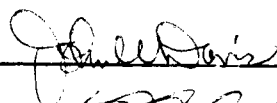


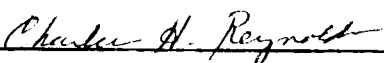
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by David L. Lipe entitled "Religious Versus Secular Ethics: A Religious Response to Some Contemporary Secular Views of Ethics." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Philosophy.

  
Glenn C. Graber, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation  
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

  
Vice Provost  
and Dean of The Graduate School

RELIGIOUS VERSUS SECULAR ETHICS: A RELIGIOUS  
RESPONSE TO SOME CONTEMPORARY  
SECULAR VIEWS OF ETHICS

A Dissertation  
Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

David L. Lipe  
March 1986

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## DEDICATION

To all who search for truth and  
are willing to pay the price  
to find it.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the course of this study a number of scholars have assisted me generously. I am grateful to Thomas B. Warren, a former professor, who first stimulated my interest in philosophical studies. In particular, I am indebted to John Davis, L. B. Cebik, and Charles Reynolds, members of my dissertation committee for their helpful comments. I especially want to thank Glenn C. Graber who served as chairman of the committee for his patience, consultation, criticism, and encouragement. Without either my committee or my chairman, I would not have been able to achieve the results of this study. Whatever errors remain in this work, however, are solely my responsibility.

I also want to thank my friends and colleagues who have helped me in various ways. A word of thanks is due the elders of the Karns Church of Christ who have allowed me to use their computer. A special word of thanks must go to Mrs. Sara Johnson and Mrs. Sara Goldman for their expert typing skills. Finally, I want to thank my wife, Linda, and my three daughters, Carrie, Nikki, and Rachel. Without their understanding, encouragement and belief in me through a number of years of work, the completion of this study would have been impossible.

## ABSTRACT

One of the major problems in moral philosophy centers around the debate between religious and secular ethics concerning the foundations of our moral conceptions. According to the religious ethicist there is an inseparable connection between religion and morality. Most religious ethicists hold that in some sense ethical terms and concepts are grounded in and dependent upon religious considerations. On the other hand, the secular ethicist holds that ethics is relative to human experience and that the foundations of ethical terms and concepts are not found in the religious or the metaphysical sphere.

This study is primarily a metaethical one and attempts to show that religious ethics (specifically Christian ethics) is possible. This is the exact opposite of the majority of contemporary thinking in moral philosophy; nevertheless, this study advances the thesis that there is an inseparable link between ethics and religion, that a theological definist analysis makes the strongest possible connection between the two, and that challenges from major secular ethicists against this position can be met.

Although the study refers to different figures in history, it is primarily concerned with the contemporary

scene and focuses on three scholars and their works: (1) Richard Robinson's An Atheist's Values, (2) Kai Nielsen's Ethics Without God, and (3) William Frankena's "Is Morality Logically Dependent on Religion?" and the second edition of his Ethics. All three work in the analytic tradition and serve as a good framework to discuss the issues in the present debate.

After introducing the basic problem of this study, I discuss the various senses in which ethics may be claimed to be dependent on religion. Following these two chapters, I devote three chapters to challenges against religious ethics (by the scholars mentioned above) taking as my starting point Socrates' question in Plato's Euthyphro: "Do the gods love piety because it is pious, or is it pious because the gods love it?" In the final chapter, I sketch the directions my future research will take regarding secular value theory, secular moral obligation theory, and my own view that certain value considerations and moral principles have a religious heritage.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of the Problem

This work is a critical investigation of some matters relative to ethics. The subject of ethics has been and continues to be a crucial subject in philosophical inquiry. Although there are various aspects of ethics which could be considered as a topic of philosophical investigation, this work is primarily concerned with the debate between religious and secular ethics. The debate concerns the general question as to the foundations of ethics. For the religious ethicist, there is some sort of inseparable connection between ethics and religion. In particular, most religious ethicists hold that ethics is in some sense grounded in and dependent upon religion. When confronted with questions concerning rightness or wrongness or when confronted with decisions about what ought or ought not to be done, the religionist turns to the sphere of the theological and the metaphysical for answers. Specifically, the Christian turns to God's revelation to answer moral problems because the Christian holds God as the ultimate foundation of morality.

On the contrary, the secular ethicist contends that ethics is relative to human experience and human nature. The

answer to moral problems need not be derived from theological or metaphysical foundations. Religious concepts, such as God, have no legitimate bearing on the content of morality (what one actually does or approves, as a moral agent) or on the reasons one has for acting and thinking as he does (the moral arguments one gives and accepts).

Although there are several important issues concerning religious and secular ethics, the purpose of this study is to show that religious ethics (specifically Christian ethics) is possible, i.e. some set of moral principles is entailed by a given set of religious propositions. Thus, I shall advance the thesis that religion is a necessary condition of morality. This perspective is not shared by all religious ethicists. For example, John Macquarrie maintains that religion is a sufficient condition for morality but not a necessary condition.<sup>1</sup> The sufficient condition thesis does not entail that morality is dependent on religion; moreover, morality, in all its aspects, is possible apart from religion. That morality is dependent on religion is a much stronger claim and has, as we shall see, important consequences.

Thus, I shall maintain that there is a link between ethics and religion, that a theological definist analysis makes the strongest possible connection between the two, and

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<sup>1</sup>John Macquarrie, Three Issues in Ethics (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1970).

that there are grounds upon which one may challenge some serious philosophical objections advanced against this position. This study (primarily a metaethical one) is the prelude of a larger research program (primarily a normative one) I plan which will include three additional areas of study: (1) a critical analysis of secular conceptions of value, (2) a critique of the secular position concerning moral obligation, and (3) a constructive study demonstrating that to claim knowledge of some value considerations (specifically, the purpose of life) and moral obligation principles, one must recognize a religious heritage behind them. More will be said about the directions this future research will take in the concluding chapter of this study.

Before making some suggestions concerning the importance of the problem, a word of caution is appropriate. A statement from John Stuart Mill's Utilitarianism will serve to introduce my point.

From the dawn of philosophy, the question concerning the summum bonum, or, what is the same thing, concerning the foundation of morality, has been accounted the main problem in speculative thought . . . . And after more than two thousand years the same discussions continue, philosophers are still ranged under the same contending banners, and neither thinkers nor mankind at large seem nearer to being unanimous on the subject . . . .<sup>2</sup>

His statement suggests that caution be exercised concerning the enormity of the debate between religious and secular ethics. The question concerning the foundations of morals

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<sup>2</sup>John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, ed. by George Sher (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1979), p. 1.

has been discussed from Plato to the present by some of the most renowned philosophers imaginable. W. D. Falk says "It is the problem of moral philosophy."<sup>3</sup> The magnitude of the problem suggests that it be approached with fear and trembling on the one hand and reverence and awe on the other. It should be with a humble spirit that one today continues its discussion.

#### Importance of the Problem

The importance of the subject "Religious versus Secular Ethics" can be viewed in different ways. First, one might consider the importance of a subject itself. The inherent dignity of certain things makes them objects of importance. Fewer subjects are of greater importance than those of religious and secular ethics. The intrinsic importance of the subject will emerge later in the discussion concerning the basic features of religion and secularism. However, at this point I wish to mention at least two questions which are involved in a study of religious versus secular ethics. The importance of these questions will indicate why religion and secularism are important in themselves.

(1) A study of religious versus secular ethics involves questions of divine significance. It would be difficult to imagine a greater question than one dealing

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<sup>3</sup>W. D. Falk, "Morals Without Faith," Philosophy 19 April 1944): 6.

with a being believed to transcend the spatio-temporal order and on whom all existence depends for its very being as well as its sustenance. Few truly great philosophers have ignored the perennial problems such as those concerning the concept of God. The Christian ethicist is especially concerned about God because he thinks God is the ultimate foundation of ethics. Most secular ethicists are concerned about God in a negative sense because they view their work in a significant measure as critical of religious ethics. Other secular ethicists offer positive secular theories; however, even these thinkers are concerned about God because they view at least a part of their work as a propaedeutic, i.e. they attempt to do away with religious views before advancing their own secular views.

