

GOD, GOODNESS, FACT AND FALUE *

Deus, bondade, fato e valor

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Resumo: Desenvolvimentos recentes na filosofia da religião, devidos especialmente a John Cottingham, chamaram a atenção para as questões da moralidade e sua relação com Deus. Para Cottingham a natureza obrigatória dos mandamentos morais, ainda que não a prove, aponta para a existência do ser de Deus, mas a experiência moral sugere a realidade e autoridade de Deus. O artigo defende uma base da moralidade que é natural, enraizada em uma metafísica mínima e na natureza humana como uma criatura imaginativa e criativa. Com isso sugerem-se possíveis soluções tanto para o problema fato/valor como para o dilema do *Euthyphro*. Esta narrativa naturalística parece apontar para uma compreensão criativa de Deus e da atividade moral humana, que, no entanto, vai além das trivialidades da ética de situação e do relativismo.

Palavras-chave: Deus, base natural da moralidade, atividade moral criativa.

Abstract: Recent developments in the philosophy of religion, notably by John Cottingham, have focused attention on the questions of morality and its relationship to God. For Cottingham, the obligatory nature of moral commands points to, but does not prove, the existence of being of God, but the experience of the

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moral suggests the reality and authority of God. This paper argues for a basis of morality which is natural, rooted in a minimal metaphysic and the nature of the human as an imaginative and creative creature. In doing so, possible solutions to both the Fact/Value problem and the *Euthyphro* Dilemma are suggested. This naturalistic account seems to point to a creative understanding of God and human moral activity, which nevertheless moves beyond the simplicities of situation ethics or relativism.

Keywords: **God, natural basis of morality, creative moral activity.**

... I want to reject a view – which some Christians have at least approached – that all our appraisals of good and bad logically depend on knowledge of God. To get a clear and indisputable example, I shall take a bad sort of act. For there is a logical asymmetry between good and bad acts: an act is good only if everything about it is good, but may be bad if *anything* about it is bad; so it might be risky to say we knew an act to be good *sans phrase*, rather than to have some good features. But there is no such risk in saying that we know certain kinds of acts to be bad. Lying, for example, is bad, and we all know this; giving a man the lie is a deadly insult the world over.¹

Peter Geach's comments are concerned with the relationship of God to the moral life. It is, as Geach notes elsewhere, to discuss the ethical with no reference to God. It is apparent also that philosophers do not want to see the ethical life simply in relation to obedience to the commandments of God – to do so would lead quickly to the horns of the *Euthyphro* Dilemma, as generally understood – whether God commands what is right, or whether things are right because God commands them. To take the latter path obviously opens the way to questions about whether what we see as bad actions would become good if God, in a fit of restlessness, suddenly changed his mind.

If the command of God is not sufficient warrant for true ethical action, then on what basis may the ethical be justified? Certainly, any reasoned account must move beyond a simple obedience to commands. But a danger remains – how to give an account which respects human autonomy in making an acting on judgements without falling into the antinomianism which disregards all notions of rules. If we are to take the love of God seriously, we need an account in which God can love us for being who we are, beyond mere subjects of a divine promulgator of authoritative decrees.

But that is not the only challenge. Geach suggests that in the case of lying we can say it is bad because there is something generally bad about the

¹ GEACH, Peter. 'The Moral Law and the Law of God', *God and the Soul*, 2ª edição, St Augustine's Press, 1969, p. 119.

action. Its badness seems to be bound up with two things – the damage done to those about whom the lie is told, and the effect on the character of the speaker of the lie. To live in a world of deceit is not an affirmation but a denial of the autonomy to be wholly ourselves. To falsify truth is to falsify who we are to ourselves as reflective and self-determining persons.

These things are knowable only by reflection on how we are in ourselves as active beings in a world in which we act and interact with others. In the past century, ethical philosophy has followed a general philosophical reluctance to commit to any understanding of the world. Non-naturalism is as fashionable in ethical discourse as it has been in many metaphysical and epistemological accounts. A rejection of certain types of non-naturalism seems implicit in any understanding of the moral which interprets the ethical in terms of persons acting within the world. The philosophical challenge is to avoid a naturalism which invites the accusation of naturalistic fallacy, and which directly addresses the fact-value problem.

This paper attempts no more than a sketch of such an answer to various challenges. In doing so, if it is correct in assumptions made, it provides a possible basis for a natural law/virtue ethics approach to the moral, retaining moral autonomy while attempting to justice – as far as we ever can – to the notion of a creative and loving God.

I

The Fact/value problem is presented to us as one of logic. To remind ourselves, the basic unit of Aristotelian logic is the syllogism: for example:

- I) All men are mortal (Major premise)
- II) Socrates is a man (Minor premise)
- III) **Therefore** Socrates is mortal (Conclusion)

Now, it is illegitimate to put into the conclusion anything which is not contained in the premises. We cannot conclude from the premises stated:

- III) **Therefore** Socrates is mortal and supports New Labour

The fact/value problem is based on this principle. Any factual proposition about the world is *reducible* to one involving the verb 'to be':

For example:

- Socrates *was* a philosopher
- Paris *is* the capital of France
- Maturity brings grey hair (which may be re-expressed as: 'Grey hair *is* brought by maturity')

The verb 'to be' does *not* contain any idea of 'ought'. From 'Socrates is mortal' we cannot derive 'Socrates **ought** to be valued'. To do so contravenes the rules of logic.

II

To Hume, who was exercised by the issue, the matter had little practical outcome: he could appeal to the common sentiment of mankind as sufficient basis for ethics:

Instead of departing from our own interest, or from that of our nearest friends, by abstaining from the possessions of others, we cannot better consult both these interests, than by a convention; because it is by that means we maintain society ... This convention ... is only a sense of common interest; which sense all the members of the society express to one another, and which induces them to regulate their conduct by certain rules.²

Now, at a time when there appeared general moral agreement on those conventions, Hume's outlook could carry the weight that no great discomfort would be occasioned by the absence of grounding of moral sentiment. What we need to notice here, is that we are now talking of sentiment. The modern age suggests that this provides only the most fragile basis of ethical life. The casual observer would notice a multi-ethnic society, religious in some quarters, secular in others, perhaps most, and inclined to deal with issues by a retreat to fundamentalism, in the sense of assertion without justification. Some religious people retreat into a version of the divine command theory, arguing that such-and-such is right because God commands it. The absurdity of this position is quickly apparent, by the simple challenge 'So incest would be right if God commanded it', which immediately provokes the denial that God would command such a thing, but there is a deeper issue here, that ethics in some sense is tied to religion, with the corollary that if the religion disappears, somehow anything ethical disappears with it. It is, I think, important to assert, as I shall throughout this paper, that, as Archbishop William Temple wrote:

In its nature ... the moral law is quite absolutely independent of religion.³

But fundamentalism is not only of the religious kind: there is a fundamentalism based on a kind of naïve relativism which is a refusal to think, and to fall into the easy answer that 'It's all relative, in it?' Vulgar relativism

² HUME, David. *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*: London, 1817, p. 195.

