world out of love for the other, ultra-orthodox Protestants may be accused of being primarily concerned with their own salvation than with their love for God or their neighbours. In the bestselling Dutch novel, *Kneeling on a bed of violets*, son Tom yells at his father: 'What was your deepest concern? One thing: your soul had to be saved. ... The reward would be eternal. Everything turns around you: your so-called predestination, your salvation. ... You are a selfish person' (Siebelink, 2005, pp. 397–398). This is a telling example of an attempt to achieve heaven that I deplore. My evaluation of this Christian ideal and more particularly the way in which some Christians pursue this also illustrates that ideals of a community, which admittedly is very large and can also be thought of as consisting of several communities, can be conceptualized in different ways as I suggested earlier. Therefore, this illustration is but one of the many different within the Christian tradition alone.

Religious ideals in education?

It might be thought that discussing the appropriateness of religious ideals in education is just a version of the justifiability of religious education in general. However, the characteristics of ideals that they are highly valued and not realized as yet, which lead to the motivation of people to do their utmost to actualize that to which the ideal refers, lead to two particular questions with respect to religious ideals in education. First, it might be argued that religious ideals should not be offered to children, because this makes them particularly prone to fanatical religious behaviour. Second,

in contrast, it could be suggested that it is beneficial to offer religious ideals to children, because they provide them with a framework to lead a meaningful and good life.

Fanaticism

Why would religious ideals make people prone to become religious fanatics who pursue ideals to the detriment of others? Berlin is one of the most outspoken objectors to the pursuit of (societal) ideals. His focus is on worldview systems that claim that 'all genuine questions must have one true answer and one only' (1990, pp. 5–6). If people try to realize their ideal, they will cause horrific situations, which will always be detrimental to others. The moment people believe that they can establish the best society imaginable, they will use every means to do so and will not refrain from sacrificing those who do not collaborate. I believe that Berlin wrongly equates the attempts to realize a particular ideal with fanaticism. The ways in which persons try to realize their ideals are highly divergent and not necessarily destructive and immoral. There are sufficient examples in history that illustrate how destructive the pursuit of ideals can be, like the Crusades, the suppression of millions of people in China or Cambodia and the establishment of the Nazi all-White empire. However, it is as easy to give examples of saints, martyrs or peaceful demonstrators who have pursued ideals in non-oppressive ways.

However, because religious fanaticism is not unrealistic, it might be expected from educators that they feel an obligation to prevent their children to become fanatic adults. Although there may be different reasons as to why some persons become fanatical whereas others do not and although some factors may be close to unchangeable, like a person's temperament, there are ways in which educators can contribute to a moral pursuit of ideals, and I want to suggest two. The first one is related to Berlin's assumption that fanaticism is related to the pursuit of a single ideal. If it is accepted that when persons have several ideals that they need to balance it is unlikely that they will become fanatical, because being fanatical about one of the ideals will be disadvantageous to the pursuit of the others to which they are equally committed, educators may contribute to the prevention of fanaticism by enthusing children to pursue several ideals. We may expect that even within the religious domain people value diverse ideals and therefore that even if they would pursue religious ideals only, they want to optimize the balance between the ideals instead of maximizing their efforts in pursuing one only. The second proposal is based on Woodruff's study about reverence, to which I referred earlier. Woodruff convincingly argues that the virtue of reverence 'keeps human beings from trying to act like gods' (2001, p. 4), which in terms of the issue we are addressing here means that it precludes the possibility of a person becoming fanatical. He suggests that by pursuing the ideal of reverence and having the accompanying emotions of awe and wonder, people will respect each other and nature. This proposal seems to be a contradiction in terms, for if reverence is an ideal, how can the pursuit of an ideal reduce the likelihood of fanatically pursuing religious ideals? Does that not lead to fanaticism as well? However, Woodruff suggests that reverence is a virtue and this

implies that the ideal pursuit is one that lies in the mean. This precludes the possibility of fanaticism, because fanaticism is an excess instead of being in the mean. For instance, the pursuit of Tom's father to guarantee a place in heaven should be interpreted as a vice. He is so focused on himself, and on what he believes to be the only way towards salvation, that his actions are excessive when it comes to buying and reading religious texts as well as praying, and deficient when it comes to looking after the well-being of others.

