Value, Duty and The Divine: A Critique of Robert Adams' Divine-Based Axiology and a Defense of a Divine Command Theory of Moral Obligation.

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Introduction

I would like to extend by gratitude and thanks to Professor Chris Heathwood for all of his amazing help throughout the supervision of this essay. I am very grateful to have had him as an advisor for this project. I would also like to thank those on my committee for participating in this process and their willingness to help.

In my studies of philosophy as an undergraduate student I have heard many different accounts of the nature of moral goodness. I have had Professors who self identify as realists, others who identify as moral naturalists and another that identifies as a utilitarian. They have all provided my fellow students and I with very interesting reasons to think that their explanation of morality is the correct one of all the possible options. Questions about the nature of morality stand out to me as some of the most important ones we can ask since we are faced every day with what appear to be moral decisions. If we make the wrong moral decisions it may leave us with guilt or create some result that we may truly want to avoid.

It is important for us who want to make the correct moral decisions to know what actually is moral in the first place. I believe that determining the correct answer to what exactly is moral is a job that moral philosophers are most apt to engage in. Since moral philosophy is something that can be traced all the way back to the ancient Greeks and since to this day the debate still rages over the nature of moral goodness as well as the nature of moral duty, it is evidently a fundamentally important endeavor to engage in. In this essay I will aim to contribute some insight into this immensely important question. I want to provide what I think is not only the most plausible moral theory but what is in fact the correct moral theory. I am not so naïve as to think that I will in any way provide a theory that will come close to settling a debate and answering all the questions that may

arise as a result of my proposal; but I do think that what I have to say is something that should be considered, particularly by theists.

As a lifelong theist myself I have always believed that in some way morality is tied to God. Those who I grew up with thought the same thing and the members of my church also felt the same way. In fact, I think every theist I have gotten to know does believe that God is somehow related to morality. To this day I still hold this view and I think it is correct, although it is not such a straightforward task to explain how it is that God is related to morality. I think that one of the most interesting explanations I have come across can be found in Robert Adams' book, "Finite and Infinite Goods."[1] I do not agree with everything in his book. In fact, much of my essay will be devoted to critiquing his view. But I do think it has created tremendous progress for theistic moral philosophy. In presenting my view I wish to add something to the discussion and create an alternative theistic approach to Adams', particularly in respect to the account of moral value.

The first half of my essay will directly engage Robert Adams' book, "Finite and Infinite Goods," and the account of moral value that he lays out in this work. My approach will be a critique of his explanation of moral value, that is, what he finds to be the reason for which some things are morally good or bad. To be clear, I initially found his value theory very compelling. For the theist this is a theory that is very easy to want to adopt. But upon further reflection it does seem to have some problems that have caused me to abandon this view. The first half of the essay will be devoted to explaining what the theory is and why it does not seem to be tenable. Although I am not satisfied with Adams' value theory, I am very satisfied with his explanation of the nature of duty

[1] Adams, Robert. *Finite and Infinite Goods*. 1999.

and why it is that we should find our duties in divine commands. I wish to support the reasons Adams gives for following divine commands. I also will be providing additional reasons for thinking that our duties are most plausibly rooted in divine commands. This is precisely what the second half of the essay will be devoted to explicating.

The essential purpose of this essay will be to provide a defense of divine command theory. The reasons I have chosen to write a defense of divine command theory are first, that I believe it is correct, and second, that I believe that DCT has not received the due consideration which it deserves from moral philosophers as a result of objections such as the "euthyphro dilemma." The classic euthyphro dilemma is a dilemma that appears in Plato's dialogue entitled *Euthyphro*. The contemporary formulation of the euthyphro dilemma as it relates to DCT is this: is something good because God commands it? Or does God command something because it is good? An affirmative answer to either one of these questions has historically spelled trouble for the theist. I believe that the euthyphro dilemma is actually not a problem for those who hold DCT if they hold the correct formulation of the theory and if they combine it with a non-divine based theory of value. My formulation of DCT will be on the nature of obligation and duty alone and not on the nature of value. Again, the version of DCT that I present in this essay will not serve as an explanation of moral value. It seems that the forms of DCT that do fall prey to the euthyphro dilemma are the one's which do try to account for value, but since my theory does not try to do this it is not a problem.

On a more personal note, this essay serves as my senior thesis for my undergraduate studies. Although receiving honors for this paper would be a great personal achievement, I want this essay to have a bigger purpose than simply serving as a

means to earn an honors title from the university. I very much value what I have learned by writing this essay, but I want the contents of this essay to actually be considered and taken seriously by those who find moral philosophy to be important, Professors and students alike. I will be passing this essay on to my friends and fellow philosophy students and for those of them who read it I hope they will find my thoughts engaging and insightful in regards to the topic at hand. The purpose of this essay will really be to contribute to the discussion and provide a plausible theistic account of morality.

Robert Adams' Value Theory

One of the many accounts of the nature of goodness that has been introduced in metaethics is Robert Adams' proposal in his book, "Finite and Infinite Goods." This is a theistic account that aims to explain the nature of goodness in terms of the notion of "resemblance to God." Things are good insofar as they resemble the ultimate standard of goodness. Adams proposal echoes the words of Plato in referring to this standard as "the Good itself."[2] Adams very briefly runs us through Plato's explanation of the good itself as it is given in his "Symposium" and "Republic," before introducing his own Platonic and theistic conception of the good.

Plato conjectured that all things that are beautiful or good are such because they participate in or resemble the ultimate standard of beauty or goodness. Things are beautiful as they copy the 'beautiful itself.'[3] The beautiful itself is beauty in its purest form. Beauty itself transcends and is independent of all other properties. These

[2] Adams, *Finite and Infinite* Goods, p. 14.
[3] Plato, *Symposium.*

transcendent properties are known as Plato's forms. This transcendent realm of forms is also never changing and completely separate from our contingent world. When we say that a portrait is a beautiful portrait, it is beautiful in as much as it resembles the transcendental and unchanging property of beauty itself. An additional aspect of the forms which Plato intends to communicate is that we ought to pursue these forms as an object of our affection. The beautiful itself and the good itself are worthy of our "love and admiration."[4]

Adams adopts a theistic version of this Platonic view. Adams essentially replaces the term "form" with God. God is "the Good itself." God is the transcendent standard of goodness and things are good insofar as they resemble God. Like Plato's forms, God is unchanging and not contingent in any way. He is to be understood as the purest entity in existence. He is the infinite Good which all finitely good things resemble. Adams is careful to formulate his view in saying: "I have not said that 'good' *means* the same as 'resembles (or faithfully images) God.' "[5] On his view, resemblance to God is a necessary condition of something's being good.

> What is determined by the meaning of good, I have claimed, is a *role* that *must* be filled by anything that is to be the nature of the good. [italics added to 'must'].[6]

Additionally, Adams lays out ways in which resemblance to God may be sufficient for goodness. Obviously, resembling God in the simplest of manners is not sufficient for something's being good. For instance God's creativity does not make it the case that whatever is creative is good since it resembles God's creativity.

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[4] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, p. 13.
[5] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods,* p. 355.
[6] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, p. 355.

A bank robbery may have been very cleverly and creatively devised; however that does not entail that the bank robbery was a good thing. Adams says that the resemblances to God we are concerned with which constitute sufficient grounds to deem them good are the resemblances that "faithfully" resemble God. "What must be included in a faithful image depends on what is most *important* about the way in which the original has the features shared or represented."[7] This is where things get a little squirrelly in Adams' view. It is not entirely clear whether something's relevant resemblance (faithful imaging) to God is sufficient for its goodness. He does seem to want to say that a thing's 'faithful imaging of God in such a way as to give God a reason for loving it' is actually sufficient for its goodness. Determining what constitutes a faithful image of God seems to often require some intuition on a case-by-case basis. What the faithful image essentially boils down to is that something is good when it resembles God *in a relevant sense*. The faithful resemblance cannot just be any kind of resemblance; it must be a resemblance that gives God a reason to love it.

What Adams means to say is that a thing's resemblance to God has to be an 'important enough' resemblance in order for the feature that grounds the resemblance to be a good feature. The example he gives in order to illustrate this is that things with three parts could be deemed good since God is a trinity. So, in this case, a three-leaf clover might be good because it has three leaves, and this 'three-ness' is sufficient for the clover's goodness. This seems to be a ridiculous reason to value a clover or say that a clover is good. As a response, Adams will say that the three-ness of a clover is not an

[7] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, p. 33.

important enough resemblance to give us reason to value it nor is it a resemblance that gives God a reason to value or love the three-leaf clover so described.

Adams deems his view "realist" in a particular and specifically formulated way. On his view, a thing's goodness has that property of goodness independently of anyone's attitude towards it. That something is good means it is good objectively on this view. Adams wants to say that things are good if they really do resemble God and have the relevant kind of imaging required in order for something to count as good. Whether something has this resemblance is a property something will really have whether anyone likes it or not. In this sense, Adams deems his view as a kind of realism "at the substantive level."[8]

In the first chapter of Adams' book, he wrestles with issues as to whether his thesis about axiology is in fact explanatory. That is, when something is good, what is the explanation of its being good and is this explanation a satisfying one? In the realm of axiological questions, it is important to know what something is good in virtue of. There should be something about good things that actually makes them good. Again, the grounds for which something is good is whether it resembles God, according to Adams. Things are good in virtue of their resemblance to God. From what I gathered through reading his work, Adams does take his idea to be explanatory.

He goes on to state that there must be a standard of goodness by which we judge things as good. Adams then gives reasons for why we should deem God as that standard of goodness. Here he draws on Anselm's ontological argument which says that God is

[8] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, p. 18.

"*aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit*," that is, "a being than which nothing greater can be conceived."