(2) A study of religious versus secular ethics involves questions of human significance. (a) From where did human life originate? (b) What is the purpose or meaning of human life on earth? (c) What is the end of all human life? The religionist as well as the secularist offers a variety of answers to these questions. The religionist believes that all human beings ultimately owe their origin to God while the secularist holds that all human beings are ultimately the products of evolutionary development. Both the religionist and the secularist are concerned with human happiness. The religionist takes an

additional step and adds that true happiness on earth is achieved by bringing one's life in harmony with God's will and true and lasting happiness will be achieved by ultimately dwelling in the presence of God himself. However, he would add that this true and lasting happiness will not be the ultimate end for all men but only for those who bring their lives into conformity with God's will. The secularist contends that the ultimate end of man is death. It may be observed that the question of human significance is closely related to that of divine significance. This close relationship between religious and secular ethics underscores even more the intrinsic importance of these two subjects.

Second, one might consider the importance of a subject because of its foundational role with respect to other realities. For the religious ethicist, there are important theoretical as well as practical consequences in the discussion of religious versus secular ethics. (1) Consider the theoretical consequences for the religious ethicist. If the strongest version of the secular ethicist's case can be sustained in moral deliberations, the religious ethicist could not appeal to God as the ultimate foundation of morality. Thus, the claims of religious ethics about what is actually right and wrong or what ought or ought not to be done are without foundation.

The secularist would perhaps allow the religionist to use religious beliefs for psychological purposes, i.e. one could draw upon one's belief in God as a motivating factor to do the moral thing but with the understanding that knowledge of moral principles are known to him apart from God's revelation. Thus, one might depend on God to motivate oneself or others to do what is already known (perhaps from natural means) to be right. However, the religionist could not appeal to God for either the derivation or definition of ethical terms and concepts. Further, he could not appeal to the Bible (God's revelation to man) for answers in moral deliberations because what the Bible says may not actually be correct or, at least it must be critically evaluated in terms of an independent standard before it is known to be correct. Thus, the Bible would be of little significance as a moral action guide.

Theoretical consequences are also at stake on the other side of the debate, when the religious ethicist purports an inseparable connection between ethics and religion as the main support for religious doctrines. In the eighteenth century, Kant argued that it was only through its intimate connection with morality that the religious doctrines of God and immortality could be rationally supported. Since Kant, philosophers and theologians have generally turned away from the cosmological arguments as proof for the

existence of God. Instead, morality has furnished the main support for religious doctrines.<sup>4</sup>

(2) Consider the practical consequences of the debate between religious and secular ethics. (a) Many religious ethicists make the apologetic claim that religion is necessary for the continued survival of morality as an institution of human life. Glenn C. Graber calls this the "cut-flowers thesis." The cut-flowers thesis consists of a hypothetical judgment which may be stated as follows: "Morality cannot survive, in the long run, if its ties to religion are cut." This judgment is a prediction of what would happen to morality if it were severed from religion. Graber calls attention to an early statement of the thesis made by Leo Tolstoy in 1894.

The attempts to found a morality apart from religion are like the attempts of children who, wishing to transplant a flower that pleases them, pluck it from the roots that seem to them unpleasing and superfluous, and stick it rootless into the ground. Without religion there can be no real, sincere morality, just as without roots there can be no real flower.<sup>5</sup>

Tolstoy's conclusion is a matter of grave importance

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<sup>4</sup>For this idea as well as the following practical consequence, I am indebted to Glenn C. Graber's "The Relationship of Morality and Religion: Language, Logic, and Apologetics" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1972), pp. iii-iv, 1-5 (hereafter cited as Graber, "Morality and Religion").

<sup>5</sup>Leo Tolstoy, "Religion and Morality," in Leo Tolstoy: Selected Essays, trans. by Aylmer Maude, selected and introduced by Ernest J. Simmons, Modern Library (New York: Random House, Inc., 1964), pp. 31-32.

to those who take morality seriously. Thus, on the cut-flowers thesis, those who believe morality is a valuable human institution and wish to avoid moral disaster will make every effort to preserve its connection with religion and the religious belief which forms its roots.

The apologetic force of the cut-flowers thesis becomes even stronger if the religionist makes the additional claim that morality is presently in a withering stage. This claim takes on a sense of urgency when the decline in morality is identified with the muddle civilization seems to be presently experiencing. Support for this claim can be found both among (i) those sympathetic to religion and (surprisingly enough) among (ii) those with little or no sympathy for religion. (i) For a representative sympathetic to religion, I have not found a better statement than Basil Willey's quoted by Graber. Willey's statement is disturbing in that it claims that the predictions of the cut-flowers thesis are even now being realized. Willey holds that there has been a progressive de-Christianization during the last three or four centuries the outcome of which "is what we see around us in the world today---the moral and spiritual nihilism of the modern world, particularly of the totalitarian creeds."<sup>6</sup>

(ii) For a statement by one who has no sympathy for

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<sup>6</sup>Basil Willey, The English Moralists (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1964), p. 118.

religion, I suggest the following statement by W. T. Stace.

The Catholic bishops of America once issued a statement in which they said that the chaotic and bewildered state of the modern world is due to man's loss of faith, his abandonment of God and religion. I agree with this statement . . . .

. . . . .  
Along with the ruin of the religious vision there went the ruin of moral principles and indeed of all values.

Both of these statements underscore the prediction of the cut-flowers thesis which is in sum: Morality cannot survive without religion.

(b) Alongside the practical claims of religionists, are those of the secularists. Not all would agree, by any means, with the prediction of the cut-flowers thesis nor with the claim that what is predicted is now being realized. In response to the claim that a naturalistic ethic leads to promiscuity and the breakdown of moral behavior, Paul Kurtz notes "the fact that ethical values are relative to human experiences does not mean that they are 'subjectivistic' or immune to objective criticism. The fact that reflective choice is situational does not mean that 'anything goes.'" <sup>8</sup>

The prediction that the cut-flowers thesis is now being realized is denied as well. Hector Hawton points out

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<sup>7</sup>W. T. Stace, Man Against Darkness and Other Essays (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1967), pp. 3, 9. My emphasis.

<sup>8</sup>Paul Kurtz, "The Ethics of Secular Humanism," in Sidney Hook, ed. by Paul Kurtz (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1983), p. 163.

that when people lament the decline of morals, they generally think of sexual laxity. They seldom think first of concentration camps and judicial torture. He adds,

That we have become more humane in our attitude to criminals, lunatics, children, and animals does not seem to count; though oddly enough in a more devout age prisons were more brutal, the insane were baited for fun, children (and wives) were flogged . . . .<sup>9</sup>

By "more humane" I take it that Hawton means moral progress (rather, than moral regress) has and is taking place. Hawton underscores the point that the substantive content of ethics has improved. Secularists also claim that if the content of ethics is going to continue to improve, it will be by moving away from religious traditions. This point is made quite clear by Bertrand Russell when he says, "I do not believe that a decay of dogmatic belief can do anything but good."<sup>10</sup>

This kind of disagreement concerning the prediction of the cut-flowers thesis as well as the realization of it evokes a third reason a study of religious versus secular ethics is important. Advocates of both religious and

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<sup>9</sup>Hector Hawton, The Humanist Revolution (Great Britain: Pemberton Publishing Co. Ltd., 1963), p. 84.

<sup>10</sup>Bertrand Russell, Why I am Not a Christian (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), p. 206. This statement is from the essay, "Religion and Morals." He emphasizes the same point in a number of his essays throughout this book. Cf. Richard Robinson's An Atheist's Values (Oxford: University Press, 1964), especially the section on religion, pp. 113-57. The work of this thinker will be given a detailed analysis in this study.

secular ethics offer defenses of their respective views; however, both, too many times, make assertions and do not give the kind of defense necessary for subjects of such extreme importance. Moreover, all too often, one camp completely ignores the other. It seems that little progress can ever be made in settling questions relating to religious and secular ethics if serious dialogue does not begin. It is hoped that each camp will give critical examination to both views with the aim of more dialogue and eventually some settling of the questions at issue.

### Assumptions

Some remarks are necessary concerning certain assumptions of this study. First, the assumption is made that it is perfectly possible for individuals who are highly educated--philosophers, scientists, and other intellectuals--to perform morally good actions without religious beliefs or convictions. I make this assumption because many moral philosophers are quick to point this out. They note that the secularist can find purpose and meaning in life and bring happiness (and/or other values) both for himself and his fellow man. Nielsen observes that men like John Dewey, George Eliot, and George Bernard Shaw "have lived happy and productive lives."<sup>11</sup> One could add to this list Thomas

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<sup>11</sup>Kai Nielsen, Ethics Without God (London: Pemberton Books, 1973), p. 35 (hereafter cited as Nielsen, Ethics).