³ TEMPLE, William. *The Kingdom of God*, Macmillan, London, 1914, p. 42.

cannot be sustained, especially when it is accompanied by the assumption that because no particular judgment is capable of irrefutable proof, then all should be tolerated as right for that person, failing to notice the universal duty of tolerance advanced against the denial of the universal implied in the relativism.

Nevertheless, we need to notice that forms of relativism have taken root in philosophical discourse, whether in the sophisticated form supported by David B. Wong⁴ (*Moral Relativity*, Berkeley 1984), which avoids the pitfalls of asserting that one ethic is as good as another, or in the interesting version of John Kekes⁵. We should note, that although Wong can find no proof that one theory is better than another, he nevertheless assumes some universality in the human condition, when he argues that we can assert that one moral code answers the needs of life — in terms of birth, maturing, forming relationships, growing old, and dying — more adequately than a rival. We should however notice that he asserts a universality in the human condition. This universality will be crucial to my argument.

Kekes argues that there are incommensurable values in society, but that we can move beyond value standards to an outlook based on what he calls the 'primary values' — the minimum requirements — of all human life. He adopts the language of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs — the physiological needs for food and shelter, psychological needs for companionship, affection and hope, and social needs of security, acceptance and respect. Kekes argues that a morally acceptable cultural tradition contains conventions which safeguard these requirements of the good life. But those values should be considered pluralistically, rather than in relativist or monist terms. Kekes argues that the relativist errs in not recognising that there are primary values, independent of context, which can be used to provide possible solutions for at least some value conflicts. To Kekes, the error of the monist lies in the assumption that primary values have absolute authority. They are valuable in clarifying conceptions of the good life, but they are not absolute — they are not binding, for instance, on an agent who does not have any hope of a good life in these terms. He argues that no one of these primary values can be absolutely universal for the familiar reason that in the circumstances of life, primary values may conflict.

For Kekes, this means that there can be no moral certainty: values seem to become free-floating. I suggest that matters are otherwise. Every normally well-brought up child is aware of moral conflict. Brought up both to be

⁴ WONG, David B. *Moral Relativity*, Berkeley, 1984.

⁵ KEKES, John. 'Pluralism and the Value of Life': *Cultural Pluralism and Moral Knowledge* ed. Paul, Ellen Frankel et al., Cambridge, 1994.

courteous and to be honest, he finds in life those circumstances when it is impossible to do justice to the precepts. But, I suggest, it does not follow from this that those precepts are false, nor always incompatible. Nor does the child perceive them as such. His only problem is in knowing *how* to behave in this situation. Much the same is true of the adult dilemma. The question we have to ask is whether we demand of an ethical code that it gives invariable and certain answers and say that it is false when it does not. Or, do we follow Aristotle's dictum that we should only demand as much precision as the subject matter allows? One finds while driving that there are circumstances not covered by the Highway Code when one has to use judgment, but this does not invalidate its rules: one pays attention to it in making a judgement on the road: the good driver is one who forms those judgments well. If this is true, we can accept Kekes' point that there is no absolute value which always applies, while questioning his belief that there is no standard by reference to which conflicts can be resolved.

We might note that adherents of Situation Ethics, such as William Temple and Joseph Fletcher recognise both the relativity of particular moral judgments and the universality of certain ethical principles. In 1934, Temple wrote:

The popular riddle concerning the reconciliation of an absolute moral obligation with the variety of actual moral codes or conventions ... [does] not of itself cause very much trouble, for ... universal obligation attaches not to particular judgments of conscience but to conscientiousness. What acts are right may depend on circumstances, social history and context, personal relationships, and a host of other considerations. But there is an absolute obligation to will whatever on each occasion be right ...⁶

The principle of morality is that we should behave as Persons who are members of a Society of Persons — a Society in which Personality is itself a valid claim of entrance. We are to treat all Persons as Persons, and all as fellow-members with us in the Society of Persons. Actual duties will depend upon actual personal relationship; there is a special duty of parent to child and child to parent; there is a special relationship between citizens of any one nation ...⁷

Temple's outlook, couched as it is in the language of Personal Idealism with a strong dash of the Second and Third Forms of the Categorical Imperative, suggests the possibility of a unity of ethics. To achieve this, we need to consider three possible layers or levels of the ethical, which I shall call 'deep', 'motivational' and 'particular'.

The deep level is the one most obviously universal. It is what Temple calls 'the absolute obligation to will whatever on each occasion be right.' It is

⁶ TEMPLE, William. *Nature, Man and God*, Macmillan, London, 1934, p. 405.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 191-192.

the concern to be ethical, the concern to try — somehow — to live one's life in accordance with certain values. I will argue later in this paper that this concern with value is the dominating feature of lived experience, and hence the basis of a universal ethical enterprise. This thought is deeply suggestive for moral education, for it does not imply that ethics is a code to be learned, but rather that it is a characteristic of all experience of the world to be developed as speed of hand or quickness of wit may be. We might note that the enterprise of Kekes or Wong bears testament to the concern with what is ethical: it is natural to treat the topic with high seriousness, even though it is in the nature of the complexity of human existence that the application of that ethical desire is so difficult.

The second level of ethics, which I have called 'motivational', concerns the objectives of the deep ethical concern. As we have seen, Temple makes central the good of persons. In some respects, this seems a curiously old-fashioned view. A criticism of Temple, as of many thinkers of his generation, is an indifference to animal suffering, and of wider ecological concern. Certainly, when dealing with the problem of evil, Temple discounts any significance in the suffering of animals. But I think we can legitimately develop his concept of the personal in a way which permits the possibility of a personal motive for all ethical enterprise.