On thesitic views like Adams', if God is to be the greatest conceivable being, God must be the paradigm of goodness himself. This must be the case since (allegedly) God would be greater if he were the "Good itself," meaning the paradigm of goodness, than if he were not the paradigm of goodness. Additionally, according to theists like Anselm and Adams, there must exist a being which actually embodies the ultimate standard/paradigm of goodness since it's not plausible to suggest that the ultimate good can just be floating around somewhere. God, as traditionally understood by theists (myself included), is by definition the greatest being which can possibly be conceived. So if the greatest conceivable being is to be the Good itself, that is just equivilant to the statement that God is the Good itself.[9]

In regards to moral badness, on Adams' view, there is no such thing as 'the Bad itself.' Good and bad are not meant to be symmetrical. The bad is always understood in relation to the Good. And things are bad when they are in opposition to or against the Good. Badness is more than a mere failure to resemble God, it is failing to resemble God in addition to being against his will and his nature. Because there is no ultimate standard of badness or 'badness itself' which all bad things resemble, things are measured in their badness by their deviation from and opposition to the "Good itself" which is God.[10]

What has been summarized thus far is the essential axiological framework which Adams defends in his book, "Finite and Infinite Goods." His explanation of why something is good is highly Platonic in nature as good things are good in virtue of their

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[9] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, pp. 43-45.
[10] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, pp. 102-103.

resemblance to the Good itself, God. To be sure, 'good' does not just mean the same thing as 'resembles God.' Adams is very adamant about making this notion clear in order to avoid bearing the burden of defending such a radical identity claim. However, anything that is good will resemble God in some way, according to Adams. This is at the very least a necessary condition and in relevant contexts it will be sufficient as well.

An Alternative Realist Theory of Value

I would like to offer a realist alternative to Adams' view of value that is not divine based like his is. To reiterate, Adams is a realist in the sense that he believes things are good or bad objectively, that is, if an action is good then it is good whether anyone believes it or not. On Adams' view the objectivity of anything having the property of goodness will depend upon whether or not it really does resemble God. At this point I would like to offer a realist alternative to Adams' view which is a non-divine based realism about value. I will also be providing some objections to Adams' view that will illustrate some of the reasons that I find Adams' view unsatisfactory.

In the realm of metaethics, the answer we give to two particular questions will determine where we stand metaethically. The first question is whether or not moral claims are intended to say something factual about right and wrong/good and bad. The second question is whether or not any of these claims are actually true. Some may answer 'no' to the first question, in which case they are suggesting that moral claims don't even aim to describe facts. Those who answer this way are likely to find themselves in the non-cognitivist camp. The moral realist, however, is going to answer affirmatively to

both questions. Moral propositions do aim to report facts and these facts can be true or false.

In congruence with Adams, according to the realist, these facts are true or false whether anyone likes them or not; they are objective facts. In this respect I am in agreement with Adams. Things really are good or bad independently of our attitudes or beliefs towards those things. But where Adams and I will be in disagreement is on the question of what makes those things good or bad.

When we assess what makes something good it is very important to ask why those things are good. If something is good there surely must be a reason for which that thing is good. If I am to ask, 'why it is good to be loving or caring about others?' and I am told that there is no reason for being loving or caring, it is just a basic fact that those are good things to do, I certainly have not come to learn anything. The proper response to such a question is, 'something is good or bad because of x,' x being some kind relevant reason that doesn't just assert that the thing in question is good.

Unlike Adams' view, my reasons for what makes these things good is going to be based upon reasons that do not have everything to do with God. Why a thing is good is not going to appeal to God as a decisive explanation. While I believe that God is the greatest good and that he is infinitely good in his nature, we must not appeal to God as the reason for why something is good. On Adams' view, it is a brute fact that God is good and things are good insofar as they resemble him. Again, I concur that God is good, and infinitely so, but I want to say that he is good and there is a reason/explanation for such a claim.

On my view God is good in virtue of his non-evaluative features. What I mean by a non-evaluative feature is a feature that is not predicated by terms like 'good' or 'bad.' This feature does not presuppose some idea of axiological position. If I say that someone is 'just,' I am attributing an evaluative feature to this person because predicating 'justice' of someone supposes that the features that this person has are 'good.' I think that God is good because his nature is essentially loving, generous, compassionate and so forth. You do not have to hold beliefs about the goodness of love and generosity in order to acknowledge that God has these features because these are non-evaluative features. Furthermore, my particular 'brute fact' in this case will be that these non-evaluative features displayed by God just *are* good and the good supervenes on these non-evaluative reasons. At this point I am issuing a promissory note that I will expand upon this notion later on in the essay.

The idea here is that God is good and he is good because he has features about him that really are good. There are moral facts and what makes it a fact that an action is good is something about that action itself, or that action's consequences, and not about its resemblance to God. In this regard I do not hold a divine-based view about the nature or explanation about value. To illustrate this point I will contrast my view against Adams' by asking what makes charity good? On Adams' view charity is good since it plays a role in resembling the Good, which is God. God is charitable in his ways, he is always willing to help those in need and to lift up those who are suffering. This is a fundamental part of who God is and how he is presented in the Bible.

Since being charitable in these ways resembles God, and things that resemble God are good (or at least *faithfully* resemble God) are good, it follows that charity is good.

This would be Adams' reason for why something like charity is good. My realist account of charity would go something like this: God is good in his being charitable. That is because it is, in general, good to be charitable. Why is it good to be charitable? It seems like helping those in need and lifting up those who are suffering is a good thing to do. Why is that good? Because doing those things makes those particular people better off. Why is it good to make people better off? At this point the explanation would likely stop. It just *is good* to make people better off. It is crucial to understand that in no way do I intend to claim that making people better off is identical with goodness. My example serves as an illustration of how my view differs from Adams'. It might not even be the case that charity is good *because* it makes people better off. Again, this is just a rough example, but it serves to illustrate my point.

To reiterate, my realist account of value is not going to be divine-based. When analyzing evaluative facts, there will not be an appeal to God as an explanation for the reason of value. What I want to claim is that things are good if they have some explanatory, non-evaluative fact about them in virtue of which they are good. This includes, but is not limited to, facts like the following: that something makes people better off, that it gets them in contact with the greatest good (God), that something helps people enjoy God, etc. Whether something has these kinds of facts about them is what will end up making them good. The things that are good will have some kind of foundationally "good-making property," which the goodness of a thing will supervene upon. On my view, this will be the explanation for why that thing is good. Good-making properties are properties of an action or a thing in general that actually make them good. When we say something is good I mean to say that the total of "its good-making features

predominate over its bad-making features."[11] If some act is bad, that particular action will have more bad properties about it than good ones overall and will therefore make the act become a bad one to commit.

This is the view I wish to express about value in this essay. My view about the goodness and badness of things is going to focus very precisely on what it actually is about those *things themselves* which makes them good or bad. Adams wants to focus on how these things resemble God in order to determine their value, but I want to focus more specifically on the actual thing or action in question *itself* and/or on its consequences, in order to discover whether it is good or bad, and I think that finding good- or bad-making properties about things is a helpful way to do this.

The Attractiveness of a View Like Adams'

While I do not think that Adams' theory about the nature of value is correct, I do see why it is attractive and why it compels so many Christian philosophers to adopt it. As we know, Adams' theory is completely divine-based. His explanations for moral goodness are rooted in the divine. This view allows the paradigm of moral goodness to exist transcendentally in God. This is one key aspect of why his view is so attractive. Adams' view provides us with an objective/universal standard that we can all get in touch with and measure our actions by. Adams' says that there is "a metaethical conviction that there must be a standard of all goodness that actually is unsurpassably good."[12] Adams'

[11] Huemer, Michael. *Ethical Intuitionsim*. p. 207.
[12] Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*. p. 44.

theory gives us exactly this sort of thing, a standard of all goodness that is ultimately good. What is difficult in metaethics is arriving at such a clear and unambiguous standard as the one he has proposed. On his view, if we want to know whether some action is morally good or bad, we can look to God's nature to find out whether the particular action in question stands in accord or discord with God's nature.

While I agree that this method is certainly the most reliable one as well as the method that should be primary for theists, especially in difficult circumstances of determining what would be a good or bad thing to do in a given situation, it does not accomplish the task of explaining *why* something is morally good which Adams' believes this theory does do. I think the idea of God representing the ultimate moral standard that could possibly be occupied by any being is a correct one. This theory emphasizes this point by not only stating that God is the ultimate standard available, but that he is also the explanation of why things are morally good.

This is another reason why Adams' value theory is attractive, particularly for the theist. I have read the work of a few Christian philosophers who believe that God would be greater if he were to serve as the actual explanation of moral goodness. The question here is: is it better to be the greatest moral being or to be the greatest moral being *in addition* to being the reason why things are morally good? Some theists[13] are compelled to answer affirmatively to the latter, that God would be greater if he were not only the maximally perfect moral agent we understand him to be but if he were also the being which all good things come to have their property of goodness in virtue of (meaning that they are good insofar as they resemble God). Since God is by definition the greatest being

[13] See William Lane Craig's, *Reasonable Faith*, and his discussion of morality, particularly page 182.

that can possibly be conceived of, the *aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari posit*, it seems that if we could conceive of some feature that would decisively make God greater if he had it than if he did not have it, then we can assume that God would in fact have that feature. So in this particular case it seems like God would have this feature.

An additional reason to hold this view, and one that strikes a more personal tone, is that it feels like it is almost immoral to deny this view as a Christian. There is a peculiar sensation of wrongness initially when denying that God is the explanation of why things are morally good or of why things are morally bad. And when you deny this idea, what you are saying is essentially equivalent to the statement that things are morally good or bad *regardless* of whether God wants them to be that way or not. If God were to command murder, which is not possible, but in the case that he did it would still be a morally bad thing to carry out this action. This is a notion that flies in the face of the ideas of such prominent Christian philosophers such as Søren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard believed that God's commands transcend the ethical; that God could create a situation in which the ethical and moral standard was 'teleologically suspended'[14] for a particular length of time.[15] The example Kierkegaard provides to explain this notion is God's commandment for Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Kierkegaard believed that God could suspend the ethical and command what would otherwise be an unethical or morally bad thing to do had God not commanded it. On this view, duty to God transcends the duty to the ethical. If you are presented with a dilemma that forces you to choose between violating the ethical standard or violating God's command, you should always choose to

[14] The famous 'teleological suspension of the ethical' is the idea that God can momentarily abolish all morality for his purposes, without compromising any of his moral goodness. See Kierkegaard's, *Fear and Trembling* about this topic.

[15] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*.

violate the ethical standard since God's commands go beyond the ethical and your duty belongs solely to God. When I say that things are morally good or bad independently of God, it means that even in the impossible case that God commanded you to do evil, you would still be doing evil by carrying this action out.