Meaning and autonomy

In previous articles I have argued that it is important for children to be raised with ideals, because ideals give meaning and direction to life (for instance De Ruyter, 2003; see also Rescher, 1987). As already mentioned, the excellent non-realized values that a person highly appreciates can be interpreted as regulative principles or regulative ideals, which persons use to evaluate their actions or to give direction to their lives in their attempt to realize the ideals. Additionally, ideals make possible that people act autonomously, because they confine the number of choices that people have: ideals form the boundaries of what people find choice worthy. These confinements are necessary in order to be able to choose and therefore to act autonomously. For, if all options are possible all the time, one will either act at whim or be continuously overwhelmed and both are not characteristic for a person who follows her own law. As Frankfurt argues 'Unless a person makes choices within restrictions from which he cannot escape by merely choosing to do so, the notion of self-direction, of autonomy, cannot find a grip' (Frankfurt, 1999, p. 110).

Although ideals can be said to be beneficial to people, because they make possible that people act autonomously, with regard to religious ideals it might be argued that their character undermines the development of people into autonomous persons, for they were defined as ideals that derive their meaning from belief in a transcendence and therefore they are not pursued by autonomous people, but by heteronomous persons. Thus, educators undermine children's development towards autonomy instead of enhancing it as is the case for other ideals. I do not believe that this argument is valid for two reasons. First, however, I need to describe my conception of autonomy.

I define autonomy, in a non-ideal sense (see Benn, 1988, for an ideal conception), as being able to reflect (critically) about one's conception of the good life, one's reasons for action and choices (see Merry, 2005) and being able to change one's beliefs and ideas if such is required in the light of other reasons or new insights. It is characteristic for an autonomous person that these reasons are her own, i.e., she does not adhere to a particular conception of the good life because other people want her to, but she wants this herself and has her own good reasons for this. This conception of autonomy is compatible with being a religious person. It says something about the way in which people believe and more particularly about the way in which they have come to their belief. Being an autonomous believer means that one has chosen to become an adherent of this particular faith. Thus being autonomous and religious are not incompatible. But does this also hold true for religious ideals?

The first reason for denying that raising children with religious ideals undermines their autonomy is related to the characteristic of ultimate ideals I described earlier. I have already said that religious ideals like all ultimate ideals are multifaceted or open-ended and are like all ideals person related. If educators wish that their children be true or authentic religious ideals pursuing adults, they would undermine this wish if they would prevent their children (as adults) to develop their own interpretation of this ideal. This seems to be a circular argument, because I seem to argue that children need to be autonomous in order to develop their own conception of (religious) ideals which in turn enables them to become autonomous, but that is what they already seem to be. This is not the case, however. Ideals are highly stable, but not unchangeable. The stability of a person's attachment to her ideals allows her to act autonomously which also includes the possibility of changing her ideals if she believes to have good reasons for doing so. Thus, children begin with conceptions of particular ideals that are offered to them by their parents and teachers and with these they can develop into autonomous persons, who may want to substitute these for other ideals and who are able to do so precisely because they have become autonomous through the ideals they had. This implies that raising children with religious ideals should allow them freedom to explore and assist them to develop the capacity to change their ideals.

The second reason is that I believe it is the way in which children are educated that may undermine their development into autonomous beings more than the religious ideals themselves. Indoctrination undermines autonomy, but raising children with religious ideals does not necessarily imply indoctrination. As is well known, there are three criteria for saying that an educational practice equals indoctrination, namely intent, method, and content (for instance Spiecker, 1991; Thiessen, 1993; Merry, 2005). Although religious ideals can most certainly be indoctrinated, it is entirely dependent on the method and intent of the educator. If parents aim for an unquestioning commitment and pursuit of religious ideals by their children and use the belief in the divine being and the possible wrath of a god to ensure that their children do not dare to divert from the pursuit of the true ideals, then they indoctrinate their children. However, if parents or teachers aspire their children to be critical evaluators of the ideals that religious traditions profess and to discover which ideals they believe the divine wishes them to pursue, educators will try to ensure that they do not use methods that may undermine the autonomy of children.

Morality and autonomy

As I have stated in the second section, some religious ideals have a particular meaning and interpretation for the religious on the basis of their belief in a transcendent. Here I want to draw particular attention to the religious–moral ideals.

Characteristic for moral adults is that they are intrinsically committed to moral principles, virtues and ideals. They do not act morally because they hope to be rewarded or aim to avoid punishment, but because they believe it important to serve the well-being of others and respect their rights. The question that arises with regard to religious–moral ideals is whether or not one's pursuit or commitment can be called

moral and therefore if it makes one a moral person if one pursues religious–moral ideals. For, are the ideals pursued as values of intrinsic worth, or are they pursued to please the divine or evade his judgement? And with regard to the education, do the religious conceptions of moral ideals further moral development or do they lead to a stagnation of moral development?