If the nature of ethical judgment is based upon the human characteristic of thinking in an ethical way, it would not be a matter of surprise if ethical judgment should turn out to be based on human concerns, in the way that art is exclusively concerned with human expression. Art is carried out by humans to reshape human experience for humans. That is true even of religious art: the devotion it expresses is human devotion about the human relationship with God. If we consider the ethical treatment of animals, we should recognise the essentially human aspect of it. This point is often obscured by talk of animal rights. We should note that it is humans who are rights-ascribing persons, just as we claim rights when we believe that a vital part of human flourishing is under potential threat. It is not animals which claim rights: we may argue that a whale has a 'right' not to be caught by humans, but we cannot insist on the rights of the gazelle not to be killed by the lion. The lion has no sense of a duty incumbent on him, and, so far as we can tell, the gazelle has no sense of a right violated. We might argue further that if we do ascribe rights to animals, we do so analogously — we do not 'give' rights, but rather say we will treat animals as having them: humans are conscious of having the right. We might ask whether a fullness of rights depends on the consciousness of having rights. We might go on to say that the maltreatment of animals is indefensible for the damage it does to the quality of human life, both in depleting the environment and in the harm done to human sensitivity through brutalisation and callousness. Our justification for kindness to animals can be cast simply in terms of human reasons.

If all this is true, we may accept the purely human aspect of the nature of ethical judgment without indifference to animal suffering. Indeed, we may argue that the concern for animals is an enrichment of ethical awareness.

The weakness of the position I have outlined on motivation is that while the wish to do right may be universal, as Aquinas also thought, the concern with the fullness of human experience is apparently not. If we can say that Kant developed the Second Form of the Categorical Imperative — the idea that we should so act as to treat people always as ends and never as means only — to demonstrate the point that human values are central to ethics, we can equally point to the ways in which people have, historically, treated persons as less than ends. It is a feature of political and religious fanaticism that persons count for less than an ideal, whether in the Nazism that sacrificed people to the Third Reich or in Lenin's clear subordination of the good of individuals to that of the revolution.

Kant would consider that these examples prove his point. If ethics is a human enterprise, we might argue that it is the very definition of the unethical that it ignores the central value of the human. Ethics exists for persons, and so what is not primarily for persons is by definition not ethical. Surely ethics seem to work most successfully when the personal comes first. So we may say that the second or 'motivational' level is prescriptive, not in the sense of R.M. Hare's prescriptivism, but rather in how matters ought to be. Certainly there is a case to be made that all manner of evils follow when persons are not placed first.

The third level, which I have called 'particular', is the level of most actual ethical judgment, and it is on this level at which the widest range of individual and cultural conflict takes place. There is, for example, clear and apparently irreconcilable conflict in Western society on topics such as abortion and euthanasia, on the ethics of censorship, and so on; and these divisions are multiplied between cultures: questions of polygamy and treatment of women and the aged create further problems. I do not believe that we can find a single ethic which will resolve all these issues, any more than we can give a definitive answer to the question of conflicting principles already noted, but, if it is true that this is a question at a different level from the two indicated, then the existence of such conflict does not of itself rule out the possibility of a basic moral code, developed on the two other levels, which provides a basis of judgment and discussion of particular conflicts.

III

It is important to note that particular arguments, at the conflict stage of this third level, frequently involve a conflict of metaphysics. The debate about abortion, for instance, turns on an ontological judgment about the status

of persons — the question of whether the embryo is a person at all, even before the question whether it is a person with rights. Similarly, questions of euthanasia rest on questions of rights and the nature and status of the essence of being a human person. Disagreement often is the result of what we take a person to be. Wong's cultural relativism largely depends upon different conceptions of person and community. In other issues, there is a question of ontology. If, in our discourse, we talk about 'love' or 'loyalty', 'relationships' or 'caring', we are, though we may not recognise it, creating a picture of the contents of the world. Someone who asserts that the most important thing in the world is a relationship, or relationships in general, is making a metaphysical claim about the nature of reality.

It has been characteristic of much modern philosophy, from the Vienna Circle onwards, to eschew metaphysics, indeed to deny the possibility of metaphysics. Thinkers of this type have argued that the philosopher can only analyse the function of language, or examine meaning in use. But if, as I am inclined to think, most ethical propositions contain a particular world view, it would follow that a philosophy which refuses to discuss metaphysics finds itself baffled in attempting to discern an effective moral philosophy. To such a turn of mind, the fact/value problem is a special difficulty, for the 'fact' aspect is beyond significant discussion. It is the avoidance of metaphysics which leads to the cul-de-sacs of emotivism, subjectivism and prescriptivism which have been predominant in contemporary ethical discussions.

If, as I have indicated, the nature of ethics is that it is personal, then it follows that it presupposes the facticity of the world. And to make that presupposition is a metaphysical claim. If we are to find a means of resolving the fact/value problem, we cannot hope to do so without at least a minimal metaphysic.

Now, the term 'metaphysics' is differently understood, among modern philosophers sometimes being used as a pejorative term for woolly and grandiose ideas of the universe, such as those espoused by the Hegelian Idealists, against whose approach so much of twentieth century philosophy has been a reaction. But that is not the only possible way of approaching metaphysics. That branch of metaphysics called Ontology sets itself the more modest task of listing the types of entities which make up the content of the universe. For my purposes, I propose to restrict my metaphysical propositions to one, with no transcendental implications or dogmatism about the further content of the universe:

Proposition 1

There exist at least material objects.

That seems modest enough, and I know of no culture which as a whole would argue against it, though it must be admitted that this is an assertion

— shared incidentally by Aquinas and Aristotle — whose truth cannot be demonstrated beyond doubt to the determined sceptic. But it is consistent with ordinary discourse. When we ask if something — like a ghost — is real, we are surely asking whether it has a similar degree of actuality to the tables and chairs around me. To ask if something is real is not an absolute but relative to a benchmark of that which I already accept as ‘real’.

The proposition seems to be extremely fruitful in clarifying certain problems which cloud ethical and metaethical discourse. In saying this, I am aware that the position I espouse involves a radical nominalism, whose nature and implications I need briefly to outline.

In all languages known, objects are habitually named: the term we use for such a name is a ‘noun’. This is not mere pedantry, for nouns are the source of huge potential problems in relation to our understanding of the universe and its contents.

Perhaps the most sustained analysis of these problems available in English is to be found in Tadeusz Kotarbinski’s *Gnosiology*⁸. It is a feature of developed language to employ noun forms, frequently for convenience. If we take the sentences, ‘the grass is green’, ‘the pullover is green’, we see at once that ‘green’ is adjectival. We know, if we think about it, that there is no such *thing* as ‘green’: we cannot detach the greenness of the grass from the grass, or the greenness of the pullover from the pullover. We are always confronted with a green *something*. Yet we will cheerfully say ‘Green is my favourite colour’. Suddenly ‘green’ is used as a noun. It is very convenient to do that, much more convenient than ‘I like best of all that which I call green as in fields, pullovers, etc.’ We create a noun as a linguistic device, even though it is not the name of any *thing*. Because there is a name, those of a thoughtful disposition then are tempted to ask ‘What kind of a thing is green?’ — after all, nouns name things. This opens the way to problems: nine centuries ago, St. Anselm addressed the question of what kind of a *thing* is ‘nothing’, and wisely concluded that ‘nothing’ is not the name of a thing called nothing, but stands for the absence of anything. The technical term for an apparent name is an ‘onomatoid’.