For me, as a theist, it feels ingrained into my worldview that there should not be anything which exists independently of God's will. But upon further reflection, especially upon the work of Thomas Aquinas, it becomes clear that there are facts that exist independently of God's will and his will cannot do or change these certain things, for instance logical truths. For example, square circles are not even possible for a being as all powerful as God to create. The conflicting concepts of a square and that of a circle make it impossible to make them one in the same. Another classic example is that of a married bachelor. In using the traditional definition of these two concepts, bachelor and married, it is simply knowable *a priori* that there cannot possibly be such a thing as a married bachelor, even if God wanted to create one. Realizing this puts me more at ease in believing that there exist certain facts which are independent of God's will, and if this is the case maybe things can be morally good or bad independently of God's will.

As a theist I very much like the motivation behind Adams' view and I think that it provides very good food for philosophical thought. Still, I do not think it is correct. However, this value theory does, in my opinion, do a good job of evading and eluding the Euthyphro dilemma. The Euthyphro dilemma asks: is something good because God commands it? Or does God command something because it is good? Adams theory is going to be able to elude both horns of this dilemma by positing the notion that something is good insofar as it resembles God.

What this ends up translating to in a response to Euthyphro is that God commands something because that is the way *he is* as "the Good itself" which Adams identifies as God. This makes God's commands non-arbitrary. These commands are not issued at random without reason for being commanded. Nor does Adams' theory allow for the good to exist independently of God since the good belongs to God's nature. But in spite of the fact that Adams' theory escapes the clutches of the infamous Euthyphro dilemma, there remains one problem in particular that I think causes this theory to be untenable. The problem I find with Adams' view is that it lacks explanatory power of moral value.

Objections to Adams' Theory

What I mean by saying that Adams' view lacks explanatory power of moral value is that Adams' view does not do an adequate job of explaining why some things contain the property of moral goodness or why other things contain the property of moral badness. The good-making properties that Adams wants to assign to things that are good are properties that do not seem to give us an adequate understanding of what fundamentally makes something good or what makes something bad.

His view, again, is that all finite things that are good in virtue of the fact that they resemble the infinite good (God) in such a way as to give God a reason to love them. So why, on Adams' view, would a particular action be a good one to commit? On his view, something like an action is good because it resembles God. Why is God good? Because he is the greatest conceivable being, and since moral goodness is a necessary quality of

something that would qualify as the greatest conceivable being, God must be maximally morally good.

Furthermore, God's nature being good is just going to end up being a brute fact. Since theists like Adams have identified God as the Good itself, to ask why the good itself is good is an incoherent question: the Good itself just is good. Thus God's nature just is the Good in a brutally factual sort of way. So why is it good to be loving? Because it resembles the way God is since he is all loving.

At this point, when I appeal to my intuition about this idea, it becomes increasingly difficult to believe that this is the reason I believe certain things are morally good or bad things to do. For instance, whenever it was in my early years that I came to realize that loving people was a good thing to do, I do not believe that the sense of goodness I drew from loving others was a result of realizing that the reason it is good to love others is that it resembles God's nature. In fact, I might well have understood that love is good before I even could comprehend the idea that such a thing as God exists. I do not imagine that any other Christian, even those raised in a devoutly Christian home, came to believe that 'love' is a moral good on the basis that it resembles God. If I were to convince a young child that the explanation of why loving other people is good is that it resembles God, I do not think that he would have any understanding as to why it is that loving people truly is good unless he was able to comprehend Adams' complex philosophical view. Even in the unlikely event that he could comprehend such concepts as Anselm's ontological argument or the idea of the greatest conceivable being, I still don't think that this young child would have much further understanding as to why it is good to be loving. To be sure, he would certainly have further reason to *be* loving, such

as the prospect of punishment if he does not act in such a manner, but he would likely be unsatisfied as to why it is the case that loving is a good thing to do.

The reason why the child may not be satisfied with the answer so provided, other than the fact that children are seemingly never satisfied with any answer provided them, is that he has not been given a satisfactory explanation as to what makes something like love good. In other words, resembling God's nature in a particular manner cannot serve as the explanation as to why something is good. If we are going to posit that something is good because it belongs to a realm that is maximally great, it does not quite seem as though we have come away with a rich understanding of why it is that that particular thing is good.

A supporter of Adams' theory may bring an objection to this previous thought that I myself am drawn to, but nonetheless reject as an explanation for moral goodness. This person may object that the reason that all sorts of moral truths are so self-evident from such a young age is that God created us in such a manner that we have these moral truths written on our conscience. From the moment that we as humans can begin to rationalize anything, we simultaneously acquire a capacity to make moral judgments because God created us that way with these moral truths ingrained into ourselves. I think that this actually is true. I think that every human being has some kind of God given and innate moral compass. However, we nonetheless have an understanding as to *why* the actual act of something like helping those in need is good. We can clearly perceive why this action has value to it and from my personal experience it has nothing to do with the fact that it resembles God's nature. The moral difference between helping people and hurting people for no reason is strikingly obvious to the intellect. Thus, I do not think that

mentioning the fact that we have God given moral knowledge does anything to defend Adams' view from my previous objection.

I would like to examine another objection. Imagine a scenario where a Muslim and a Christian engage in a debate over which conception of God is better, the Islamic portrait of God or the Christian one. Let's also say that both theists hold Adams' view of value. In Islam it is repeatedly emphasized that God does not love sinners (Qur'an 2:190, 2:276, 3:31-32, 30:43-45). Whereas in Christianity it is stated that God does love all people including sinners (Romans 5:8-10, John 3:16). Naturally, disagreement between these two individuals will arise as to whether it is good to love sinners. The Muslim will say no and the Christian will say yes. What reason would they appeal to on Adams' view? They would have to say that the reason why loving/not loving sinners is good is that that is how God is. So at this point the Muslim may ask, "why should I love sinners?" The Christian will respond, "because God loves sinners. He's all loving." Then the Muslim will respond, "actually, God doesn't love sinners, therefore it's good not to love sinners."

And this will keep going back and forth. Where there is true disagreement here between the Muslim and the Christian at this point is not so much in the question as to whether loving sinners is actually a good thing to do, as it is a question about who has the correct conception of God. This seems to be a flaw that is entailed by Adams' theory. It seems to be intuitively true that when we argue about whether something like loving sinners is a good thing, we argue about the action and the properties of the action itself, namely the act of loving sinners. In an average scenario where two opposing parties engage in debate over whether this particular action is morally good, they may take a

more consequentialist approach and point to the effects that the action would have as a result of performing it and then debate as to whether those effects are desirable. Or they may take the approach of inquiring as to whether this action is something that a virtuous or rational person would commit. These seem to be plausible approaches to explaining why it is the case that loving sinners is a morally good thing. But that is not what these theists would be doing if they adopted Adams' view.

The two theists would be arguing not about whether loving sinners has good effects or whether it is a rational thing to do. They would be arguing about whether or not God loves sinners, which seems to be a matter of irrelevance as far as an explanation for the morality of this action goes. Again, they are not debating about the benefits of the particular act in question, they are debating about whether love for sinners is in God's nature. So the argument is an argument about the nature of God, not about loving sinners. On Adams' view, it seems that whoever wins the debate by showing who has the correct conception of God's nature, will additionally have shown what constitutes the moral goodness of loving sinners, namely that it is or is not in God's nature to do so.

The two theists are seemingly distracted by a point of irrelevance. Even if one of the theists persuaded the other that his conception of God is correct, we still do not have an understanding of why it is good to love sinners. More likely than not, these two theists will never be able to provide a quality explanation for their moral beliefs and thus will senselessly keep arguing about who has the correct conception of God. It seems that this debate will only be settled if they give additional reasons outside of God that explain why it is good to either love or not love sinners and if those reasons are what makes the action of being loving good, then it seems that God is no longer needed for the explanation.

At this point, a proponent of Adams' theory may retort that I am simply begging the question here. He may say that I haven't provided real evidence against the view and that I am simply denying his view. But that doesn't seem to be the case at all. Given what I have said in the previous paragraphs, it seems intuitively strange to abandon the route of explaining the goodness or badness of the action of loving sinners based on its own merit in favor of the approach that attempts to show the moral status of loving sinners by appealing to God's nature. This does not seem to be a real world approach that anyone would use or a method that anyone would find compelling in order to discourse about moral value.

Another objection that I could see a proponent of Adams' theory conjecturing is that if God, in reality, is all and only good then it seems to be the case that if some moral feature or property turns out to be truly good, then it follows that God will have that moral feature and not lack it. Therefore if something is good, that entails that it will be part of God's nature. Thus, if something truly is good it must be a part of God's nature. This seems to give us Adams' view; it is a necessary condition for good things to resemble God. I think it is quite right that if something is morally good then it will be a feature of God's nature. God lacks no amount of moral goodness and if he did he would not be morally perfect and complete. This much is true. However, something's being a part of God's nature is not what makes it good. The morally good feature in question is good, but not because it is part of God's nature. This feature makes God good in virtue of him having it. God's having this moral feature does not make the moral feature good. If this is the case then it seems that something's good-making properties lie outside of its relation to God, which is an idea that stands in contrast with Adams' theory.

An additional way to put the previous objection is that Adams' view is only supposed to state the necessary condition of what makes something good. If something is good it will resemble God in some fashion. Adams' God-likeness thesis is simply supposed to tell us what is *common* among all things that are good, that they will resemble God. Here is my response to this objection: great, I believe this too. In fact, I think everyone who believes in God believes this. Furthermore, I think that everyone who understands theism would agree that this would be the case if God did exist. This statement is so trivial it hardly seems worth saying. God is by definition all good; he lacks not a single good property. Therefore, if some finite thing has a property that truly is good, that entails that God will also have that good property since he has every good property to be had. If this is the case, then clearly if something has a good property it will resemble God in that manner since it shares that good property with God. I hardly imagine that this is *all* that Adams' wanted to get across in his value theory.

Adams wants to suggest that a things' resemblance to God is part of the explanation for *why* it is good, that things are good *because* they resemble God. David Decosimo, in response to Adams' theory, recognizes that Adams is not merely making the claim that good things resemble God when he puts it this way:

> If you believe in God, the idea that some things are excellent because they resemble God is not implausible… Quite different is the notion that goodness or excellence as such is *constituted* by resemblance to God.[16]

[16] Decosimo, D. *Intrinsic Goodness and Contingency, Resemblance and Particularity: Two Criticisms of Robert Adams's Finitie and Infinite Goods.* pp.418-419.