Huxley, John Stuart Mill, and David Hume among those who lived noble lives without religion. Also, one should quickly add the lives of obscure persons who have lived decent lives without religion. There are many who reject the view that a consequence of abandoning religion leads immediately to murder, rape, robbery, drunkenness, sexual laxity and the like. There are no doubt many atheists, agnostics, and skeptics of all sorts who, although they abhor the idea of God and religion, nevertheless perform morally good actions. Just as it is not the case that without religion one cannot behave morally, it is equally not the case that believers become incapable of behaving immorally. The issue in this study is not whether one can perform moral actions without acknowledging a religious sphere. On the contrary, it is whether there is a real ground, or reason for moral action.

Second, the assumption is made that even without religious beliefs, one is capable of not only doing the moral thing, but also of giving a philosophical rationale of many moral concepts without making reference to anything in the religious sphere. There are a variety of ethical terms, and it is simply false to say that an analysis of all these ethical terms must contain reference to theological concepts. More will be said about this particular view in Chapter III, "The First Horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma." At

this point in the study, however, I simply wish to emphasize that I do not share the religious view that morality in toto is determined directly by the will of God. Instead I shall argue for the more limited claim that terms which function in theories of moral value and/or non-moral value may be linguistically and logically independent of religion, while moral obligation terms are logically dependent on religion.

### Limitations

Although this study will refer to various figures in history who have contributed to the discussion of religious and secular morality, it is not, in a strict sense, an historical study. Reference to contributions in history will only be for the purpose of providing background material for the contemporary discussion. Concerning the contemporary scene many different figures make valuable contributions. For the purposes of this work, I limit myself to a consideration of three important contemporary thinkers and their works: (1) Richard Robinson's An Atheist's Values, (2) Kai Nielsen's Ethics Without God, and (3) William Frankena's "Is Morality Logically Dependent on Religion?" and the second edition of his Ethics.

These three thinkers provide an excellent framework for my particular interests. The reasons for this claim may be divided into two areas: (1) those reasons which are

applicable to all three, and (2) those reasons which are restricted to each in particular.<sup>12</sup>

First, consider the reasons applicable to all three. (1) The importance of their treatment of religious ethics is seen in that the number of extended discussions dealing with religious ethics is small. Graber, in his critical bibliography, notes that even textbooks in ethics usually contain only a few passing references to topics in religious ethics such as situation ethics, natural law theory, a divine command theory of ethics, etc.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, Robinson, Nielsen, and Frankena all discuss this topic at length. (2) Further, Robinson, Nielsen and Frankena are concerned about both religious and secular ethics. All three present severe criticisms of religious ethics as well as attempting to develop and defend a secular ethic. It is one thing to reject religious ethics. It is quite another thing to show in a positive way what secular ethics can offer instead. Rather than treat the question of ethics in an entirely negative way, each of these three authors has constructed a systematic ethical theory of a secular nature for which he

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<sup>12</sup>Some of the following reasons for choosing the thinkers under consideration are not directly pertinent to the scope of this study. However, they are relevant to future research I intend to make of Nielsen, Robinson, and Frankena; thus, they are included in the present discussion.

<sup>13</sup>Glenn C. Graber, "A Critical Bibliography of Recent Discussions of Religious Ethics by Philosophers," Journal of Religious Ethics 2 (1974): 54 (hereafter cited as Graber, "Critical Bibliography").

claims superiority over any type of religious ethic. This is significant since many critics of religious ethics have limited themselves to critical analysis alone and have ignored any effort to develop a positive alternative.

(3) Robinson, Nielsen, and Frankena, as we shall see, all emphasize both (a) metaethical and (b) normative problems in religious ethics. Graber, after noting the scarcity of material on religious ethics, points out that most of the few other discussions of religious ethics emphasize metaethical problems while the content of religious ethics is rarely discussed.<sup>14</sup> Philosophers who emphasize (a) metaethical problems do not generally offer an ethical code, ethical conclusions, or principles of ethics. They reject ethical theory in the traditional sense and restrict themselves to the analysis of ethical words and statements commonly used in different ethical theories. Further, an attempt is made to construct theories of meaning and justification of the various types of judgments formulated in normative ethics. This was regarded as the main task of ethics through the mid-seventies, but there is renewed interest in normative ethics in recent philosophy.

Although metaethical problems are still being discussed, they are not viewed as ends in themselves but preliminary work to be done in setting out normative theory. This seems to be the case with the thinkers under

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

discussion (and is my particular view of metaethics), although this emphasis is not evenly distributed among them. One is impressed quite early with the fact that Nielsen and Frankena focus more on metaethical matters than does Robinson. However, all three go beyond merely discussing the logic of moral judgments as such; they also make and defend normative judgments. Further, they evidence an interesting application of certain developments in metaethics. Thus, while all three work in the analytic tradition, their analytical attention to words does not constitute their sole task (as seems to be the case with some who base their conclusions exclusively upon linguistic criteria)--although their normative conclusions are to a great extent dependent upon their logical analysis.

(b) Normative ethics sets forth moral norms as a rule of conduct. It investigates moral theories and attempts to establish moral principles on a rationally justifiable basis. Philosophers working in normative ethics attempt to construct systematic ethical theories for employment in daily living. The problems about which normative ethics is concerned are three: (i) What is good in itself? (ii) What ought we to do? and (iii) What kind of person should we attempt to become? Robinson, Nielsen, and Frankena attempt to answer such normative questions strictly on a secular basis.

Robinson, Nielsen, and Frankena provide a kind of

framework in which to study the debate between religious and secular ethics that is not found in the work of many philosophers. For example, it would be difficult to consider the issues in this study in the works of metaethicists such as Ayer, Hare, Toulmin, Stevenson, and Urmson.<sup>15</sup> These thinkers concern themselves almost exclusively with the analysis of ethical words and judgments found in different ethical theories. Although the primary thrust of this study concerns metaethical issues, we are also concerned with some normative considerations. The thinkers to be evaluated in this investigation provide the balance essential in a study dealing with both metaethical and normative issues.

Second, consider the reasons which are applicable to the men in particular. (1) Robinson especially deserves attention for at least three reasons. (a) As far as I am able to determine, no one has given this distinguished Oxford philosopher the attention due his work. He has given a detailed treatment of problems relating to religion in general and Christian ethics in particular. It would seem unfortunate to overlook such a thorough contemporary contribution to the general field of ethics.

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<sup>15</sup>See the following as examples of my point. A. J. Ayer, Language, Truth, and Logic (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1935); R. M. Hare, The Language of Morals (London: Oxford University Press, 1952); Stephen Toulmin, An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics (London: Cambridge University Press, 1950); Charles L. Stevenson, Ethics and Language (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944); and J. O. Urmson, "On Grading," Mind 59 (April 1950): 145-69.

(b) An Atheist's Values should be dealt with because of severe criticisms it gives to the normative ethics to be found in the Gospels. This point is significant not in that religious ethics are inseparably bound to Christian ethics for such is obviously not the case.<sup>16</sup> The significance lies in the fact that it is believed by many that the normative ethics set out in the Gospels and expanded and elaborated on in the Epistles constitutes the moral code or rule to guide one in his moral capacity to decide what to do in this or that situation and to enable one to judge concerning the activities of others. Christian ethics for such people may be equated with biblical ethics. Robinson not only argues against religious ethics but against Christian ethics in particular, a matter of great concern to the person who believes the New Testament to be God's revelation for men living today. (c) Further, Robinson considers some objections to religion in general overlooked by many, including Nielsen and Frankena. For example, he spends a great deal of discussion on the claim that religion is inimical to truth and reason.

(2) Nielsen warrants critical investigation for three reasons. (a) He has made a major contribution to the contemporary discussion involving religious and

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<sup>16</sup>To support this, one has only to consider Louis Jacob's, "The Relationship Between Religion and Ethics in Jewish Thought" in Religion and Morality, ed. by Gene Outka and John P. Reeder, Jr. (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1973), pp. 155-72.

secular ethics. His book Ethics Without God deals exclusively with what this work is about and provides a good framework for discussing the particular themes of religious and secular ethics.<sup>17</sup> (b) His discussion is more metaethical than Robinson's and thus deals with several points of significance overlooked by Robinson. (c) Further, Nielsen represents a popular line of critique of religious ethics. He is one of the most articulate spokesmen for a line with which many analytical philosophers would agree.