The creation of onomatoids, normally unconsciously, has particular significance for ethics. If ‘green’, as a noun, is a convenience term, so too are words such as ‘justice’, ‘love’, ‘loyalty’, ‘value’ and so on. We take the term ‘justice’ to refer to those qualities in a person — or, indeed, in a God — which we call just: it is easier to refer to ‘justice’ than to ‘that aspect of persons I call “just”’. The fallacy, it seems to me, is then to assume that the existence of the noun leads people to assume that it names some *thing*, whether they call it an ‘abstract object’ or Plato’s Ideal Form. This

⁸ KOTARBINSKI, Tadeusz: *Gnosiology*, Pergamon, London, 1966.

confusion leads many teenagers to late night discussions to determine what is this thing called real love. A more subtle approach to language would save a deal of sleeplessness and lead to a more productive discussion of the qualities of persons which we discern as loving, a discussion closer to Aristotle's way with ethical terms, which was to examine those persons we call just or friendly or good. After all, if we remove the two persons we call lovers, their love is not left behind, any more than a relationship exists apart from the people related. The objects we call persons may be related — a state described adjectivally — and everything that may be said about their relatedness may be said adjectivally without diminution of human experience, but there is no need to posit such abstract objects such as relationship, togetherness, sharing and so on. To talk unreflectively in those terms is to assume an ontology of relationship for which there is no need.

To go further: in speaking a language of abstract objects, we raise cultural barriers. The subtle differences between and within languages create world pictures with different resonances and meanings — the word 'sharing', often tied in certain discourse to 'caring' can have overtones from the factual to, in some contexts and to some listeners, the nauseating.

If we are aware of the problem I have space only to sketch, then we have the basis of an ontologically minimal ethic, based upon the carefully limited but thoughtful descriptions of persons. People are described as just or unjust, in the light of their activity, and to be just, as Aristotle emphasised, depends upon an individual acting in a certain kind of way.

IV

We need to supplement the first proposition with a secondary but crucial dogmatic utterance:

Proposition 2

Among material objects there are sentient, reflective and self-directed objects, called 'persons'.

This again seems modest. Nevertheless, it is open to some controversy. There is, for many, an instant reluctance to accept the description of themselves as 'objects', for we experience ourselves as subjects, and much ethical debate has centred on human relationships as inter-subjective. Again, many wish to assert a spiritual humanity which seems denied by

my reference to ourselves as material objects. In my defence, I reassert that I am seeking a minimum metaphysic of persons, devoid of claims about the total content of the universe: I am content with the claim that there are *at least* material objects. To say more opens the way to metaphysical dissension: the more elements in the ontology, the wider the possibility of disagreement and the more difficult the task of finding a common principle of ethics.

It is important to notice how much Proposition 2 permits us to say. We can, adjectivally, describe the human object as 'running', 'jumping', 'smiling', and so on, but we can include intellectual states — 'musing', 'reflecting' — as well as emotional ones — 'sad', 'cheerful' — and moral attitudes — 'just', 'kind'. Aristotle rightly showed how to have correctly attributed a moral virtue is to be a person — a moral object — performing in a certain kind of way: one is a just person if and only if one can be described as acting justly, or, to speak adjectivally, if and only if just performance can be predicated of the acting person. But Aristotle went further: one is only a just person is a consequence of *being* just — the subjective experience of the act matters above all in virtue.

It is therefore crucial to recognise that the human object is an experiencing entity. Much traditional philosophy treats the person as primarily intellectual: since Descartes, the emphasis has been on epistemology — how we know and judge the experience of our senses. There are important questions here, but the danger is that we overlook the primary experience of being persons: we are not only, but more importantly, not in the first instance, cool judges of experience, rational observers of our intellectual experience.

We are first active. That is the inescapable human reality. Karol Wojtyła, in *The Acting Person* has emphasised this, but it is a tradition stretching back at least to Aristotle's belief, exemplified in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that virtue rests on performing acts well: goodness is an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue. We should note also that we are — as Franz Brentano pointed out — intentional creatures, that is, persons whose minds are directional. We do not perceive the world passively, but always in terms of preference (Brentano speaks of love and hate, rather than of preference). From these two points, we can, I think, begin the construction of a universal ethic.

Because we are active, we learn a pattern of preference, not necessarily a purely logical one: I prefer to say 'organic', to indicate that we grow in our tastes and values, for reasons not always clear to us. The way in which we do this is profoundly significant in helping to understand how we imbue the world with moral value. I suggest the process is universal: culture affects outcomes but not the nature of the process.

It is a datum that human beings are in action: by being born in a community we are in a network of activities. It is worth remembering that activity

actually precedes thought: a baby is active and interactive (it moves, acts and responds) long before developing the capacity to reflect on that activity. The beginning of introspection is reflection on activity of self and others *already* in process. To this extent, the tendency of some philosophers to write as if there were first meditation and only then thoughtful action is a misleading one: the model is only a model. In the process of life, ethical activity is, as it were, partly reactive: social processes are ongoing, through the activity of myself and others, and my contemplation and criticism occur within that context, rather than as a passive onlooker. Indeed, even as a 'contemplative onlooker' I am not inactive: each new phenomenon is an alteration of my pattern of preference, and I change with the new interaction brought about by each change of circumstance. Thus, the alteration of circumstances triggers the 'organic' change from 'is' to 'ought'.

V

We need to draw together these strands into a narrative, outlining proposals for solving the problem before us. In doing this, I am suggesting not that there is one simple answer, but rather that a solution may be found within lived experience. My underlying approach may be summarised in Wojtyła's comment:

In each of his actions the human person is eyewitness of the transition from the 'is' to the 'should' — the transition from 'x is truly good' to 'I should do x.'⁹

Wojtyła's characteristically bold assertion needs to be supplemented by some justification of what value — the truly good — is. His account, like mine, is fundamentally personalist. If this is the case, then value inheres in a person, not as some *thing*, but as a proper quality — proper in the sense that it is not separable from that which is valuable. It is important to recognise the essentially onomatoidal nature of the concept 'value': things' value is not separable from the objects themselves. If we look to value as a kind of fact, then it is a fact perceived about how things are: it is not factual in the way we might describe an entity as a fact.