Adams is not merely suggesting the idea that God-likeness will be common among all things that are good. He is saying that what makes a thing good is its resemblance to God. Here is the passage from Adams' book which demonstrates the point:

> Being excellent in the way that a finite thing can be consists in resembling God in a way that could serve God as a reason for loving the thing.[17]

This passage should be enough to allow us to discard the previous objection as it would simply be a misreading of Adams' work. Like I have been saying this thesis does not provide the kind of explanatory account of moral value we should hope for.

Recall what I said earlier about how some theists believe that God would be greater if he served as an explanation for moral goodness. While I think this is interesting to suggest such a notion I do not think it is possible. In light of the previous objections raised I do not think God could actually serve as the explanation for a thing's goodness. This is not to reduce God in any sense. This is not to say that there is a conceivable being out there which could possibly serve as the explanation for moral value and God falls short. What I mean to say is that it is impossible for any kind of agent, God or otherwise, to stand as a sufficient explanation of moral value. And if this is true, then a thing's relevant resemblance to God does not explain its moral value either. Furthermore, if a thing's resemblance to God, in the important relevant sense, does not explain its value, I think Adams' value theory fails.

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[17] Adams, R. *Finite and Infinite Goods.* p. 36.

Objections Raised by other Philosophers Against Adams' View

I want to introduce some additional and fascinating objections provided by some prominent philosophers of religion. While their objections do not have to do with problems of explanatoriness like mine do, I think that their objections are worth noting. One interesting, and quite hilarious objection, that I have come across is one presented by Mark Murphy in his paper, "From Adamsian Axiology to Theistic Natural Law Theory." His objection is that "Adams' axiology…is too permissive in calling things good in virtue of their bearing a likeness to the divine."[18]

The way that this is illustrated in his essay is through an objection that discusses a situation in which he comes down with an illness where his skin and muscles begin to take on the exact texture and taste of a delicious chicken fried steak. We can reasonably call a chicken fried steak 'good' if it truly tastes delicious and has some aesthetic appeal. The latter feature of this chicken fried steak is a way in which the steak resembles God (its aesthetic appeal). So by saying that a chicken fried steak is good because it resembles God in a way is not a problem for Adams theory.

The problem is this: Murphy goes on to say that this condition of tasting like a chicken fried steak makes him taste good. He bears the features that make any particular chicken fried steak good. But having the condition certainly does not make Murphy good. God is certainly not going to think that Murphy has more goodness since he has all the aesthetical appeal of a chicken fried steak. Recall how Adams qualified his view by

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[18] Murphy, M. *From Adamsian Axiology to Theistic Natural Law Theory*. pp. 5-7

saying that the goodness of a thing lies in its resembling God in such a manner as to give God a reason for loving that thing. According to this objection, God would find goodness in the chicken fried steak since it resembles God's aesthetic goodness. Murphy has those same aesthetic features of the steak, yet God does not find those features in Murphy to be good.

This is a problem with Adams' view since it does not qualify itself against an objection of this sort. Murphy goes on to say that Adams should go for a more Aristotelian axiology over the Platonic one proposed in Adams' book. Murphy suggests this approach which says that a thing's goodness may be determined by:

> …perhaps being like God in ways that belong to the kind to be like God. It is the kind that fixes the context for determining what counts as a relevant resemblance, or failure to resemble, God. Every good, then, is a divine likeness, but those that make a thing good are those divine likenesses such that members of the kind ought to exhibit them.[19]

Although, this would make Adams' view less "permissive" in allowing things to become good in their resemblance to God, I do not think that it would make the view any more explanatory than it already is. Why should we think that this view gives us any more explanation as to what it means for a thing to be good? If I return to the same confused child as before and tell him that a thing's goodness consists in it's belonging to a certain kind of things that resemble God, I believe that he will still be in ignorance as to what makes things good. It seems that this entire 'God resemblance' thesis is unable to give us a satisfactory explanation of moral value. Conjecturing 'kinds' does not make this

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[19] Murphy, M. *ibid.* pp. 10.

kind of value theory any more explanatory than it previously was on Adams' view. Thus, it is still subject to the 'little child' objection as well as my 'disagreement' objection.

A different problem that seems to arise for Adams' theory is how to determine intrinsic value. This is a problem brought up in David Decosimo in his critique of Adams entitled, "Intrinsic Goodness and Contingency, Resemblance and Particularity: Two Criticisms of Robert Adams's Finite and Infinite Goods." In this article, Decosimo goes after Adams' conception of excellence as illustrated in "Finite and Infinite Goods." Excellence, for Adams, is a kind of goodness which is "worthy of love or admiration for its own sake."[20] If something is excellent, then it is intrinsically valuable on Adams' view and it is intrinsically valuable independent of our attitudes or beliefs about that thing. Excellence is an objective feature things have. Decosimo enunciates the key component of Adams' theory for the purposes of his objection. The key component is Adams' idea that in order for a finite thing to be excellent it must be intrinsically valuable. Additionally, its value must not be relative to or dependent on human activity since this thing's excellence would hold even if humans didn't exist.[21] But what seems to be the case is that whenever we find something intrinsically valuable, the way in which we find it to be intrinsically valuable is context dependent. This is the example provided by Decosimo:

> An excellent strawberry is plump, juicy, sweet, unblemished, bright red, and neither too soft nor too firm… Yet, if I found a stockpile of strawberries in the midst of a food fight, my criteria for what would count as an excellent strawberry would dramatically shift. What had in a different context made a strawberry count

[20] Adams, R. *Finite and Infinite Goods.* pp . 13-14.
[21] Adams, R. *Finite and Infinite Goods.* pp. 18-23.

> as excellent would in this one make it shoddy. Handing my friend a moldy, mushy strawberry I would say and truly mean, 'This one is excellent!' and then watch gleefully as he took aim.[22]

It seems like in both cases that Decosimo discusses, our 'intrinsic' value that we assign to things completely depends upon the context. What makes the strawberry excellent in one circumstance turns out to be a horrible feature in the opposing circumstance. This is problematic in the eyes of Decosimo since, as he says:

> if we can hardly make sense of intrinsically *valuing* a strawberry in Adams' sense, it is even more difficult to make sense of what it concretely means for a strawberry to *have* intrinsic value in Adams' sense.[23]

It seems that, given Adams' view, we have no way to make sense of what it is for a thing to have intrinsic value, or excellence. How are supposed to value this strawberry? Is there a particular manner in which this strawberry is meant to be valued? If we cannot answer this question, then we are in no position to discover what kind of intrinsic value this strawberry has. As Decosimo puts it: "on Adams' grounds, we do not and cannot know what we should be looking for."[24]

Supervenience and Moral Value

Earlier on in the essay I issued a promissory note that I would discuss what I meant by saying moral properties supervene upon non-moral facts. I will now be

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[22] Decosimo, D. *Intrinsic Goodness and Contingency, Resemblance and Particularity.* pp.425-426.
[23] Decosimo, D. *ibid.* p. 427.
[24] Decosimo, D. *ibid*. p. 428.

following through on that promise. As I discussed earlier in the essay, it is crucial that moral facts are explained by non-evaluative facts. If someone asks me why they should be charitable and I provide the response, "because it is good," this person has not learned anything. Or if I say that charity is good because it is a loving thing to do, this person is still going to want to know what it is about charity itself that actually makes it loving. Thus we need non-evaluative facts to present to this person in order to provide an explanation as to why it is good to be charitable. This is exactly what moral supervenience aims to do. Michael Huemer gives a good illustration to accompany his definition of moral supervenience:

> …if Pol Pot is evil, there must be something else about him that makes him evil-say, his disregard for human life, his tyrannical personality, and so on. And whatever this property or collection of properties is, any other person who had it would also thereby be evil. We express this idea by saying that moral properties 'supervene on' non-moral properties.[25]

What this goes to show is that the moral properties of a thing are built upon the thing's non-moral properties. The presence of these non-moral properties give rise to and explain the presence of the moral property. This ties back to the idea that if some action or even some person is good, that action or that person will have non-evaluative properties about them which are 'good-making' in nature. To give an example analogous to Huemer's, imagine someone commonly deemed good by most societies, Mahatma Gandhi. What makes Gandhi a morally good person is that he was a loving person. He

[25] Huemer, Michael. Ethical Intuitionism. p. 202.

was generous, conscientious, patient, kind. He cared for the poor. He cared for his enemies, etc. What makes these various features good is that they contain non-moral properties within them that are good-making overall. Love, for example, may contain such good-making features as generating happiness between individuals, it may provide momentary enjoyment for these individuals or it may help these people sustain a more enjoyable life in general. These are non-moral features that are good-making in nature as outcomes of love. The moral goodness of love supervenes upon these non-moral properties of love.

What I have briefly provided with the notion of moral supervenience and good-making properties is meant to serve as an explanation of moral value. Metaethically speaking, the value theory that I have provided is a realist position. Meaning that things are good or bad independently of people's attitudes or beliefs towards them. Furthermore what I have provided so far is meant to provide both necessary and sufficient conditions for some thing's being good. In terms of these necessary and sufficient conditions, something is morally good if and only if it's good making properties are more numerable or abundant than the bad making properties of that thing.

I believe that the previous axiology proposed is superior to that of Adams' divine-based axiology because it avoids the major pitfall of Adams' theory, which is its inability to provide an adequate explanation of moral value. The value theory just provided seems to give a very satisfactory explanation of moral value, showing that moral properties must supervene upon non-evaluative properties that are good making in nature and those non-evaluative properties are the explanation of something's moral goodness. Going back to

the example about the theists in disagreement, if they were to take up this value theory they could engage in a more reasonable dialogue about whether it is good to love sinners.

Better yet, they could provide quite insightful reasons for their position that could potentially sway the opinion of the other. Additionally, if a little child wants to know why it is bad to steal, we could provide him with the non-moral reason that stealing causes its victims harm (causing these victims harm being a non-evaluative fact) and it is bad to purposely cause people harm in that sense. This is exactly the kind of reason I imagine mothers providing their children with and even these little children seem to recognize from such a young age that causing other people unwarranted harm is no-good. The children are far more likely to recognize and digest this reason for not stealing than the reason that says stealing is bad because it is against the Good itself.

Part II: Divine Commands and Moral Duty

At this point of the essay I want to discuss some reasons why a divine command theory of obligation is very plausible and, if moral duties exist, likely true. I will be providing an argument that aims to show that if God does not exist then moral duties do not exist either. I want to argue that it is absolutely necessary that God exists in order for any kind of objective moral obligation or universal duty to exist. In regards to objective moral duties I simply mean 'independent of human opinion.' With regards to universal duty I mean a duty that does not depend on your geographic location, economic status or anything of that sort. This duty also does not depend on human opinion. If there is a universal duty then everyone in the world is obligated to uphold that duty. Without God there are no universal moral duties or objective obligations. This notion is what I want to argue in favor of.