(3) Before pointing out some general reasons I have chosen Frankena's work in ethics, a word of explanation is due for choosing specifically the article "Is Morality Logically Dependent on Religion?" and his Ethics as the basic framework for a discussion of Frankena's ethical position. I have chosen these two works because of the distinct difference in their purposes. In the former, Frankena's discussion is largely critical and negative (his own

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<sup>17</sup> He has written a number of articles which also show this. Consider the following for just some of them. "Some Remarks on the Independence of Morality from Religion," Mind 70 (April 1961): 175-86; reprinted in Divine Command Morality, ed. by Janine Marie Idziak (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), pp. 231-43; future references to this essay indicate the location in the latter volume. "Religion, Morality and Bertrand Russell," The Amherst Review (Spring 1959); "Morality and God: Some Questions for Mr. MacIntyre," Philosophical Quarterly 12 (April 1962): 129-37; "Ethics Without Religion," The Ohio University Review 6 (1964): 48-62; reprinted in Moral Problems in Contemporary Society, ed. by Paul Kurtz (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), pp. 17-32. The latest article I have found is "Why Should I Be Moral Revisited?" American Philosophical Quarterly 21 (January 1984): 81-91.

admission, p. 296) and serves the fundamental purpose of presenting negative arguments against religious ethics. Although he also does some of this in his Ethics (particularly in his discussion of divine command theory, pp. 28-30), his discussion in this work is to a great extent positive as it not only raises various questions about normative ethical theories, but also it seeks to present a positive case on secular grounds for a particular normative theory of moral obligation.

The reasons for considering Frankena's ethical view in particular are three: (a) Like Robinson and Nielsen, he has made a tremendous contribution to the debate between religious and secular ethics. His contribution is distinctive in that Frankena is open to the arguments of religionists. Like Robinson and Nielsen, he is very critical of religion but, unlike them, evidences a spirit of genuine consideration of both sides of an issue.<sup>18</sup> (b) He raises

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<sup>18</sup>In addition to his article, "Is Morality Logically Dependent on Religion?" in Religion and Morality, ed. by Gene Outka and John P. Reeder, Jr. (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1973), pp. 295-317 (hereafter cited as Frankena, MLDR) and his Ethics, 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1973), Frankena has written a number of articles pertinent to religious and secular ethics. See "Public Education and the Good Life," Harvard Educational Review 31 (Fall 1961): 413-26; "Recent Conceptions of Morality," in Morality and the Language of Conduct, ed. by H. N. Castaneda and G. Nakhnikian (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963) pp. 1-24; and "The Concept of Morality," The Journal of Philosophy 63 (November 1966): 687-96. For an extended list of the writings of Frankena see "Bibliography of the Writings of William Frankena," Journal of Religious Ethics 3 (Spring 1975): 63-67.

some metaethical problems in the area of religious ethics not dealt with by either Robinson or Nielsen. (c) Frankena's work provides a balance which seems necessary for future studies I intend to make. Philosophers have offered in general two sorts of theories of moral obligation--teleological theories and deontological ones. Both Robinson and Nielsen offer a teleological theory of moral obligation. Frankena offers what he calls a "mixed deontological theory."

Thus, because the works of Robinson, Nielsen, and Frankena are (1) concerned with the question of religious versus secular ethics, (2) emphasize both metaethical as well as normative problems in the same area, and (3) have individual features warranting attention, I have selected the works of these thinkers to constitute the framework for the present discussion of religious and secular ethics.

### Definitions

This section of the study attempts to clarify its scope by proposing definitions of such basic terms as "religion," "secularism," and "ethics."<sup>19</sup> It is an extremely difficult task to define these concepts, and it may be that it is impossible to provide clear and precise definitions of

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<sup>19</sup>See David Little's and Sumner B. Twiss', Jr. "Basic Terms in the Study of Religious Ethics," in Religion and Morality, ed. by Gene Outka and John P. Reeder, Jr. (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1973), pp. 35-39, for some helpful suggestions in defining "religion" and "morality."

these concepts. However, it seems clear that if there is to be any profitable communication concerning the debate between religious and secular ethics, the meanings of the major terms in the debate must be made as clear as possible. If terms and concepts are used ambiguously, vaguely, carelessly, or without meaning, communication fails.

### Religion

Although there are a number of world religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Janism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, etc., it is not within the scope of this work to define "religion" as it describes these religions. The term "religion" as discussed in the following should be understood at the outset to refer to the Christian religion. For our purposes, it is sufficient to call attention to three basic features of the Christian religion: (1) a conceptual feature, (2) an emotional feature, and (3) a practical feature, all of which have important causal connections.<sup>20</sup>

(1) The conceptual feature includes a set of beliefs about the world of nature, man, history, and a supreme being which is believed to occupy a special relationship to these things. (a) The Christian religion clearly includes belief in a supreme being. "Supreme" should not be confused with

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<sup>20</sup> Rem Edwards does not make these particular classifications, but he makes some interesting observations on the various traits of religion to which my discussion is indebted. See Reason and Religion (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972), pp. 19-38 for his discussion.

"superior." Although there are religions which include superior gods (such as the gods of the ancient Greeks), the Christian religion holds that there is one supernatural God. By "supernatural" I mean a God which transcends nature. He is "beyond" the spatio-temporal order. "God" will be understood to be "the infinite, eternal, uncreated, personal reality, who has created all that exists other than himself, and who has revealed himself to his human creatures as holy and living."<sup>21</sup>

(b) The Christian religion has definite beliefs about man. Man is believed to be created in the image of God himself with a purpose and meaning on earth. His existence on earth consists of a probationary period, the only time he has to accomplish the goals God has for him. During his life on earth, he has a choice to make--to enter into a covenant relationship with God or to refuse to enter into such a relationship with God. The Incarnation, Atonement, and Kingdom of God have all been designed and revealed by God to help and encourage man to enter into a spiritual relationship with him. A failure (according to the Christian concept) to enter into this relation has eternal consequences (all that is involved in life after death including Heaven and Hell).

(c) Beliefs about the world are also included in

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<sup>21</sup>John Hick, Philosophy of Religion (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 14.

the conceptual traits of religion. The Christian view of the world is much like that of the Middle Ages. The world, like man, was created by God for a particular purpose. Though man was logically prior to the world (in the mind of God), the world was chronologically prior to man. By this, I mean that God had man and his purpose in mind as a primary consideration in his scheme of things and the world as a secondary consideration. The world was made for man as the place of man's probationary period. It has no significance in itself, but only in its role for the purposes of man. It is, to quote Keats, a "vale of soul-making."<sup>22</sup>

(2) The emotional trait of religion includes certain attitudes, feelings, and experiences (e.g. the attitude of worship, the feeling of reverence and awe, the experience of God) which are evoked from the conceptual features of religion. The attitude of worship (though including activity) includes that deep sense of love and admiration for God. It may be contemplative, expressed in some bodily posture, or in some activity of service.

The feeling of reverence and awe is a feeling of deep respect, love, and intense concern for the conceptual traits of religion. The religionist respects, loves, and admires God. He has an abiding interest in his fellow man.

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<sup>22</sup> John Keats, In "The Letters of John Keats," English Romantic Poets, ed. by James Sterens et al. (New York: American Book Company, 1961), p. 642.

He is deeply concerned about himself and others as he stands in awe of God. He is moved deeply when he contemplates the beauty and grandeur of the heavens and the earth.

The experience of God evokes various concepts. In the Christian religion, there are accounts of various "religious experiences," including Saul's encounter with Jesus when he was overcome by a bright light. Edwards supplies a succinct statement, calling attention to various other types of experiences when he mentions

experiences of deep prayer or contemplation, experiences involving a sense of profound awe and reverence in the presence of the holy, experiences of release from finite selfhood or of the absolute dependence of the finite self upon the Whole of Reality, conversion experiences, varieties of mystical ecstasy, and so on.<sup>23</sup>

(3) The practical trait of religion includes certain activities such as public and private worship which emerge from the emotional trait of religion. Public and private worship would include the activities of prayer, singing, exhortation, study, ritual, etc. All of these activities combine to reinforce the religionist's view of God, man, and the world.

Although many religions include most of the traits I have outlined, one should be careful not to make these traits necessary for all religions. However, it is safe to say that they are core features of the Christian religion.

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<sup>23</sup> Edwards, Reason and Religion, pp. 34-35.