I shall come to my suggestions by a route different from Wojtyła's.

Traditional assumptions about the fact/value problem are based on the idea that logic, like mathematics, is *timeless*. But the experience of value and obligation takes place within the order of experienced time, by sentient persons. The judgments are not timeless.

⁹ WOJTYŁA, Karol. *The Acting Person (Analecta Husserliana Vol. X)*, Dordrecht, 1979.

The twentieth century has taught us that there are many possible mathematical systems, many geometries and many logics. Any of these systems rests upon certain presuppositions and definitions: no logical system is or can be wholly axiom-free.

Perhaps the fundamental axiom of normal forms of logic, and especially the traditional syllogistic of Aristotle is the Law of Identity:

$$A \equiv A$$

However, when we are talking of living persons, identity becomes a problematic concept. Within the context of a valuing person, the subject ('I') alters: the 'I' of today is not in every respect identical with the 'I' of last Tuesday week. A logic which truly represented the lived experience of valuing and decision making would need to pay attention to the way in which the experiencing self changes over time.

But by entering a temporal element into the equation, we are able to suggest some possible ways of resolving the formal — as opposed to what I have called the 'organic' — question.

Let us take two occasions in our lived experience, one present, which I shall call t_1 , and one future, t_2 . At t_1 , I say 'I ought to give alms to the poor.' Now, this is a *tensed* sentence: it refers to a future state of affairs, which — in some sense — I wish to see happen. That future may be quite close, but it is necessarily future as contemplated action must be — we cannot act in the past.

Now we can consider the future — t_2 — when one of two states of affairs will be the case: either at this future point it is true that I am giving alms to the poor or it is not true that I am giving alms to the poor. Either is factual, a state of affairs.

At t_1 I am stating that I now — presently — prefer/ desire/ believe in one future state of things rather than another, each of these propositions being expressed in terms of the verb 'to be'. At first glance, incorporating the notion of time appears to have dissolved the problem. But to leave matters there seems to me too glib — we have not really resolved the issue unless we can give good reasons — beyond the general sentiment of mankind — why we should think it worthwhile to prefer one set of future affairs rather than another.

VI

All I can do, perhaps, is to make some tentative suggestions about the most profitable lines of enquiry.

Any provisional solution along the lines I have given presupposes that I am an imaginative person capable of envisioning different possible futures. Our tentative metaphysical conclusions, supported by introspection, suggest that I am such a person. Following Franz Brentano's *Psychology From an Empirical Standpoint* (1878), I argued that we are *intentional* persons, that is, that we are not neutral observers of the world, who only then reach a value judgment — we are not cameras set up at random, blindly photographing whatever happens to come into view, without discrimination — we are persons who instinctively impose value on our perceptions.

We are also, I have insisted, *active* persons, born into communities of acting persons. Activity precedes thought — a baby acts and is in reaction with the world before it is consciously rational. Then, little by little, we learn to reflect on the activity of ourselves and others, and I criticise and reflect on the activity of others within a world in which I am myself an actor. Action is an inescapable condition of human life. Action reflects perceptions, sometimes changing as I experience new phenomena. What is important to notice here is that valuing is not a by-product of conscious activity, something added to the fact of it, but a precondition. I pursue things *because* I see them as valuable: value does not follow the pursuit as an optional extra.

Therefore, we may conclude that human activity, and certainly purposeful human activity, which is activity in the full sense, presupposes both thought and the imaginative foresight of possible futures. Twentieth century philosophers, and not only of the existentialist school, have sometimes talked of human life in terms of projects, and a project is necessarily — if only in a piecemeal way — about changing or affecting, future states of affairs — the world will be different if I choose to build a garage, drink a second bottle of whisky, or not attend a conference.

We need to understand, against those sceptical about whether reasons can be given for ethical choice that reasons can be given for preferring one possible future rather than another. That reasoning may be prudential ('This will be painful'), financial ('I will be richer' or 'This is expensive. '), emotional ('I will feel better'), or *evaluative* ('We are all humans and in being human add to the richness of creation. ') There is nothing odd, among many possible reasons for activity, in there being an evaluative condition.

It seems to me that the experience of being rational, thinking, evaluative, reflective and active human beings is universal and not culturally relative. Reasons of equal validity can be given for identical values across cultures, e.g. for valuing life, avoiding theft, and so on. Bad consequences can be seen to follow from not holding certain values. Bad values lead to certain states of affairs that we may hold to be undesirable, even if only for prudential reasons. I am not convinced that prudence can or should be seen

as somehow amoral: certainly, if it can be shown that to act imprudently, e.g. when looking after children, is immoral, then prudence would be part of the moral in some, but not all, circumstances.

We require at least one moral principle, which is universalisable. I would formulate this quite loosely as 'It is proper to seek the good of persons.' This includes many traditional views, but I do not seek to replace them or to lay yet another injunction alongside them — I want to insist on the possibility of ethical agreement. (As a believer, I would wish to go further and interpret this principle further, in terms of love, yet I hold back from doing so in the wider sense simply because the principle of love seems not explicit in every culture.) But what I have formulated is the deep principle — it still seems to me open to legitimate cultural differences about *how* the particular local version is to be interpreted.

But all this is unhelpful as a guide to living without the ability, which I have already suggested, to foresee ways in which this could operate. I suggest that the key to the moral outlook is the moral imagination. After all, cruelty of most kinds tends to be not infrequently allied to lack of moral imagination. The thug sees this old lady as just that — an old lady. In this case, there is no awareness of her as a centre of consciousness as much as the assailant: she is defined by, and understood in terms of her old-ladiness. It is always hard to recognise that there is more to being a person for someone else than just being a black person, or a Jew, or a Catholic or a homosexual. We recognise that the starving of Africa lack reality until brought before us in terms of this particular starving child seen on the TV screen. This is why, in moral education, the most urgent need is not the teaching of codes or rules, but the development of the moral imagination. The moral imagination is always particular: it is always about something. Moral activity is always particular: it relates to someone.

Any moral ontology therefore needs to be particular. An ethical action involves a good to or for a person, not an abstract ideal. And to understand a person necessitates imagination. As Royce has it:

Who then is thy neighbour?... We find that out by treating him in thought just as we do ourselves ... thy neighbour is as actual, as concrete as thou art. Just as thy future is real, though not ... [yet] ... thine, so thy neighbour is real, though his thoughts are never thy thoughts. Dost thou believe this? Art thou sure what it means? This is for thee the turning-point of thy whole conduct towards him. What we now ask of thee is no sentiment, no gush of pity, no tremulous weakness of pity, but a calm, clear insight.¹⁰

¹⁰ ROYCE, Josiah. *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy*, Gloucester, Mass. 1965, p. 156-157.