To be clear, this will be a defense of DCT that is solely meant to explain the nature of moral obligation and duty, that is, what we 'ought' to do. It is not meant to explain moral value. The previous half of this essay was devoted to critiquing a view that does attempt to explain moral value in reference to God. I do not believe that it is plausible to hold a divine-based view of goodness or badness. That is, I do not think that you can explain *why* something like a particular action *is* good or bad with reference to God. Trying to explain moral value in such a manner is exactly what Robert Adams sought to demonstrate in his book, "Finite and Infinite Goods." I personally reject Adamsian axiology and any other divine-based theory of value.

Although I believe that there are good reasons to believe that divine command theory (DCT) fully explains our moral duties and obligations, there are also features of DCT that make DCT attractive. By attractive I mean that there are non-epistemic reasons to be fond of DCT. These reasons will not serve the function as a kind of justification for the truth of the view but they will serve to combat the prevelance of uneasiness that people have with regards to DCT possibly being true. From my experience as an undergraduate philosophy student I have come to recognize that many of my peers that study philosophy do not reject God solely for epistemic reasons but also emotional ones. This same attitude parallels many people's feelings towards DCT. Many people feel as though DCT is something to fear. That God's commands are scary or even repulsive. I would like to counteract this notion to the best of my ability by citing some attractive features of DCT that would provide us motivation to follow them, motivation that other theories will not be able to offer.

In this essay I will start with a discussion of the non-epistemically attractive features of DCT that I previously mentioned. Following that discussion I will provide an argument in favor of DCT and why it serves as the best explanation of our moral duties. After that section I will then move on to discuss some important objections to DCT including the famous Euthyphro Dilemma developed by Plato in his dialogues. I will explain how the Euthyphro Dilemma has been traditionally used against DCT and how this dilemma relates to my formulation of DCT in particular. I will then proceed to wrap up my essay with a discussion about the implications of my view and how my formulation of the view commits me to a kind of consequentialism.

Before I present an argument in favor of DCT I think it is very important to distinguish the important (and not always recognized) difference between moral value and moral duty. The former notion pertains to the moral realm of goodness and badness while the latter refers to moral rightness and moral wrongness (obligation). Most people, especially those that are not familiar with moral philosophy make the all too common error of thinking that in terms of talk about goodness/badness, that right/wrong are synonymous terms for good/bad. 'Good' and 'right' or 'bad' and 'wrong' are used interchangeably to refer to the moral status of things like a particular action. To use the terms in this sense however, is to make a mistake. There is a very important distinction to be make between moral value (good/bad) and moral duty (right/wrong). Let me illustrate the distinction with a couple examples.

I currently have a sister who is a college student in another state. At the moment she is a freshman and incidentally suffering from a bit of homesickness every now and then. What would certainly alleviate some of her unhappiness would be for me to book a flight half way across the country in order to visit her. My visiting her would certainly increase her happiness and cause her to be less homesick. Thus my visiting her in order to make her less homesick would be a good thing to do. In fact, I think that it would be a morally good thing to do. However, it would be very strange for someone to say that it is the morally *right* thing to do, which is to say the morally *required* thing to do. Saying that it is morally right for me to go completely out of my way to visit my sister in order to alleviate her homesickness implies that I have some kind of obligation to do such a thing and that failing to do so would mark a moral shortcoming on my part.

To really drive home the difference I will give another example. Say that I make a decent income, not a lot of money and more than a small amount. Would giving all of my money to charity be a morally good thing to do? Absolutely. Would it be the morally right or required thing to do? I don't think so. Although giving all my money to charity is a very praise worthy action, it is in no sense a moral duty that I have as a person who makes a pretty average income. People might want to say that those who make an astronomically high income (Bill Gates, Warren Buffet) have a moral duty to give away a significant amount of money. Whether these critics are correct or not is a separate issue. Nonetheless it is certainly not the case that I (person with the average income) have a duty to give a significant portion of my income to charity, although it would be a morally good thing to do.

The question at this point is: why does it seem so intuitive that something like visiting my sister is a morally good action, but saying that it is a morally right action sound so incorrect? Or that giving all my money away to charity is a morally good action, but not a morally right action. The reason is that there is a difference between good/bad and right/wrong. They are not the same thing and they cannot be used interchangeably like so many people do. What grants things with the status of moral value results from the answers to a range of questions such as what things make people better off, or what increases well-being and so forth. Answers to questions like these give us an idea of what is morally good. Moral duty however is related to what we have a duty to do.

In regards to moral duty, there are, for example, certain ways of living or certain actions that we as humans are obligated to undertake or fulfill and failure to do so is potentially reprehensible. Some philosophers (Ross) want to say that some moral duties

are prior to moral value.[26] These are interesting views. However, in this essay, in the previous half, I have argued for a realism about moral value that says that certain actions are good or bad independently of God's willing them to be so. I believe that our moral duties are based upon these moral values and, therefore, that moral values precede moral duties.

In this essay it will be important for the reader to keep in mind the distinction I have just made in order to avoid confusion or misinterpreting the view that I am going to articulate. As far as this essay is concerned, good/bad and right/wrong do not mean the same thing.

What does it mean to say that there are universal moral duties, or objective moral duties? When philosophers refer to objective moral duties they mean to say that these duties are not a matter of personal opinion or thought. What objective moral duties are is a set of moral requirements that are independent of human opinion. Human emotion and opinion play absolutely no role in the fruition of objective moral duties. A classic example, that I personally like to illustrate this point is one coined by William Lane Craig. He says that:

> To say that there are objective moral [duties] is to say that something is right or wrong independently of whether anybody believes it to be so. It is to say, for example, that Nazi anti-Semitism was morally wrong, even though the Nazis who carried out the Holocaust thought that it was good; and it would still be wrong even if the Nazis had won World War II and succeeded in exterminating or brainwashing everybody who disagreed with them.[27]

The opposite of the word "objective" is, of course, subjective. If our moral duties were subjective, that means that they would depend on at least some kind of human belief

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[26] Ross, W.D. *The Right and The Good.*
[27] Craig, William Lane, *Can We Be Good Without God?* (brackets added).

or collection of human beliefs about what is morally right. An example of subjective moral duties would be ones that a particular culture creates and asserts. For example, if, say, whatever is morally right comes down to whatever the United States government decides, then the moral duties that the United States government asserts will be subjective.

For the purposes of this essay I am going to assume that there are such things as moral duties and that these are a real feature of the world we find ourselves in. I do not have the space to argue for the existence of objective moral duties but thankfully there is no shortage of literature in which my assumption here is supported.

The question that I seek to answer in this section is: what is the explanation of the existence of these moral duties? What exactly constitutes the existence of these obligations that we have? Let me start with this. It seems like there are a number of moral duties that exist. For instance, I sense that I have a duty not to murder innocent people. I have a duty to refrain from killing innocents. I also have a duty to save a person's life when I am capable of doing so and the rescue would cause no harm to myself and or anyone else. I have a duty to keep promises that I have made if I have a reasonable capability of doing so. There are a plurality of moral duties that we could identify that I am sure many people around the world would agree on.

Now, I am sure that we could lump these duties together with every other duty that is required of human beings into a kind of set. This set would be completely comprehensive of every duty that we are obligated to fulfill and everything that we are obligated to refrain from doing. Thus this set would serve as the ultimate set of moral duties. If we were to somehow write down on a physical list every moral duty that is

contained in this ultimate set, I imagine it would look very much like a piece of legislation. That is, this list would look like a set of laws, a set of moral laws to be exact.

I imagine that many people would agree to some of the most basic duties that would be the content of this moral law. These duties would include, but by no means are limited to, demands like: Do not murder, do not steal, do not commit adultery, do not harm people for no reason, do not break promises if keeping them does you, or anyone else, no harm. These serve as examples of the kind of duties that we would imagine existing within the moral law if an actual moral law exists. I would venture to say that most people on this planet would agree that the examples I just mentioned are things that one should do. I could be mistaken about that claim but I would be very surprised if it were not the case that most people on this planet think that we ought not to keep promises.

Describing the set of moral duties that I just asked you to imagine as a moral law will likely make some people uneasy. The terminology may sound spooky and mysterious. However, it does not seem that the term "law" is out of place here or that it is a misrepresentation of the set of moral duties. The word "law" seems to be the best name for the ultimate set of moral duties. Therefore, for the remainder of this section I will continue to use the words "moral law" to refer to the complete set of moral duties that we have. I hope that the term "law" does not repel any readers nor serve as any kind of stumbling block; it seems like a very fair and appropriate name.

As I said previously, I am going to assume that our moral duties are objective and independent of human belief. Thus the moral law that I previously described is also going to go beyond human belief since it is nothing more than the compilation of moral

obligations that we human beings have. If we believe in objective moral obligations and a thus a moral law, we have to confront this question: from where did the law originate? There are a few possible accounts that we could provide for the existence of a moral law. These accounts are three in number and are as follows. 1. These moral duties were issued 2. These moral duties have always existed (or that they exist necessarily). 3. These moral duties have no explanation for their existence.

I would like to look into each of these accounts and try to determine their worth as explanations of the moral law. Lets start with number 3: These moral duties have no explanation of their existence. I think it is important to state that I don't believe in the principle of sufficient reason, which states that everything that exists has an explanation for its existence and also that every positive fact has an explanation.[28] I think that there are certain brute facts in existence such as the fact that making people better off is a good thing to do. Because I believe in brute facts I cannot therefore believe in the principle of sufficient reason. However, I do think that most things have an explanation for their existence and that most positive facts have an explanation for their truth.

One positive fact that I believe calls for an explanation is the fact that there is a moral law. The existence of a moral law does not seem to be brutally factual in the same way that the goodness of increasing people's well being is brutally factual. The moral law's existence intuitively calls for an explanation and to simply assert that our moral duties have absolutely no explanation for their existence seems very strange.

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[28] Rowe, William. *Introduction to Philosophy of Religion*. p. 23.

Thus, I believe that the only serious options we have to choose between for an explanation of the moral law are whether these duties were issued or whether they have been around forever.