### Secularism

The secularist presents the natural alternative for the one disenchanted with a religious world view. It should be understood at the beginning of our discussion of the traits of secularism that "secularism," like "religion," is a very complex notion, admitting of various traits. Not all, who would regard themselves as secularists, would subscribe to all of the traits listed below. The most that could be said is that the majority of secularists, either explicitly or implicitly, subscribe to at least a substantial subset of some form of the following traits. The difficulty in discovering the basic features lies in one's starting point. The starting point for this study is to view secularism in a religious context as a system of thought which is not only mutually exclusive of the complex institution of the Christian religion but antagonistic to it. In this sense, secularism is closely related to one particular form of naturalism.<sup>24</sup>

As for exponents of the following features, I suggest such notables as W. D. Falk, Paul Kurtz, Sidney Hook

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<sup>24</sup>In addition to the following references I cite concerning the features of secularism, the following are suggested for some helpful hints: Paul Kurtz, "What is Humanism?" in Moral Problems in Contemporary Society, 2d ed. edited by Paul Kurtz (Buffalo, N. Y.: Prometheus Books, 1973), pp. 1-14; Basil Mitchell, Morality: Religious and Secular (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980); Ronald W. Hepburn's chapter "Secular Ethics and Moral Seriousness," in his Christianity and Paradox, pp. 128-54 (New York: Pegasus, 1958); and Alasdair MacIntyre, Secularization and Moral Change (London: Oxford University Press, 1967).

and as far as this study is concerned, Kai Nielsen, Richard Robinson, and to a lesser extent (at least compared to Nielsen and Robinson) William Frankena.

The traits of secularism include: (1) a cosmological feature, (2) a methodological feature, and (3) a humanistic feature all of which are connected.<sup>25</sup>

(1) The cosmological feature of secularism includes four distinct traits: (a) only the world of nature exists, (b) the world of nature is non-teleological, (c) the world of nature is eternal and necessary, and (d) the natural events of the world of nature have natural causes.

(a) The secularist holds that only the world of nature exists and by implication holds that the supernatural world does not exist. The "world of nature" refers to the spatio-temporal order often called the "cosmos." It is this which constitutes ultimate reality for the secularist. This must be the case, because there is no other world of reality. This metaphysical claim must be made by the secularist in order to offer any position which is contrary to the supernatural claims of the Christian religion.

(b) The secularist holds that the world of nature is non-teleological. No effort is made to investigate the final cause (the end or purpose) of an event or thing--

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<sup>25</sup> Although these traits are my own, I am indebted to Edwards for some helpful comments especially concerning cosmological features of secularism. See Reason and Religion, pp. 134-38.

indeed, it is held that such a notion is meaningless. The efficient cause (the immediate cause of the being) of an event or thing is the concern of the secularist. The secularist is opposed to any metaphysical view which would allow for a transcendent or immanent God (or one who is both transcendent and immanent) who has ordered nature for his own purposes. The secularist does not wish to deny human values and purposive intelligence, but only that nature as a whole has values and purposes.

(c) The secularist holds that the world of nature is eternal and necessary. The world of nature, especially its basic "stuff," is uncreated and self-sufficient. He will not allow for the world of nature to be contingent on any kind of supernatural being either for its existence or its sustenance. His position will not admit of "something from nothing."

(d) The secularist holds that the natural events of the world of nature have natural causes. He agrees with the religionist that every event has a cause, but disagrees that some events have supernatural causes. Every event, for the secularist, has a natural cause. This relates closely to (c) in that the world of nature did not come into being by a miracle of God. It did not come into being out of nothing and being without a cause; it was not created by God.

(2) The methodological feature of secularism is the scientific method of inquiry. By this I do not mean the

narrow claim of the logical positivists "involving the empirical verification or falsification of descriptions and explanatory hypotheses."<sup>26</sup> Rather, I have in mind what Paul Kurtz describes in his recent article "The Ethics of Secular Humanism."

Broadly conceived this is the hypothetico-deductive method, in which hypotheses are introduced, deductively elaborated, and experimentally tested, directly or indirectly by the evidence. The scientific method . . . is continuous with ordinary common sense and critical intelligence, and it involves the controlled use of the methods of inquiry that are successful in other areas of life as well. Knowledge claims are tentative; even verified hypotheses may be later modified in the light of new evidence or more comprehensive explanations. Thus the scientific method entails some degree of skepticism about claims to ultimate truth.<sup>27</sup>

(3) The humanistic trait of secularism includes a philosophy of man which advocates that the well-being of human beings is ultimate and is to be pursued without reference to any religious sphere. Human values arise from human needs and desires and are to be furthered by man's critical intelligence. The metaphysical view of the secularist will not allow for any religious basis for human value (except perhaps for motivational purposes). Human values are just that--human--not divine.

### Ethics

The term "ethics," like "religion" and "secularism," is a complex notion. Ethics is a philosophy (called by some

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>27</sup>Paul Kurtz, "The Ethics of Secular Humanism," p. 160.

a science) that is concerned about the moral problems and judgments of morality. However, the term is used in other ways also. Sometimes it is used synonymously with the term "morality" and sometimes it is used to refer to the moral principles, system, or code of an individual or society. The word "morality" is sometimes used to refer to that which is opposed to "immorality." Other times it is used to refer to realities such as art, science, law, or religion. William Frankena notes that this is what Bishop Butler called "the moral institution of life." This is the way Frankena and others use the expression and the way I intend to use it in this study. The terms "ethical" and "moral" should not be understood to mean "morally right" or "morally good" but "pertaining to the institution of morality."<sup>28</sup>

Ethics or morality includes things like the following: propositions (moral principles or moral judgments); beliefs about and reasons for these propositions; characteristic natural or acquired ways of feeling that accompany the propositions; certain actions and practices following upon the propositions; and motives.<sup>29</sup> The family members of a complex institution like morality range all the way from religious views including the Judaistic views of Moses and

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<sup>28</sup>William Frankena, Ethics, pp. 4-6.

<sup>29</sup>See Frankena's discussion in his Ethics, p. 9 of factors in morality for more detailed information on this point. Also, note Graber's remarks on pages 8-9 of his "Morality and Religion."

the Christian views of Jesus to secular views including those of Nielsen, Robinson, and Frankena, not to mention a host of others. Ethics (morality) as an institution is associated with an action guide(s) that includes the following traits: (1) concern with conduct toward others, (2) public, and (3) overriding.<sup>30</sup>

(1) Ethics is concerned with conduct toward other persons and groups of persons. This particular trait specifies the content a given action-guide must have in order to qualify as a moral principle. Graber observes that a specification like this "is necessary to enable us to make the distinction between 'specifically religious duties' and moral duties . . ." and adds the following:

The distinction is wholly one of the content of the duties involved. Specifically religious duties are concerned with the proper way to behave towards God, religious activities (e.g. prayer, ritual, etc.), and sacred objects (e.g. books of scripture, ritual implements) or places. Moral duties on the other hand, can be distinguished from these by the fact that they concern the proper way to act in our dealings with other persons.<sup>31</sup>

I would add to this that the distinction is helpful from the anthropologist's point of view in making a decision as to

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<sup>30</sup>This language is Graber's but for similar distinctions note those of Little and Twiss in *Basic Terms in the Study of Religious Ethics*, p. 45f; William Frankena's "The Concept of Morality," pp. 688-96; and Tom L. Beauchamp's and James F. Childress' Principles of Biomedical Ethics, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 14-17.

<sup>31</sup>Graber, "Morality and Religion," p. 11.

what constitutes a moral principle in cultures other than one's own.

Ethics' concern with the conduct of other persons is treated by Little and Twiss as an "other-regarding" feature. They call attention to Frankena who includes the "other-regarding" element as necessary for there to be a morality.

X has a morality or moral AG only if it includes judgments, rules, principles, ideas, etc. which 1) concern the relations of one individual to others, 2) involve or call for a consideration of the effects of his actions on others (not necessarily all others), not from the point of view of his own interests or aesthetic enjoyments, but from their own point of view.<sup>32</sup>

Frankena's second distinction presupposes a personal agent who is concerned with and aware of the effects of his actions on someone else. His first distinction involves a relation between persons, whether the persons involved are aware of the relation or not.