Any approach to ethics has to begin with the fact of the person and human personality; and this is an ontological, perhaps even anthropological quest. The nature of the moral imagination seems to me the fundamental but exciting task that faces moral philosophy in our day, for it is on the basis of our thoughtful objectivity and creative inter-subjectivity that we find the only worthwhile ground of significant, experienced life.

VII

So far, we have developed simply a minimalist ontology, which is based on the fact of moral imagination and the good of persons. This account needs some further supplementation, both within a Christian metaphysic and in relation to the moral imagination. There is also the question of the nature of good for persons. If we argue that the good in some sense entails doing well, a Christian understanding is different from a purely this-world approach, bounded absolutely by our mortality. In his account of the moral life, Aquinas is careful to demonstrate that ultimate human flourishing is as a whole person in eternal life with God, an embodied life spent in contemplation of the divine. Of course, Aquinas cannot give a coherent account of how this is an eternal life of activity, for such a life is beyond the limits of imagination.

But it does not follow from this eschatological understanding that therefore human flourishing does not encompass the quotidian, antemortem life. Aquinas' account of natural law is thoroughly embedded in the business of human living. Like Aristotle, he is well-aware that we are social animals who flourish best in our relationship with others. If we are to live a moral life, it will be a life lived in this world, not the next. It is in this world that character are developed, in this world that we can do good for people (as conventionally understood, heaven is not a place where we can do good for others as beatitude is complete – a consideration which raises interesting theological questions which we cannot explore here).

The account of good to supplement the view developed so far is therefore, even for the believer, to be understood in terms that make sense in the realm in which good can be done by us as agents. This has both moral and non-moral elements: performing acts that give more felicity but also enable us, responsible for each other, to become morally better persons. There is an aspect of welfare, in terms of the necessities and comforts of life, but also the ways in which we may contribute to the spiritual and cultural aspects of life.

There is a further consideration. God's goodness is not the goodness of a moral agent. Brian Davies has noted:

As philosophers know well, in debates about God's goodness it is often asked whether God wills something because it is good or whether something is good because God wills it. Aquinas, who never directly tackles this question (so far as I know) can, I think, be said to hold that the answer must be: (a) God wills us to do what is good because it is good, and (b) what is good for us to do depends on the way in which God has made creatures to be. In terms of this account, Aquinas would say that God would never command us to torture children because, in effect, that would involve him in contradicting himself, or going against his nature as the source of creaturely goodness (the nature of which Aquinas thinks that we can determine, at least to a large extent, independently of theological reflection). And this, of course, is not to suggest that God's goodness consists in him acting in accordance with moral norms to which he responds in any sense.¹¹

This approach is consistent with my argument. To accept it, for many, would create particular problems, and it is not possible to deny that many distinguished Christian thinkers hold that God is a moral agent. Richard Swinburne, for example, argues:

In claiming that God is by nature perfectly morally good, I suggest that the theist be interpreted as claiming that God is so constituted that he always does the morally best action (when there is one), and no morally bad action. For God, as for us, there is often no one best action, but a choice of equal best actions, only one of which can be done ... Perfect moral goodness surely involves fulfilling one's moral obligations ... I suggest that in our sense of 'moral' all theists hold that God is perfectly good, and that this is a central claim of theism.¹²

What is needed is a coherent account of the goodness of God. For Swinburne, God's goodness lies in particular acts of goodness: he always does the morally good thing. For Davies, the God's goodness needs to be understood in a wider way. He argues that God's goodness is not to be understood in terms of the goodness of humans. God is not, as a person may be, *well-behaved*. God's goodness lies in the way we are drawn to him as good – as that above all which is desirable and from whom comes the inspiration to be moral agents. Morality flows from God and in that sense is in him. Davies' claim is that, as God is perfect being, that being is the good to be sought. 'God is good' is not identical with 'God is morally good.'

In answer to the *Euthyphro* Dilemma, Davies argues not that God wills the good because it is good, so much as that God wills *that we do good*

¹¹ DAVIES, Brian. 'Is God A Moral Agent?', *Whose God? Which Tradition*, ed. D. Z. Phillips, Farnham, 2008, p. 122.

¹² SWINBURNE, Richard. *The Coherence of Theism*, rev. ed., Oxford, 1993, p. 184-187.

because of our natures: in other words, because it is our good. He wills our personal good rather than an abstract goodness. That is the sense in which it comes from God.

This view, Davies claims, is wholly consistent with Scripture. He notes how the Bible explicitly warns about comparing God with anything creaturely. In the Old Testament, God's righteousness consists in keeping his covenant with Israel, and emphatically not because he upholds some code. He notes that while pain and suffering are at the heart of scripture, and while people ask why God permits such evils to happen to his people, the question is never put in terms of why God, *as a moral person should*, does not prevent the suffering. (Some might argue that this view is based on selective reading of, for instance, the Book of Job). The question is of another order than 'The Problem of Evil' as formulated by Epicurus and Hume.

God's goodness, Davies claims, means that he cannot command that which is destructive of being, and, in that sense, the *Euthyphro* question is further shown to be mistaken.

VIII

If this analysis is correct, it then follows that we ought not to see moral human action as a set of regulations to be commanded by God. Rather, it is to be seen as an extension of his creative nature as well as a desire that we should not be followers of divine commands but rather persons who seek to be fully human: to be the people that God willed we should be.

Such an analysis is consistent with Thomist views of the nature of persons. God willed that we should be persons of a particular kind, developing particular types of character.

It is important to remember the concept of God as creator. His goodness exists not only in the way that he is perfect being attracting by his goodness, but also that he creates and sees what he has created as good. If, as Davies suggests, God wills us to be true to our natures by being as good as we may be, it follows that goodness is not simply *obedience* to command, but a brave creativity in the making of good. If, as I think, for there to be good it has to be experienced by a conscious mind – good is always experienced – and good is not something separate from that which is good (it is not an additional thing but is intrinsic to it), then the good is not the problem it is taken to be by those who fret about the *Euthyphro* Dilemma or those troubled by the fact-value distinction or, indeed, the naturalistic fallacy. We are not equating good with a natural

quality that we have. Our language treats good adjectivally, but it is more than that. If I do well as a person, functioning as fully as it is possible to be, I do not merely possess a quality of goodness, as a possession. I am most fully myself. In my fallen state, I do things which are less than fully good. In that cases, I am sometimes described as being more or less good. But if I could move beyond lapses, then I would be good in a different sense.