Could these moral laws have existed forever? From eternity's past? I want to provide a thought experiment to shed light onto why I do not think this is plausible. Human beings are contingent creatures, that is, they could have possibly not existed. In some possible world scenario human beings could have never come into existence in the first place. In a possible world scenario, the evolutionary process could have never even gotten off the ground and thus, life on earth would never have come about.

Here's the next piece to this thought. The moral law pertains exclusively to human beings. The moral law does not have any bearing on the behavior, actions or lifestyle of animals or plants or any other living thing. Lions and zebras are not subject to the moral law; only human beings are and it is intended solely for their purposes. I don't know anyone who would want to throw a lion in prison for eating its young or even claim that the lion has done something morally wrong. Lions are not moral agents. As far as I know, lions (or any other animal for that matter) do not have moral sense. However, if a human being ate his young, then we would certainly throw this man in prison, maybe give him the death penalty, and certainly chastise him for his action. The reason for the discrimination is that the only living creatures in our universe who are subject to the moral law are human beings.

Now back to the question about whether the moral law is eternal. If the moral law is eternal then that means it has always existed and will continue to exist eternally into the future. What this entails is that the moral law, which only human beings are subject

to, would exist *even if* human beings didn't exist. Even if there were no human beings around to be subject to the law, the law would still exist. Again, human beings could have possibly never existed. But this is not the case for the moral law on the hypothesis that we are considering. The moral law must exist on this view even if human beings do not exist since it is eternal. Thus, we would have a moral law intended for creatures that do not exist. The question now is this: why would a moral law exist that absolutely nobody is subject to? Why would this useless moral law exist eternally?

Let's think about it. If the moral law exists, then it is likely the case that duties such as 'don't break promises' and 'do not commit adultery' have always been around. These laws, however, are specifically designated for human creatures, or at least beings that very much resemble human creatures. Again, any one of these creatures could have possibly not existed. This means that even if no rational creatures that are capable of things like committing adultery ever existed, we would still have the moral law that says: do not commit adultery, which is specifically directed towards these creatures. Why think that there exists a necessary moral law that corresponds to something that doesn't exist? I think an alternative approach is more plausible. According to this approach, the moral law was issued.

This is meant to be another argument from strangeness and I hope that the weirdness of a pointless eternal moral law has been sufficiently exposed here. The fact that it is so strange to conceive of an eternal moral law without any subject to adhere to it seems to reveal its implausibility and, furthermore, ought to provide us with good reason to reject the possibility of such a law existing.

An objection that I would like to anticipate at this point is that if God exists, then doesn't God have some kind of duty to keep promises that he makes to humanity? If he does then it seems like even God has duties. And if God has duties then there always have been moral duties and thus, a moral law. I want to refrain from replying to this objection at the moment but I will be sure to provide a reason for why this objection misses the intended target and does not apply to my moral theory. I will address this point after the next section.

Up to this point we have determined we have considered whether the moral law has absolutely no explanation for its existence, or whether the explanation for its existence is that the moral law has always existed, eternally. If we consider both of these options to be implausible, as I think we should, then we still have one option left to possibly consider. That is, whether the moral law was issued.

What does it mean to say that the moral law was issued? In my mind it seems to mean that some *thing* brought, either by the will or some other faculty, this law into existence. If no 'thing' brought this moral law into existence then this is equivalent to saying that the moral law appeared, out of thin air, uncaused. But I do not think it is reasonable to claim that anything came into existence without some cause. I think most people will agree with me on this issue. In this case the law has not been around forever and therefore, avoids the problem we encountered with the 'eternal moral law' thesis. But what could this 'thing' be? At this point I am going to conjecture some possibilities and then commence another process of elimination in order to find the correct answer.

In this case there seems to be fewer options than before. In this case I can only conceive of two possible 'things' that could have brought about the existence of the

moral law. The first is that natural processes brought this law into existence. The second option is that an agent brought this law into existence (i.e. a moral law giver).

Let's suppose that the moral law was generated by natural processes. Perhaps it was brought about over the course of human evolution, perhaps by a different mechanism. In this case, nature had an absolute hand in determining what the moral law would come out to be. Nature would have determined the exact content of this law. It would have determined every duty that is a member of this law. When we consider this being the actual case, and I ponder over it, I quickly see a multitude of problems with this thesis.

The first problem I see with this view is explaining how this law could have actually come into existence. Remember, the moral law is not subject to people's opinions. The moral law is objective (independent of beliefs about them) and universal (it applies to all people, everywhere). This entails that the moral law *transcends*[29] the minds of the creatures within the natural world. What this means is that if the moral law was actually produced by natural processes/the natural world, then the natural world created an intangible, transcendent, objective standard of moral duties specifically for human beings.

Although I am not a scientist, I cannot imagine any way in which scientists, or anyone else for that matter, could explain how natural processes created an intangible moral law. I think that this problem alone is enough to take 'the natural moral law' thesis off the table of options. But even if we could conceive of some way in which the natural world could produce a moral law, there are still additional problems with the theory.

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[29] Be or go beyond the range or limits of (a field of activity or conceptual sphere). *Oxford English Dictionary.*

The second problem I have with 'the natural moral law' thesis is this: why should we think that nature has a good sense of moral right and wrong? Why should I think that nature brought about the best set of moral duties possible and that these duties are not completely random. Why should I think that the purposes of these moral laws are worthy purposes? I can actually conceive of a situation where nature would bring about moral duties that are intuitively wrong to uphold. For example, if nature functions on the premises of natural selection, choosing the fittest creatures for survival and weeding out and disposal of the weak, we would see a moral law that probably demanded of human beings something like, 'kill the weak.' If the purpose of nature is to select those fit for survival, then the moral law it produces probably is geared toward the actualization of that purpose as well. Thus, nature's moral law would probably demand us to 'kill the weak.' But the fact that 'killing the weak' is wrong is so obvious that it is almost not worth stating.

A proposition worth mentioning that supports something like a natural moral law is W.D. Ross' *prima facie* duties. Here is a quote from his book entitled, *The Right and The Good*. Ross claims that the fact that things like certain acts

> are *prima facie* right, is self evident; not in the sense that it is evident from the beginning of our lives…. But in the sense that when we have reached sufficient mental maturity and have given sufficient attention to the proposition it is evident without any need of proof, or of evidence beyond itself. It is self-evident just as a mathematical axiom, or the validity of a form of inference, is evident. The moral order expressed in these propositions is just as much part of the fundamental nature of the universe as is the spatial or numerical structure expressed in the axioms of geometry or arithmetic. In our confidence that these propositions are true there is involved the same trust in our reason that is involved in our confidence in mathematics; and we should have no justification for trusting in the latter sphere and distrusting it in the former. In both cases we are dealing with propositions that cannot be proved, but that just as certainly need no proof.[30]

[30] Ross, W.D. *The Right and The Good*. pp. 29-30.

What Ross is claiming here is that our duties are not just self-evident, but just as self-evident and clearly recognizable as mathematical axioms. Lets consider the following algebraic axiom called the transitive axiom: if $a = b$ and $b = c$, then $a = c$. This is an extremely self-evident axiom. If *a* is numerically equivalent to b and b is numerically equivalent to *c*, then a is numerically equivalent to *c*. There is no room for disagreement here and anyone who is in a position to understand what the transitive axiom is claiming is in a position to know that what the transitive axiom claims is true. The truth of this axiom is so obvious that it is difficult to believe that anyone who understands what is being claimed by it would disagree with its truth.

Ross wants to say that moral duties are just as *prima facie* self evident as a mathematical axiom like the one previously provided. I would actually agree that the duties he lists as *prima facie* duties are in fact self-evident. However, my agreement with Ross that things like keeping promises are self-evident duties does not commit me to the view that these duties are eternal. Nor does it commit me to the view that these duties arose in conjunction with rational beings coming into existence, as Ross believes. Ross says, about the metaphysical status of these duties, that

> the moral order expressed in these propositions is just as much part of the fundamental nature of the universe (and, we may add, of any possible universe in which there were moral agents at all) as is the spatial or numerical structure expressed in the axioms of geometry or arithmetic.[31]

Notice the claim that these duties are a part "of any possible universe in which there were moral agents at all." But what about a possible universe in which there are no moral agents at all. The fact that he even made mention of possible universes where

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[31] Ross, W.D. *The Right and The Good.* pp. 29-30.

moral agents exist seems to suggest that his moral law (which, in Ross's case, consists of his list of *prima facie* duties) would not exist in a universe in which there were no moral agents whatsoever. As we already discussed, there is a possibility that human beings (or any moral agents for that matter) may have never existed at all. So it seems that on Ross' view, these *prima facie* duties could have never failed to exist at all.

But on Ross' view, the fact that moral agents do exist entails that moral duties also exist. Thus, this Rossian moral law exists in conjunction with rational agents. If rational agents do not exist, then Ross' duties do not exist. If rational agents do exist, then Ross' duties also exist. Therefore, the moment moral agents come into existence the moral duties for these agents (presumably) would also pop into existence simultaneously with these agents.

One issue that this seems to raise is how this set of objective moral duties came into existence. What exactly brought into existence this set of duties that exist independently of the minds of the human agents it stands for? They surely were not uncaused. So what could that cause be? Not human beings because, again, human beings do not have the causal capacity (or the moral reliability) to create their own objective moral law. Furthermore, I find it unintelligible to suggest that a *real* moral law is somehow necessarily linked to the existence of moral agents as if it were are part of their essence.

I could understand what someone would mean if they said that for any potential group of moral agents there are actions that these agents could do to one another that would either increase or decrease their well being. This much seems true. But Ross would

not identify our moral duties with what some kind of utilitarian/consequentialist calculus would suggest our duties are; Ross is a deontologist.

Ross seems to want to say that it is not possible for there to be a world in which rational/moral agents did not have moral duties. Thus, for every possible world in which beings like humans exist, they have a moral law. But this is also strange. If the moral law exists if and only if a rational species like humans exist and if this moral law exists alongside humans in every possible world in which their species exists, then it seems like the moral law is something like an essential property of the human species. As Alvin Plantinga puts it: "An object x has property P essentially, then, if and only if x has P in every world in which x exists."[32] But how could a moral law be an essential property of the human species? I do not see any reason to think that the moral law is an essence of the human species.

I think that I will conclude that Ross' view on the metaphysical status of his moral law is rather implausible as it seems to suggest that a moral law will just pop in and out of existence as long as rational agents are coming into and going out of existence. It is also a complete mystery as to why this moral law is a necessary feature of human existence.