For an action guide to qualify as a moral principle, it must have a bearing on others i.e. to use Frankena's phrase, it "concerns the relations of one individual to others." Specifically, it bears on the general welfare of others. G. J. Warnock observes that the limits of moral evaluation "are set somewhere within the general area of concerning the welfare of human beings. . . . the relevance of considerations as to the welfare of human beings cannot in the context of moral debate, be denied. . . . it is so,

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<sup>32</sup>Frankena, "The Concept of Morality," p. 156.

simply because of what moral means."<sup>33</sup> Frankena's distinction calls for a consideration of the effects of one's actions on others, not from one's own point of view but from the other's point of view. Little and Twiss observe on this that Frankena's point would eliminate some of what one would normally take to be a morality. They mention egoistic patterns of morality such as that of the Navahoes which, in their view, would have to be classified as non-moral systems.<sup>34</sup> For the purposes of this study, egoistic patterns of morality should not be understood to constitute real moral systems.

(2) Morality is public. This trait "states a feature that a given action-guide must have to qualify as a moral action-guide but that entails no determination at all of the content moral principles will have."<sup>35</sup> This feature is necessary for the concept of morality in this study to distinguish it from "private ideals or sectarian codes not meant to apply to everybody."<sup>36</sup> Some could have such a restrictive point of view of morality that it would be applicable only to a certain group. The Christian ethic as well as various secular ethics are extended to everyone.

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<sup>33</sup>G. J. Warnock, Contemporary Moral Philosophy (London: MacMillan, 1967), p. 67.

<sup>34</sup>Little and Twiss, "Basic Terms in the Study of Religious Ethics," p. 57.

<sup>35</sup>Graber, "Morality and Religion," p. 12.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

(3) Ethics is overriding. Graber says,

To say that moral principles are "overriding" is to say that no principle is moral unless it ought to take precedence over all other sorts of principles (i.e. custom, prudential considerations, personal considerations, even specifically religious duties) when and if they come into conflict with it.<sup>37</sup>

It might be objected that the moralities of such thinkers as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche do not constitute moralities since they argue that morality is to be "suspended" or "trans-valued" or gone "beyond." However, Graber suggests that even these systems constitute moralities since they exemplify all three traits of morality.

In both the case of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, an action-guide is put forward that is (a) conceived as the standard for regulating all behavior, including conduct towards other persons; (b) proposed for public adoption (else why would books be written justifying the standard?); and (c) judged to take rightful precedence over all other considerations, including the dictates of those standards that the authors identify with 'morality' (in their use of this term).<sup>38</sup>

This concludes the attempt at some clarification of the most complex notions in this study, "religion," "secularism," and "ethics." Many other clarifications will be made later in the course of this study.

#### Plan of the Remainder of this Work

The remaining part of this study divides into five chapters. In Chapter II, I discuss the different senses in which it has been claimed that ethics is dependent on religion. Chapters III, IV, and V concern the secularist's

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

general claim that religious ethics cannot be defended. I argue in Chapter III that there are good grounds on which one can challenge Nielsen's claim that the first horn of the Euthyphro dilemma (God commands x because it is right [good]) results in standards of right and wrong which are logically independent of God's will. In Chapters IV and V, I discuss the secularist's objections based on the second horn of the Euthyphro dilemma (x is right [or good] because God commands it). In Chapter IV, I discuss the secularist's linguistic claim that it is false to say that any ethical judgment can be defined or analyzed by any theological judgment and his logical claim that one cannot derive evaluative statements from purely factual statements. In Chapter V, I evaluate two additional objections by the secularist based on the second horn of the Euthyphro dilemma. The first of these is couched in the question, "Why obey God's commands?" and the second concerns the charge that God's commands are arbitrary. The general outcome of Chapters III, IV, and V is that the secularist claim that religious ethics cannot be successfully developed and defended can be challenged and a theological definist analysis of ethical terms is possible.

The final chapter of this study will consist of a sketch of the directions my future research will take concerning secular value theory, secular moral obligation theory, and my own development of the view that to claim knowledge of certain value considerations such as the

purpose of life and moral obligation principles, one must hold that they have a religious heritage.

## CHAPTER II

### SENSES IN WHICH ETHICS IS CLAIMED TO BE DEPENDENT ON RELIGION

#### Some Preliminary Remarks

Although the thesis is often asserted that ethics is dependent on religion, the various senses in which it is dependent are rarely formulated in a clear and precise way.<sup>1</sup> Below, I distinguish six forms of the dependence thesis: (1) historical or genetic, (2) psychological, (3) epistemological, (4) ontological, (5) linguistic, and (6) logical. It will be helpful in clarifying these forms if we make some brief distinctions at the beginning of this chapter between terms or concepts on the one hand and judgments or propositions on the other. For our purposes, the following distinctions by Frankena will be adopted:<sup>2</sup>

- A. Ethical terms or concepts like "good," "bad," "right," "wrong," "ought," "obligation," "virtue," etc.
- B. Religious or theological terms or concepts like "God," "immortal," "the Atonement," "the will of God," "divine forgiveness," etc.

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<sup>1</sup>The following classification of the various forms of the dependence thesis follow closely (though not in the same order) Graber's treatment in his "Morality and Religion," pp. 19-48. Consider also Frankena's "Public Education and the Good Life," pp. 421-25 for some excellent remarks on the different forms of the dependence thesis.

<sup>2</sup>Frankena, MLDR, p. 297.

- C. Ethical judgments like
  - "We ought to love and worship God"
  - "We ought to love our neighbor as ourselves"
  - "The good is communion with God"
  - "Suffering is evil"
  - "It is wrong to kill"
  - "It is right to keep promises"
  - Etc.
- D. Religious or theological beliefs or propositions like
  - "There is a God"
  - "Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God"
  - "Jesus of Nazareth atoned for our sins"
  - "God loves and forgives us"
  - "Our souls are immortal"
  - "God commands us not to kill"
  - Etc.

### Historical or Genetic Dependence

It is held that ethics may be historically or genetically dependent on religion. This is the claim that the elements of the ethical sphere are dependent on the elements of the religious sphere for their origin and/or development in history. This is maintained by those who argue for example that our democratic morality is a result of the Christian religion. This form of the dependence thesis can take different forms. (1) It may take the form that there would have been no ethical principles had it not been for religion. Thus, there must be some type of necessary connection between the ethical sphere and the religious sphere. (2) A less general claim may be maintained as Graber suggests.

It may be only some one or two central elements in morality, such as emphasis on motives or methods of self-discipline that are taken to owe their origin to religion; or it may be held that one particular sphere of morality (e.g. capitalistic ideals for economic action)

owes its development to religion .<sup>3</sup> . . while other spheres may be of independent origin.

In sum, the historical or genetic thesis claims that: (1) the ethical sphere originated and/or developed in history, and (2) the religious sphere exercised an indispensable influence on the development of the ethical sphere.

### Psychological Dependence

It may be held that ethics is dependent on religion in a psychological sense. This is the claim "that the motivation to be moral presupposes certain religious or theological beliefs."<sup>4</sup> Graber points out that this thesis may take several forms. It may take the form that ethical principles would never come to be believed without religious considerations to serve as motivation. In addition to belief are psychological attitudes, motives, dispositions and actions, any and all of which might be claimed to be psychologically dependent on religion. The religious side "might include any items that could serve as motivating factors, such as beliefs, attitudes, experiences or aims."<sup>5</sup> This may be the thesis that Nielsen refers to when he entertains the theologian's suggestion that "we ought to do what God wills because God will punish us if we do not obey

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<sup>3</sup>Grabers, "Morality and Religion," p. 45.

<sup>4</sup>Frankena, "Public Education and the Good Life," p. 421.

<sup>5</sup>Grabers, "Morality and Religion," p. 43.

him."<sup>6</sup> Thus, the only motivation for doing x (a moral principle) where x is what God wills would be a theological belief in hell (the means and place where the one so motivated would be eternally punished).

It should be kept in mind that the psychological dependence thesis, like other forms of the dependence thesis, may be asserted in different degrees. (1) It might be argued that all people require religious motivation to be moral. If this means that no one would ever have any motivation to adhere to ethical principles unless he were motivated by religious considerations, this obviously is not the case. Many have been moved to do the moral thing by considerations which are non-religious. Some might be motivated out of considerations simply for peace and stability in society. It seems clear that many non-religious people (even atheists) do the moral thing. (2) One might hold that all people would require religious motivation some of the time (i.e., in situations of especially strong temptation). (3) It might be asserted that only some people require religious motivation to be moral. An example of this is Marx's view that "religion is the opiate of the people" which I take to mean that religion is a means of motivating the masses to act in such a way that would be conducive to social stability. The set of moral principles requiring

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<sup>6</sup>Nielsen, Ethics, p. 4. This is also the thesis Robinson attacks when he notes that religion does not furnish the only cause for morality. An Atheist's Values, pp. 133-40.

religious motivation may vary. It may be held that only some moral principles require religious motivation or that all moral action requires religious motivation.