God makes humankind creative of good. When he commands the right because it is right, this should, I think, be understood as commanding what our intelligence and imagination choose as the good for humans. It is an injunction to be human in the fullest sense, which includes values such as autonomy. The warrant for the moral injunctions of the Decalogue can only be our finding them useful – they are followed for their adequacy to life, for no other justification is likely to convince.

For us, this being good (perhaps goodness) is not to be understood as obedience to a rule, but something which reaches further, entailing a will to the good rather than the slightly imperfect will to obey the regulation. The latter approach leads to a kind of legalism.

IX

Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to fall into acceptance of Situation Ethics as outlined by William Temple and Joseph Fletcher. In Situation Ethics, a judgement must always be made situational, and nothing is ever wholly right or wrong in itself, only right or wrong in the circumstances. William Temple had argued:

The general principle is that relative terms are absolute in the appropriate relations. To kill is right, if at all, relatively and not absolutely; that is, it can only be right in special circumstances. But in those circumstances it is absolutely right,

It is doubtful if any act is right “in itself”. Every act is a link in a chain of causes and effects. It cannot be said it is wrong to take away a man’s possessions against his will, for that would condemn all taxation, or the removal of a revolver from a homicidal lunatic; neither of these is stealing – which is always wrong; though high authority [A reference to St. Thomas Aquinas: *Summa Theologica*: II-II, q.66, a.7, c (My note)] has held that a starving man should steal a loaf rather than die of hunger, because life is of more value than property and should be chosen first for preservation if both cannot be preserved together.

The rightness of an act, then, nearly always, and perhaps always, depends on the way in which that act is related to circumstances; this is what is

meant by calling it relatively right; but this does not in the least imply that it is only doubtfully right. It may be, in those circumstances, certainly and absolutely right.¹³

In the same way, Joseph Fletcher thought:

There is only one thing that is always good and right, intrinsically good regardless of the context, and that one thing is love... It is the *only* principle that always obliges us in conscience. Unlike all other principles you might mention, love alone when well-served is always good and right in every situation. Love is the only universal. But love is not something we *have* or *are*, it is something we *do*. Our task is to act so that more good (i.e., loving-kindness) will occur than any possible alternatives...It is an attitude, a disposition, a leaning, a preference, a purpose.¹⁴

At first glance, this sound thoroughly compatible with the general view about personalism outlined earlier, and it certainly appears creative of a true Christian love. However, it seems problematic in various ways that need to be avoided.

Situation Ethics seems to have all the problems of Act Utilitarianism. Situation ethics is strictly teleological and therefore suffers from all the associated problems of determining outcomes, having time to make decisions, possessing the necessary skills, having all relevant information, etc. If we want to argue that being good means more than possession of a particular trait that we may happen to have, but rather a part of being, then the being good is wrapped up in any outcome. Fletcher would, within a year of producing his book, declare himself an atheist, and subsequently treated his version of situation ethics in utilitarian terms. In his treatment of conscience he had already made it wholly action-centred:

The traditional error lies in thinking about conscience as a noun instead of as a verb. This reflects the fixity and establishment-mindedness of all law ethics as contrasted to love ethics. There *is* no conscience; "conscience" is merely a word for our attempts to make decisions creatively, constructively, fittingly.¹⁵

If this is so, then we are left with just actions as good. There seems little space for talking of ourselves as reflective beings in the sense of persons who do not merely imagine futures but reflect on our pasts. Fletcher's interest only in the decisions we make in the future seems to miss a crucial aspect of human experience. As a simple matter of fact, most people do review

¹³ TEMPLE, William. 'A Conditional Justification of War': *Religious Experience and Other Essays and Addresses*, Ed. A. E. Baker, James Clarke & Co, 1958, p. 173-174.

¹⁴ FLETCHER, Joseph. *Situation Ethics*, Westminster John Knox Press, 1966, p. 60-61.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 53.

their lives and actions. We wonder whether we did the right thing and consider where we did well or poorly. Doing this is partly curiosity, but it also enables us to function better. The habit of reflection on the things we have done and the motives we had builds character and is important for future decision-making. Fletcher's reductionism towards conscience seems to impoverish a valuable part of human experience.

In the Christian sense, too, conscience plays a valuable part in religious discourse. If God's primary relationship is with the person, then how a person *is* – how she sees herself, judges herself, learns in her humanity is fundamental to who she is. If love has the centrality Fletcher believes, then it is true above all that most people love another not because of what she does, but because of what she is, as a centre of consciousness, reflectiveness, learning and feeling. Of course, as Aristotle well knew, actions matter to who she is, because the reflective experience of action changes the self.

An issue with Situation Ethics in particular is a lack of definition of what constitutes a 'situation'. Is it the particular circumstance or does it stretch into the future? If so, how far into the future? For example, I see a man drowning and, out of love for a fellow human being, jump into the water to save him. A life is saved, and a good thing apparently done. But a year later, the man I saved wantonly guns down 50 people in a terrorist killing. Is my act, initially seen as loving, an unloving one after all? Ought I to have left him to drown as a loving act, in case he turned out to be a bad man? If all that matters is the action, then we can never justly judge goodness with any certainty.

Fletcher seems equally vague in defining what the good for people actually is. He speaks loosely of 'welfare', but is vague in definition beyond that. The same accusation might be levelled at the suggestions made in this paper, and any fuller account needs to be one which is more specific than Fletcher's generalised welfarism. By stressing the person as someone with past, present and future contained within an active life, we are at least looking to something stronger than simply actions. It is possible to make judgements about non-moral goods to be pursued, such as freedom from thirst, hunger, fear, loneliness that can be seen as worthwhile. One can, in most circumstances, think of no good reasons for someone to be thirsty, and many good reasons why she should not be. The exceptional case (she is having an operation, and should not drink) is just that – an exception which does not normally need to be considered.

Is it true that there are no actions intrinsically wrong regardless of circumstance – burning babies, for example? It does not follow that because many actions are situational in their rightness that all are. Fletcher attempts to argue that there could even be circumstances when an action such as

rape could be right and loving.¹⁶ Some would question this, and many might argue that the case cited by Fletcher in support of this argument is an uncertain one.

If Fletcher is right, there would, in principle, be situations in which actions such as cruelty, using children for sexual pleasure, genital mutilation, date-rape, pillage, torture or incest could all be seen as right or loving acts. Some might question this.