Overall I find 'the natural moral law' thesis is highly implausible and not worth considering much further. I find it entirely implausible that a transcendent moral law could have originated through natural processes. If this thesis, and the rest of the theses thus far proposed are false, we still have one option remaining. I think that this last option is in fact the correct one.

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[32] Plantinga, Alvin. *The Nature of Necessity.* p. 60.

If we are to say that the moral law was issued and that it is not a product of nature, we seem to have one option left: the moral law was issued by some kind of mind/agent. Now this agent could not have been any human being because this law is independent of any human ideas and human beings do not even have the capacity to create an actual, transcendent moral law. The being that did issue the moral law would have to be one that is capable of creating an intangible set of moral duties and, additionally, capable of finding a way to communicate these duties to the human subjects. I arrive at this latter notion since it does not seem like people can know what duties they are subject to unless they are informed, in some way, about them. If this notion is correct, it seems to suggest that this being is personal. In addition to being personal, this being would have to be powerful enough to cause a real yet intangible moral law to come into existence. This would not just be any kind of power. This power would have to be something supernatural since, as we just discovered, no natural process can account for the existence of a transcendent moral law.

Therefore, our being, our 'lawgiver,' that created the moral law is a personal agent with supernatural powers. This lawgiver bears a striking resemblance to God. In fact, I cannot imagine this moral lawgiver being anyone other than God. Who else could possibly be the agent who has the supernatural power to bring into existence a moral law designated for a specific set of beings and, furthermore, inform these beings as to what their moral duties actually are? I have not the slightest inkling as to what a plausible alternative identity for this moral lawgiver would be. If there are plausible alternatives, I would be delighted to hear them.

This seems like an appropriate place to address the objection that was raised earlier on. The objection was (put formally):

1. God has moral duties.
2. If God has moral duties then he has always had moral duties.
3. If God has always had moral duties then, since God exists eternally, the moral law has existed eternally.
4. Therefore, the moral law has existed eternally.

I do not think that this objection proves that our moral law exists eternally. First, while there may have always been a moral law for God, it does not follow that there has always been a moral law for humans, which is the kind of law we are concerned with. I think that there are laws that apply to human beings which are a part of their moral duties that are in no sense a part of God's duties. For instance, while God and humans may share the duty to keep promises that they make, it is not the case that God has the duty to not commit suicide. I do believe it is plausible, however, to say that human beings have a duty not to commit suicide. I believe that it is wrong for human beings to take their own life (in most cases).

Regardless of what you believe about suicide, this is certainly a possible element of the moral law for human beings. But it is ridiculous to suggest that God could have the duty to refrain from committing suicide since God cannot commit suicide in the first place. Necessary existence is a feature of God's nature. He cannot die. Human beings, on the other hand, can die.

To further explicate the distinction between our duties and God's, it seems like we, as human beings, ought to submit to God's will. Can God submit to his own will? I do not

think this question is meaningful. I do not know what it would mean for God to submit to his own will. Therefore, God likely does not have the duty of submitting to his will or anyone else's will. Additionally, it seems like people have a duty to respect their parents. Does God have parents? No. Therefore, God does not have the duty to respect his parents.

The difference is a result of the distinction between the nature of finite human beings and the nature of God. The difference between the natures of human beings and God entails that they will subject to a certain set of moral duties that differ from one another. Human beings would be subject to one specific set of duties and God will be subject to another. Thus, our moral duties as human beings are different from God's and we have different moral laws. Therefore, with regards to the argument previously provided, I would accept this argument as sound if the term "moral law" refers to God's moral law alone. However, if we are supposed to interpret this "moral law" as being the moral law that applies to both human beings as well as God, then I reject premise 3 on the basis of the grounds just provided.

Another objection that may be raised at this point is this: You (Elliot) have claimed, in the previous half of your essay, to be a realist about moral value in a sense that is non-divine based. This probably commits you to the view that these values exist necessarily/eternally. But these values apply to human beings specifically. If this is the case, then certainly your arguments against the necessity of a moral law, as it applies to human beings, must also apply equally to your belief in necessary moral values.

Remember what I said about the weirdness of an eternal moral law for human beings. Human beings are contingent. They could have possibly not existed. It is strange that a

necessary moral law could exist for these contingent beings since it is possible that this moral law is never put in to use. How is moral value different? The difference is that moral value has always and will always be exemplified in God. The problem with the eternal moral law for human beings is that there is a possible world in which no human beings exist. However, there is no possible world in which the laws for them do not exist (on the eternal law view). This means that there is a possible world where there is a moral law for beings that do not exist, and that is strange.

But in the case of moral values, in every possible world these values are being exemplified by someone because there is a being that exists in every possible world, who is God. Therefore, there is no world in which moral goods are not being exemplified. And since God exists necessarily, these moral goods have always been and always will be in existence in conjunction with God.

At this point I anticipate the following objection: But wait, didn't you say that moral values aren't explained by God? That there are things that are morally good independent of God?

What I have claimed is that the *reasons* for *why* some things are morally good are independent of God and do not require God as part of the explanation of something's goodness. I would say, however, that if God did not exist then we would likely encounter a problem as to whether anything like moral value even exists in the first place for the same reasons that we run into problems with an eternal moral law. But there is no possible world in which moral value does not exist since these moral values are being exemplified by a being that exists in every possible world. The fact that these moral values require exemplification to exist in the first place does not entail that the being

exemplifying those values is the explanation of *why* those things are good. My saying that these moral values require God for their existence is different from saying that the explanation for the goodness and badness of these moral values requires God. The latter is false.

I must address a classic objection to DCT that has been around for millennia. This famous objection has been able to steer most members of the philosophical community away from DCT. This objection is known as the Euthyphro dilemma. I discussed the Euthyphro dilemma in the previous half of my essay as it related to Robert Adams' moral theory. But now I wish to talk about how it relates to my formulation of DCT.

The Euthyphro dilemma (as it is formulated today) poses the question: Does God command something because it is good? Or is something good because it is commanded by God. Traditionally, this dilemma poses a serious threat to anyone who holds any kind of view that tries to explain the reason *why* something is morally good in terms of God. Trying to explain the moral goodness of, say, some action in terms of God will lead to a confrontation with, and likely a defeat by, the Euthyphro dilemma. If the traditional Divine Command theorist claims that God commands something because it is good, then he is committed to saying that the good exists independently of God and that therefore God isn't needed to explain why things are morally good. On the other hand, if someone says that something is good for the simple reason that God commands it, then that command appears to be arbitrary since he could have commanded anything and it would be good. If nothing was morally good in the first place then God could have made something like murder morally good. So the dilemma goes.

The infamous Euthyphro dilemma is no problem for my formulation of DCT. I happily grant that God commands something because it is good. Things have moral value independently of God. However, things are morally *right* or *wrong* because God either commands or forbids those things. The obvious objection that could be raised against this claim asks whether God commands something because it is right or whether something is right because God commands it. But this would be a false dilemma since the proper answer to why God commands something is that the thing he commands was morally good in the first place.

In the case of Christianity, God commands things like loving your neighbor because loving your neighbor is a good thing to do. Loving your neighbor has the status of moral goodness independently of God's attitude toward it. Therefore, on my view, when God commands things like love your neighbor, his command is not arbitrary since the goodness of such an action is independent of God.

In addition, as we have already discussed, just because something is morally good does not mean that it is morally right. Which brings us back to what I have been trying to demonstrate up to this point of the essay: there needs to be a moral law giver in order for there to be moral right and wrong. Although the Euthyphro dilemma poses a problem for divine-based value theories, and to divine command theories of moral duty that are not combined with non-divine based realist theories of value, it does not pose a threat to my Divine Command theory of moral duty.

I believe that DCT gives us better reason to follow its demands than any other theory of moral duty. If we are given a set of moral duties which have inferior reasons for being followed than a different set of moral duties, it seems intuitively true that we should

prefer, as well as follow, the latter set of duties. I want to briefly discuss why I think that the demands made by God's moral commandments have very good reasons for being followed. Perhaps they have the most superior reasons for being followed. Although I have critiqued Robert Adams' value theory in *Finite and Infinite Goods*, I do think he made some excellent points in this book about what elements of a theory of moral obligation give us good reason to comply with its demands.

Adams lists three morally good "reasons for complying with social requirements."[33] Social requirements are things like societal laws such as paying taxes, speed limit laws, or state-enforced church attendance. The first good reason for compliance with a set of duties is the quality of the relationship out of which the duties arise. If the relationship we have with the one who is making moral demands of us is a poor relationship (a relationship of neglect or abuse for example), then we have inferior reason and motivation to comply with those demands. The second reason for compliance is the moral quality or "personal characteristics" of the person making the moral demands. If the source of our moral duties is a morally corrupt source, then we likely do not have any good reason to follow those demands other than prudential ones. The third and obvious reason for compliance depends upon the goodness of the demand itself.[34] Is this demand asking me to do something that I know is morally bad? If so, I do not have a good reason to comply with this demand.

With regards to the first reason of compliance (the quality of the relationship with the one making demands), Adams believes that our relationship with God is to be highly valued and, furthermore, gives us a great reason to comply with his demands. Adams

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[33] Adams, Robert. *Finite and Infinite Goods*. p. 244.
[34] Adams, Robert. *Finite and Infinite Goods.* pp. 244-245.

draws upon a theory put forward by Samuel Pufendorf to explain why we should value our relationship with God:

> If God is our creator, if God loves us, if God gives us all the good that we enjoy, those are clearly reasons to prize God's friendship… Many reasons of the sort I have just suggested can be characterized as reasons of gratitude. Gratitude is instanced by Pufendorf[35] as a source of reasons for regarding the command of another as giving rise to obligation.[36]

Indeed, if God gave us life in the first place and wants what is best for each and every one of us, then it seems that we ought to be very grateful for his kindness. Our obedience to God's commands would presumably be motivated, in part, by our gratitude to God for his many blessings. Who could we possibly be more indebted to than the being that gave us life? Or to whom could we have more thanks to give than the being that provides us with the capacity to enjoy so many pleasures? It seems like there is none other than God who deserves so much gratitude. Therefore, our obedience to God's commands should be fueled by more gratitude than our obedience to any other set of demands. This gives us excellent reason for obedience.