Graber points out that the latter view of the psychological dependence thesis has important apologetic consequences. "The psychological dependence thesis entails that the only successful course which will lead people to act morally is to instill in them the proper religious beliefs or attitudes."<sup>7</sup> A failure to instill in them religious views can only result in a lack of moral conviction. This is precisely Trueblood's point when he notes that the events and experiences of the twentieth century constitute "a great body of evidence . . . of the moral decay that follows a loss of theistic conviction."<sup>8</sup> Though I shall not have much to say about this dependence thesis in the present work, in my future research I shall hold to a sufficient-condition form of this dependence thesis that religion is a very important source of moral motivation but that there may be alternative sources for moral action.

#### Epistemological Dependence

Another form the dependence thesis might take is the claim that ethics is epistemologically dependent on religion, i.e. we could never come to a knowledge of ethical

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<sup>7</sup> Graber, "Morality and Religion," p. 45

<sup>8</sup> D. E. Trueblood, The Predicament of Modern Man (New York: Harper Bros., 1944), pp. 56-57.

principles without going through the domain of religion. Thus, knowledge of ultimate ethical principles is dependent on certain religious considerations such as: (1) general revelation (aspects of the world and its nature interpreted as divine revelation), (2) special revelations (the record of the Bible, the Book of Mormon, Papal bulls, traditions, etc.), or (3) certain religious experiences including dreams, visions, and the conscience (viewed as a particular datum of experience through which God has disclosed himself to rational beings).

The claim is made that knowledge of ethical principles is dependent on religious considerations (as I just outlined) and that without religion there can be no knowledge of ethics. Frankena holds that such a view cannot be sustained and furnishes as proof the following:

As St. Paul said, even "the Gentiles which have not the [revealed] law--are a law unto themselves, "having the [moral] law written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness."<sup>9</sup>

In response to this I quote Romans 2:14, 15a delineating the various senses of law.

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law [revealed law], do by nature the things contained in the law [revealed law], these, having not the law [revealed law], are a law [moral law] unto themselves; which show the work of the law [revealed law] written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness . . . .

I differ with Frankena concerning his qualification

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<sup>9</sup>Frankena, "Public Education and the Good Life," p. 425.

of law. Although the word "law" in this passage is used to refer to both the revealed law and the moral law, Frankena has not appropriately delineated the senses in his quotation. This is not a major difficulty since I agree with Frankena that Paul's statement does refer to both a revealed law and a moral law. My disagreement with Frankena concerns only at which point in the passage Paul speaks of the moral law. Nevertheless, Frankena maintains that this passage supports the view that knowledge of ethical principles is not dependent on knowledge of a religious sphere, and I would not agree.

A theologian might argue that this statement does not show that there can be knowledge of moral principles which is not dependent on religion because the conscience itself is a datum by which God discloses himself to all his rational creatures. Frankena might say to this that even granting that the conscience is taken as a kind of voice imposing certain moral obligations in response to a moral law that one's acceptance of a given ethical principle (based on the conscience) might be based on a (secular) rationally acceptable authority who did not explain to him the theological background of the conscience; thus, it might still be said that he knows the principle and this knowledge is not directly or immediately dependent on religious considerations. Concerning this claim, it should be noted that it is epistemologically dependent on the word of the authority

which must trace back eventually "to a direct rational justification of the principle--and this, by hypothesis, depends on religion."<sup>10</sup> Therefore, since one's knowledge of the ethical principle depends on the word of the authority, and that criterion is epistemologically dependent on religion, it may be concluded that one's knowledge itself is dependent on religion.

Frankena calls attention to other forms of morality (such as Bradley's "my station and its duties" or Bergson's "closed morality") which have no theological background whatsoever and contends that knowledge of these forms of morality is not dependent on religion.<sup>11</sup> To this list I might add the secular moralities under consideration in this study--Frankena's mixed deontological system, Nielsen's consequentialist morality or Robinson's morality based on his principle of counter misery. One response to this could be an attempt to show that justification of ethical principles (secular or religious) must include an appeal to a theological background since such terms as "ought" are to be defined in theistic terms. A discussion of this will have to wait until Chapter IV.

Graber observes that the epistemological dependence thesis has important apologetic consequences.

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<sup>10</sup>This statement as well as the reasoning in this paragraph is from Graber's "Morality and Religion," p. 40.

<sup>11</sup>Frankena, "Public Education and the Good Life," p. 425.

If it is true that knowledge of moral principles is impossible without some religious warrant, then one can continue to claim that he has knowledge of moral principles only if he grants the status of <sup>12</sup>knowledge to the religious evidence that warrants them.

### Ontological Dependence

The dependence thesis may take the form of an ontological relation between the elements of ethics and those of religion. This thesis is exemplified in the familiar Thomist doctrine that everything (including morality) depends upon God for its continued existence. A corollary to this is the Thomist view that the universe would self-destruct if God withheld his sustaining power. The Catholic philosopher-theologian Dietrich von Hildebrand holds to an ontological dependence thesis when he says "morality as such essentially presupposes God's existence."<sup>13</sup>

The ontological relation between ethics and religion might find support in some biblical passages. Speaking of Christ, the Apostle Paul says, "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). Again in reference to Christ the writer of Hebrews says, "He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power" (Hebrews 1:3). If by Christ all things are sustained, then

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<sup>12</sup>Graber, "Morality and Religion," p. 42.

<sup>13</sup>Dietrich von Hildebrand, Ethics (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1953), p. 455.

ethical principles could not continue to exist without the existence of God.

A form of the ontological dependence thesis might be found in those thinkers who want to avoid the possibility of anything existing independently of God. Thus, Ralph Cudworth claims that Descartes held the dependence thesis because "if the natures and essences of things should not depend upon the will of God, it would follow from hence, that something that was not God was independent of God."<sup>14</sup>

### Linguistic Dependence

The crucial issue concerning the relationship between morality and religion is whether morality is linguistically or logically (which will be discussed next) dependent on religion. The linguistic dependence thesis in its most natural form is the claim that the terms and concepts of ethics are to be defined (or analyzed) by reference to those of religion.<sup>15</sup> The claim of this thesis is that

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<sup>14</sup>Ralph Cudworth, "Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality," in Divine Command Morality, ed. by Janine Marie Idziak (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), p. 166.

<sup>15</sup>This is the thesis Frankena has reference to in his consideration of claim 1 in his article "Is Morality Logically Dependent on Religion?" It is also treated by Nielsen though not explicitly in his reference to A. C. Ewing's objection that if "being obligatory" just means "willed by God" then it is senseless to ask why God willed one thing rather than another. See Ewing's "The Autonomy of Ethics," in Prospect for Metaphysics, ed. by Ian T. Ramsey (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1961), p. 39; quoted in Nielsen, Ethics, p. 3.

the terms and concepts of ethics acquire meaning by reference to religious terms and propositions as in the view that "x ought to do action y" has the same meaning as "God commands x to do y."

Two distinctions should be made concerning this relationship between ethical terms or concepts on the one hand and religious terms and concepts on the other. (1) Religious terms and concepts may be taken to be both a necessary and sufficient condition for the meaning of an ethical term in those cases in which the religious term specifies a complete analysis of the moral term. (2) Religious terms and concepts may be taken to be a necessary condition (but not by itself a sufficient condition) for the meaning of an ethical term in those cases in which a complete analysis of the moral term includes one or more non-religious terms as in the proposal that "x ought to do action y" is defined as "God commands x to do y and y benefits mankind."

As an example of (2), Graber calls attention to William Paley's familiar statement "Virtue is 'the doing good to mankind, in obedience to the will of God, and for the sake of everlasting happiness.'" "Obedience to the will of God" (the religious element) is necessary but not sufficient for the linguistic analysis of "virtue" (the ethical element).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Graber, "Morality and Religion," p. 21.