The answer to this question requires taking a position in the debate about the relation between the moral and the religious. This debate has a long history and eloquent defenders of both the position that they should be seen as separate or autonomous domains as well as the view that the religious is necessary for or influential on the moral. I cannot begin to do justice to the positions within the framework of this article, but I do not think this is necessary for my question either. I permit myself to opt for the position I believe to be best defensible and use that as my basis for answering the question.

This position acknowledges that there are moral ideals that can be influenced by religious ideals, in other words that there is an overlap of religious and moral ideals, but there are also moral principles and rules that have a separate or autonomous status. This is, of course, known as the distinction between broad and small morality. The small morality consists of rules and obligations that confine behaviour of people in order to protect the interests of others. These are minimally required for a society to be able to exist as a society and are compulsory for all. Examples are not to steal, injure or kill innocent people. The broad morality consists of rules and principles that are conducive to realizing one's important goods or life goals and since these can vary they are not required from everyone. The rules of the small morality are most often also subscribed to within religious traditions—some of the commandments on the Second Table belong to the small morality—but whether or not this is the case, the rules of the small morality always confine the principles and ideals of a person's broad morality. This implies that what people do in the name of their religion or a god is only justified if it is not immoral in the sense of conflicting with the rules of the small morality. The already mentioned Adams, for instance, defends the 'divine command theory', but his God is an almighty divine being who is good. He claims that only if people follow the commandments of the good God, the God of love, they do what God asks of them. This God will never command people to do immoral things.

Given the distinction between small and broad morality, I want to defend that children learn that pursuing religious and religious-moral ideals can be praiseworthy, but that these are always confined by the moral rules that belong to the small morality. Children need to learn that such pursuit is valued because of two separate reasons. Firstly, because the action aims to realize what is deemed to be excellent within a religious tradition and secondly, because it is moral. Therefore, children need to be assisted to develop into (relatively) autonomous persons who are able to evaluate if what they believe is commanded by god or what others say is god's command is morally defensible. But why would raising children with religious ideals be beneficial to their moral development if it is deemed important to ensure that children know the distinction between the moral and the religious value of actions?

The most important reason for claiming that religious ideals are conducive to moral development and moral action is that, given that they are offered in such a way that children pursue them for intrinsic reasons as well, they can be a good stimulus for behaving morally. Walker (2003) provides empirical evidence for this claim. He has found that religion and spirituality figure prominently in the lives of moral exemplars as well as ordinary people (2003, p. 376). Additionally, the reason for people to say that someone is a moral exemplar often has to do with religious reasons, which leads Walker to conclude that for many people the religious and moral domain overlap.³ Furthermore he has found that most people believe that ‘authentic religious life should be characterized by a range of moral virtues’ (idem., p. 380). However, he concludes on his various empirical researches that ‘people believe that it is more likely that someone can be highly moral but irreligious than it is that someone can be authentically religious but largely immoral’ (idem., p. 383). The argument I presented above is consistent with this conclusion.

Thus, religious ideals can be beneficial to children in their development towards autonomous and ideals pursuing adults as long as parents do not indoctrinate their children and offer them diverse ideals. Religious ideals can also further the moral development of children, and therefore may be seen to be beneficial to other people as well, but only if children learn that pursuing religious–moral ideals is valuable for both religious as well as moral reasons. I therefore conclude that parents who have religious ideals themselves have no reason to refrain from passing them onto their children. When we return to the beginning of this paper, I think it can be concluded that the decline of religious traditions and their ideals might indeed also be perceived as a loss.

Notes

1. This overlap can also be found in religious and aesthetic domain, when an artist aims to evoke both religious emotions like awe or wonder and an aesthetic experience of beauty.
2. I acknowledge that there is a lot of debate about this issue and that it does not apply to Christianity per se. However, although it is true that the command is only taken literally by orthodox Christians, I believe that the gist of the commandment is present in all Christian traditions. Of course, what ‘being as perfect as God’ means, is interpreted in different ways. In contrast with the perfectionist interpretation, Feinberg offers a different interpretation of the obligation of Christians. He argues, for instance, that Jesus parable about the Good Samaritan does not introduce a moral hero: ‘The parable suggests that one could meet Jesus’ ideal without standing on guard waiting with anticipation to commit a morally praiseworthy act, it could be met without risk to one’s own life’ (2004, p. 12).
3. Note that he does not conclude that the one is dependent on the other.

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