The second motivating factor that a set of moral requirements should have, according to Adams, is how morally good or reliable the source of these moral requirements is. Since omnibenevolence is an essential feature of God's nature, it is safe to say that there cannot be a source that is morally superior to an omnibenevolent being. An omnibenevolent being is one that has no moral deficiencies. His moral status is perfected through and through. This brings us to the third reason for following moral commands, the quality of the demands themselves.

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[35] Pufendorf, Samuel. *On the Law of Nature and of Nations,* I, vi, 12.
[36] Adams, Robert. *Finite and Infinite Goods*. pp. 252-253.

If the being making moral demands of us has absolutely no moral deficiencies, we can assume that he would not issue bad commands. In fact, it seems that it would be impossible for an omnibenevolent being to command something morally bad since that would point to a defect in its moral nature. Therefore, it seems to be necessarily the case that anything God commands of us will good. Better yet, God would only make the best possible demands of his creatures.

So we have three excellent reasons to follow God's commands. We have motivation to follow God's commands that springs forth from tremendous gratitude for his goodness towards us. We know that the commands given by God are issued through a supremely good source and we know that the commands themselves will be nothing other than the best possible demands that could be made of us. I do not know of any alternative theory of obligation that provides us with such a powerful motivating force to follow a set of demands. Nor any alternative hypothesis that has such a morally excellent being that issues the commands. Nor am I aware of any alternative theory that can ensure such infallibility and assurance in the goodness of the commands being issued.

The reasons I have just given to prefer DCT over alternative theories of obligation are, of course, non-epistemic reasons. By non-epistemic I mean that the argument I provided for the motivating force to follow DCT theory is not an argument for DCT's actual truth. However, DCT does seem to give us superior reasons to follow its demands than any other alternative. Thus I think that we have reason to prefer it over other theories.

The last task that I wish to undertake in this project is to address the nature of God's commands. In this section I would like discuss why God may command the things

he commands. What exactly are the goals of God's commands? Are they to maximize happiness? Are they to maximize overall well being? After I have given answers to these questions I will discus whether my version of DCT commits me to a form of consequentialism.

Before I get into the nature of God's commands I must address an important preliminary distinction between two kinds of value as they relate to commands. My recognition of this distinction is due to Professor Chris Heathwood's distinction between what he calls *axiological* and *moral* value. 'Axiological value' pertains to the value that states of affairs can have. However, for the purpose of this paper and for the sake of the reader I will simply replace the term 'axiological value' with happiness. Heathwood puts the distinction this way:

> "We also make judgments as to some sate of affairs or outcome being simply a good or a bad state of affairs or outcome. Unlike welfare judgments, these kinds of judgment are not explicitly relational: we are not saying that the state of affairs is good or bad for someone (although that is often also true, and in fact is often what makes it a good or bad state of affairs); we are saying that it is simply a good or bad situation" (Heathwood, 3-4).[37]

For example, a consequentialist may say that a certain action would have more moral value than a different action if this former action makes the world a better place by maximizing happiness. If we are looking strictly at the value of outcomes overall that an action may produce and only taking into account whether this action is going to maximize happiness in the world, regardless of the means we use to get us this state of affairs, then we are looking strictly at overall happiness as a way to measure the goodness of an action. On certain forms of consequentialism that only take into account something

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[37] Heathwood, Chris. *Monism and Pluralism About Value*. pp. 3-4

like happiness when assessing the goodness of an action, what determines whether the act is good (or even whether this is an act that one *ought* to do) depends entirely upon whether the act produced more overall happiness than alternative acts, regardless of the means by which this happiness was brought about.

So-called 'moral value', however, also takes into account the value of persons and the value that an action itself can have. When taking into account 'moral value,' we evaluate the intrinsic value that something like the action *itself* that brings about the result of happiness. In this case we are looking at the value the act has independently of the outcome that it brings. When we consider this kind of value in addition to something like the overall happiness produced when determining an act's moral status, it may not be morally permissible to use whatever means necessary in order to bring about more maximally good outcomes like you could when only considering, for example, how much overall happiness this act brings.

When bearing in mind 'moral value,' we are after more than just good outcomes. When considering the 'moral value' of a situation in addition to the value of the outcome of that situation, you must evaluate the status of the moral action in addition to the value of its outcomes. If committing some obviously heinous act is required in order to bring about a marginally better outcome ("better" in the sense of "one with more happiness") than an act that requires no such heinous action, then on 'moral value' we should go with the latter action.

Now I would like to consider the possible nature of God's commands. As I previously expressed, God is an omnibenevolent being. As an omnibenevolent being, God is a being that is all loving, all merciful, all caring and so forth. In addition to being

omnibenevolent, God is an omniscient being. There is no piece of knowledge that is to be had that God does not have. If there are any facts that are available to be known, God knows them.

Taking into account the fact that God is both all knowing and all good seems to give us some insight into the nature of God's commands. As I also discussed previously, God's omnibenevolence would presumably entail that he commands his beings only to do the morally best things that they are capable of doing. In addition to this, God's omnipotence would allow him to know exactly what are the best things to demand of his creatures. So if God's commands demand that his creatures do the maximally best things they have the capacity to do, wouldn't the purpose of such commands be to bring about the best outcomes possible? And if that is the case, does it not seem to follow that God is some kind of consequentialist? By commanding what he commands, does it not seem like God is seeking to maximize the total amount of goodness in the world?

We will assume for a moment that God does not command what would bring about the maximally best outcomes. In this case, God, in his omniscience, is knowingly commanding things that bring about inferior outcomes than what a different set of commands could have brought about. If God is knowingly commanding things that bring about an inferior set of outcomes than what could have possibly been brought about (through morally acceptable means) by a different set of commands, then God is knowingly making the people of the world less better off. If God knowingly makes the people of the world less better off than he could have otherwise done (through morally acceptable means), this would demonstrate that God is not all caring and thus, not all good. Thus, he would not be omnibenevolent and furthermore, wouldn't be God.

Therefore, it is not the case that God does not command what would bring about the maximally best outcomes.

An obvious objection to this argument is that God could easily have morally sufficient reasons to command things that would make the world a worse place. For example, God commanding some world leader to bring about some miserable state of affairs in order to make people recognize their lack of reverence for God and get these people to take their eyes off of idols.

The reason why this objection does not succeed against my argument is that God is bringing about this bad state of affairs in order to bring about a more maximally good outcome (people turning away from idols). The bad state of affairs that God is bringing about here is only temporary. Maybe God's bringing about of this poor state of affairs is the only way possible for God to get these people to turn from idols toward the greater good which is God. The argument that I just posed meant to say that God would be doing something bad if he commanded us to do things that would not bring about an overall better state of affairs that he otherwise very easily could have brought about with different commands. But this would show a deficiency in God's goodness, which isn't possible. Thus, God will only command what is best for his creatures.

Does this make God a consequentialist? Does my formulation of DCT commit me to a form of consequentialism? The answer to that question is that it depends. If by consequentialism we mean the view that says we must maximize what Heathwood describes as 'axiological value,' or total happiness in the world, then no. I do not believe that God only takes into account the value of outcomes or overall happiness alone when issuing his commands. I will explain why in a moment. On the other hand, if by

consequentialism we mean the broader view that we must maximize ‘moral value’ in conjunction with ‘axiological value,’ then I will say that I am committed to such a view. I believe that God seeks to maximize good outcomes in the world but in seeking to maximize the good outcomes he takes into account the value of the means by which he brings about these outcomes.

The reason why I do not think that God only takes into account ‘axiological value’ in issuing his commands is because of a famous objection raised against act utilitarianism called the organ harvest objection. The organ harvest objection goes like this: a man goes into a hospital to get a routine surgery done. This surgery requires that the man be given anesthesia and put into unconsciousness. This man thinks that he will be waking up shortly after being put out of consciousness and that the surgery will have fixed his ailment and that he will go on his merry way to recovery. The man arrives in the surgery room and is given the anesthesia and is placed unconscious.

Suddenly, five men are rolled into the hospital room who have just been in a terrible car accident. Each man needs a different organ transplant to survive. One needs a heart transplant, another a liver, another a lung and so on. If they don’t get the necessary transplants, they will surely die. Coincidently, all five men have the exact same blood type, O-, which is a rare blood type and can only take blood from other people with blood type O-. There are no organs in stock at the hospital that contain blood type O-. However, there is one other person in town that has the blood type O-. The same man who is currently having his routine surgery done. If the surgeons were to stop the routine surgery on this man, take his organs and place them in the five other men, they would certainly all survive at the cost of the one man’s life.

The question is this: would it be moral for the surgeons to harvest this man's organs, which would cost him his life, when he has not consented to such an action, in order to save the five men in need of those organs? My answer is that it would not be. It would be immoral to take this man's life in order to save the five when the single man has not consented to such a sacrifice. The reason is that it is not permissible to use someone as a *means*, in such a manner that the surgeons would if they harvested his organs, in order to bring about the superior state of affairs where five people live and only one person dies.

When only considering something like overall happiness that an action would bring, we would certainly say that we ought to take the man's life in order to save the five. When only seeking to maximize happiness, all that would matter is the outcome of something like an action. But when we take into account 'moral value' in addition to the value of outcomes and the overall happiness within those outcomes, we become much more skeptical as to whether harvesting this man's organs in order to save the five is morally right. This seems to be the case since the badness of taking this single man's life seems to outweigh the goodness of saving the lives of the five men through the means of that one man. The badness of the act has more badness than the goodness of the outcome has goodness. Thus, we should mark such a case with the status of immoral.

Therefore, I think that God takes into account 'moral value' in addition to 'axiological value' when issuing his commands. However, I think that his commands still seek to achieve the best moral outcome possible. If this is true, then this means that the nature of God's commands is based upon consequentialist motives (seeking to maximize

the value of outcomes in addition to the value of the means by which he brings those good outcomes about).

Concluding Remarks

In this paper I have discussed moral value and what I take to be a plausible explanation of moral value. I take this plausible explanation to be the notion that moral properties supervene upon non-moral properties. I also hold that the necessary and sufficient conditions of a thing's moral value are that this thing's 'good making' properties are more numerable than it's 'bad making' ones. I presented this value theory as an alternative to Robert Adams' divine-based value theory.

I have ended this essay by discussing the plausibility of a Divine Command theory of moral duties. I showed that there are both epistemic and non-epistemic reasons to find this view plausible. I argued that a moral law requires God to issue the laws in the first place. Otherwise, I do not think that it is possible for a transcendent moral law to exist. I ended the discussion by arguing for the position that God's commands may be consequentialist in nature.

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