This concern ties to something deeper. Fletcher assumes that the difficulty of being certain in some situations leads to a position where we need an alternative to rule-based ethics without falling into antinomianism. His view of rule-governed morality assumes that following rules is an absolute requirement. His method is to point to hard cases, where the right thing to do is not clear, usually because different rules seem to point in different directions. Lawyers often point out that hard cases make for bad laws. In morality, there are similar concerns. It is true that there are cases where it is not clear that we should tell the truth or take someone's property. But it does not follow from that that the rules of truth-telling and avoiding theft are invalidated in general. In most cases, most of the time, there are overwhelming good reasons for telling the truth and not being a thief, and very few, if any, bad ones. In *The Right and the Good*,¹⁷ the great Scottish philosopher, W. D. Ross (1877 – 1971) argued that we have *prima facie* duties such as fidelity, justice and beneficence which should always be followed unless there were, in a given situation, overwhelming *moral* reasons for performing another sort of moral duty. This approach appears more credible than Fletcher's denial of rules and gives some useful guidance about how to act morally.

A Virtue ethicist would argue that Fletcher gives too little weight to character in stressing the outcome and the action so strongly. By concerning himself just with outcome and actions, he seems to ignore the wider aspects of being a moral person, acting in the right way for the right motivation. This can be seen in his treatment of conscience:

The traditional error lies in thinking about conscience as a noun instead of as a verb. This reflects the fixity and establishment-mindedness of all law ethics as contrasted to love ethics. There *is* no conscience; "conscience" is merely a word for our attempts to make decisions creatively, constructively, fittingly.¹⁸

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 163-164

¹⁷ ROSS, W.D. *The Right and the Good*, Oxford University Press, 1930.

¹⁸ *Op.cit.*, p. 53.

This action-based account seems inadequate. Conscience become something essentially calculative about what we will do. But we are not simply calculators of potential good actions. We are also persons who are reflective about actions done and actions neglected. We learn through reflective experience and grow in that way. Only in reflection and experience of what we have done what we can do and what is truest to our better natures. Terms such as 'repentance', 'regret', 'anguish', 'learning', 'practice' are predicated on the assumption of ourselves as self-reflective beings moving through time, being changed but also changing ourselves as we move on.

D.Z. Phillips has raised the question of whether we can in moral dilemmas presented by situations ever be truly confident that we have done 'the right thing'. This kind of knowledge may be beyond us:

When one finds oneself in situations where, whatever one does, one is going to hurt someone, talk of arranging goods in an order of priority often seems out of place... On the contrary... even after a person has decided what he must do in these COTTINGHAM situations, he may still feel remorse for having committed the evil which his decision inevitably involved. When one lies to save a friend from suffering despite the fact that one's whole relationship with him has been characterised by absolute straightforwardness and honesty; when one has to go against the wishes of parents who have sacrificed a great deal for one in deciding to marry a certain girl or to take up a certain job; when a man is forced to kill another person to save a child's life; talk about establishing an order of goods would be a vulgar falsification for many people. They did what they had to do, but they did not glory in it. In the cases I have mentioned, a trust in truthfulness has been betrayed, great sacrifice has been considered an insufficient reason, a life has been taken: all these are considered to be terrible, and the decisions which brought them about and had to be taken were terrible decisions nevertheless. It is essential to recognise that in moral dilemmas, the discovery of what must be done often involves one in evil, pain and suffering.¹⁹

There are no easy answers in life, and there is need to be cautious about the over-simple approaches of the type represented by Fletcher. Remorse is perhaps the necessary price of autonomy, and however we may calculate consequences there are always harms possible and, sometimes, inevitable. This is why in relation to God, human autonomy is not simply cherished but also, on God's part, understood and accompanied in its suffering.

A further, and perhaps fatal, issue, consistent with Phillips' argument, is the assumption in Situation Ethics that Right ^o Good. In the examples Phillips gives, we might be doing the *right* thing, but does it follow that

¹⁹ PHILLIPS, D.Z. 'Some Limits to Moral Endeavour', *Through a Darkening Glass*, Blackwell, 1982, p. 38.

it is a *good* one? Temple does not separate the two, arguing in *Christianity in Thought and Practice* that the good is what is right in the circumstances and the right what is good in the circumstances. The same assumption is made by Fletcher. But is this straightforwardly and invariably true? If I give alms to the poor, it might be argued that doing so is both good and right. A moment's thought suggests otherwise. Giving to the poor is surely a right act, as an action, but is it good even if I do so for unworthy reasons? Would someone say I had performed a *good* act if my motivation were to curry favour with voters rather than for the good of the poor themselves? As Phillips suggests, my actions might be right at times when they seem not good, but merely necessary. If I kill a brutish man as this is the only way to prevent his murder of a child, surely though I would argue that the killing is *right* and necessary, I would not wish to argue that it is a *good* thing, involving as it does the destruction of a man's life. It is unlikely that I would be pleased that I killed him, and I might well have sleepless nights wondering whether I could have found a different way to secure the safety of the child. I hope I would not feel the contentment of a deed well done: it would be a right action causing pain for others.

X

Reflections on these matters is seems valuable in the light of recent work by John Cottingham, much of which is summarised in his rich and provocative 2014 book.²⁰ Cottingham argues that morality has a special quality, a sense of obligation, which points towards God. He is not arguing that our moral awareness is proof of God. He mentions how J.L. Mackie points to the 'queerness' of moral obligations, and builds his own theory on the basis of the perceived special nature of the moral:

...in addition to underwriting *objectivity* and *nonrelativity*, the idea of a divine source of goodness also implies a certain kind of *authority*. This connects with the notion (by no means confined to theists) that beauty and goodness exert some kind of normative pull on us. Beauty is *to be admired*; goodness is *to be pursued*. These values in a certain sense constrain us, whether we like it or not. We can of course deviate from them, or turn away from pursuing them, and we often do, but that does not seem to alter their validity.²¹

In this account, the *Euthyphro* Dilemma is avoided by consideration of how the commands of God are embodiments of the goodness of God – they are good in themselves, having goodness as their source.

²⁰ Veja-se especialmente COTTINGHAM, John. *Philosophy of Religion: Towards a More Humane Approach*, Cambridge, 2014.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 73.

It is not the purpose of this paper to critique Cottingham, but to draw attention to ways in which the moral obligation may be understood as open to strictly naturalistic justification while being open to a developed theological understanding. In one sense, the enterprise is more cautious than Cottingham's, but, while Cottingham emphasises the nature of moral commands, I have attempted to move further into the creative nature of the moral life, a creativity which is a reflection of, and a trust in, the creative goodness of God.

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