An example of (1), where religious terms and concepts constitute both a necessary and a sufficient condition for the meaning of an ethical term, is found in Carl Henry who seems to be making a linguistic claim when he says "the good is what God does and wills."<sup>17</sup> Not only does he hold to a theological definism, he makes it clear that "what God wills" (the religious element) is both a necessary and sufficient condition for "the good" (the ethical element) when he says, "The God of Hebrew-Christian revelation is the ground of ethics. He is the supreme rule of right. He defines the whole content of morality by his own revealed will."<sup>18</sup> Henry seems to be asserting both a linguistic form and a logical form (the view that ethical judgments are derived from theological ones) of the dependence thesis. I am not sure which thesis (if any) takes precedence in Henry's thinking since he seems to speak of both theses interchangeably. He quotes L. A. Garrard to the effect that the will of God constitutes the foundation of ethics and then says Garrard's "judgment is a pertinent reminder" of the view that "the good is what God does and wills."<sup>19</sup> In the next paragraph, Henry quotes Garrard again to say "God is the ultimate source of all moral obligation."<sup>20</sup> Although

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<sup>17</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, Christian Personal Ethics (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), p. 209.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 211. My emphasis.      <sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>20</sup> L. A. Garrard, Duty and the Will of God (Oxford: Blackwell, 1938), p. 58; quoted in Henry, Christian Personal Ethics, p. 209.

this statement could be hinting at the historical as well as the ontological forms of the dependence thesis, it seems that it should be understood as a statement supporting the logical dependence thesis. The possibilities of interpretation of Henry could be: (1) he makes no distinction between the logical and the linguistic thesis; (2) he distinguishes the two and his linguistic thesis presupposes the logical thesis; or (3) he distinguishes the two and his logical thesis presupposes the linguistic thesis.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps a clearer example of asserting that religious terms and concepts constitute both a necessary and sufficient condition for the meaning of an ethical term is Karl Barth's view of ethics which seems to take a linguistic-logical form. He notes,

that theological ethics has to accept the fact that it must not believe in the possibility and reality of a general moral enquiry and reply which are originally and ultimately independent of the grace and command of God, which are not touched or affected by them and to that extent stand inflexible and inviolate in themselves . . . . .

. . . . . when it turns to this general moral enquiry and reply, it will do so with the understanding that it has its origin and meaning from the divine command which objectively applies to man, whatever attitude man may take to it. . . .

. . . . . Its starting-point is that all ethical truth is enclosed in the command of the grace of God--no matter whether this is understood as rational or historical, secular or

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<sup>21</sup>More will be said concerning the derivation of the logical thesis from the linguistic thesis under the heading "Logical Dependence."

religious, ecclesiastical or universal ethics--social truth.<sup>22</sup>

From this statement, it seems that Barth is making the following claims: (1) the religious ethicist does not believe in the possibility of moral enquiry independent of a religious sphere; (2) ethics is logically dependent on religion; (3) ethical terms and concepts (religious or otherwise) are dependent on religious propositions for their meaning.

Although Paley, Henry, Barth and others make it fairly clear that they hold to a theological definism, others are not so clear. An example of this is Paul Ramsey's statement, "God has something to do with the very meaning of obligation; he is no merely external threat standing behind morality."<sup>23</sup>

It would be interesting to note some examples of those who assert the logical dependence thesis without (as Henry and Barth do) asserting the linguistic dependence thesis. Graber calls attention to three. He mentions some religious ethicists who hold to a logical dependence thesis who do not combine it with a linguistic dependence thesis. Hastings Rashdall holds that ethical judgments logically entail that an infinite mind exists. Thomas Aquinas, a definist regarding the term "law," does not make the term

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<sup>22</sup>Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936-61), 2; Part 2: 522, 523, 527. My emphasis.

<sup>23</sup>Paul Ramsey, Basic Christian Ethics (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), p. 1.

dependent on religion for its meaning, since he includes no theological concepts in his analysis. Finally, he mentions Patterson Brown who holds that God's will is the criterion of right and wrong--not the meaning of the terms "right" and "wrong."<sup>24</sup>

Before leaving the linguistic dependence thesis, the apologetic force of this thesis should be noted. When one uses ethical terms such as "good," "right," and "ought," one assumes that these terms are meaningful. Given the linguistic dependence thesis, religious terms and concepts are equivalent in meaning with ethical terms and concepts. If they are equivalent in meaning, they are equivalent in meaningfulness; thus, for one committed to the linguistic form of the dependence thesis, his belief in the meaningfulness of moral terms commits him to the view that religious terms are meaningful.<sup>25</sup>

#### Logical Dependence

The logical form of the dependence thesis in general is that ethical judgments are dependent on theological judgments for their justification. Concerning the examples of Henry and Barth, we saw that although they could be classified as examples of the linguistic dependence thesis, it was not clear as to how they related their linguistic claim to

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<sup>24</sup>Graber, "Morality and Religion," p. 23

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 27-28.

their logical claim (if in fact they are making a logical claim). My conclusion (and the reason I gave them as examples) is that they are forms of the linguistic dependence thesis. Further, they assert logical dependence but their assertion is in some way grounded in their linguistic claim or identified with it. Thus, they make a linguistic claim and hint to a logical claim.

Graber points out that one form of the logical dependence thesis follows from the definist view of the linguistic dependence thesis. This has to do with the view that all logical relations are analytic, i.e. they depend entirely on the meanings of the terms contained in the sentences related. He notes that the argument for this is along the following lines:

Theological definism claims that the meaning of moral terms cannot be specified in non-theological terms, so it follows that propositions containing moral terms are not logically entailed by any proposition or set of propositions that does not contain at least one theological term, and, hence, that no argument for a moral principle can be valid unless its premisses contain at least one theological term.<sup>26</sup>

Graber points out that this argument is faced with problems and the doctrine upon which it is based, that all logical relations are analytic, is rejected (on good grounds) by a great number of philosophers.

He forms a more plausible line of inference (which is the converse of the above doctrine) that all relations of

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

meaning give rise to logical relations and proposes the following:

If . . . this is conjoined with the theological definist claim that moral terms include theological terms as part or all of their meaning, it follows that every statement containing moral terms logically entails one or more statements containing theological terms.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, if "x ought to do action y" is defined as "God commands x to do y" the moral statement ("x ought to do action y") logically entails the religious statement ("God commands x to do y"). Graber notes that such construction "is equivalent to saying that moral statements depend on theological statements for their truth, since this makes it impossible for a given moral statement to be true unless the corresponding theological statement is true."<sup>28</sup> He concludes that this line of reference is free of the obstructions to the former and affords grounds to speak of a linguistic-logical thesis as a single unit.

I now suggest an example of a religious ethicist who makes a logical dependence claim and although hinting to a linguistic claim does not presuppose one. Dietrich von Hildebrand observes that in the categorical character of moral values

we discover that only the existence of a personal God who is the Infinite Goodness can fulfill the message of moral values or can ultimately justify the validity of this obligation. . . . We do not want to reduce all moral obligations to positive divine commandments. But we want to say that moral values only possess the ultimate reality which justifies the gravity of the moral

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 28-29

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

order, of its majestic obligation, if they are ultimately rooted and embodied in the Absolute Person of God. . . . we must say that if there were no God, all moral values, the moral law itself, would be deprived of their indispensable metaphysical basis.<sup>29</sup>

In this quotation, Von Hildebrand makes various claims concerning the relationship of religion to morality. It seems evident that much of what he says is a claim for ontological dependence for without God there would be no "metaphysical basis" for morality. It seems also clear that his statement about validity is a logical claim. What is not clear is Von Hildebrand's remarks concerning whether he is making a linguistic claim and if he is to what extent he makes the claim. He says, "We do not want to reduce all moral obligations to positive divine commandments." Does this statement allow for the reduction of some moral obligations to positive divine commandments? If this were answered affirmatively, must some of these moral obligations contain any non-theological terms or concepts? If so, he is claiming that religion is a necessary condition for the meaning of a moral term but not a sufficient condition. Does he allow that theological terms specify a complete analysis of moral terms, thus holding to the view that religion is both a necessary and sufficient condition for morality? It is not evident exactly what claims Von Hildebrand would make concerning the linguistic dependence thesis.

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<sup>29</sup>Von Hildebrand, Ethics, p. 456.

Though his claims concerning linguistic dependence are not as clear as we would like, it appears that he holds to the logical view that ethical judgments can be derived from theological ones. In this case, we might ask whether all moral obligations depend logically for their justification on theological judgments, or whether only some depend logically on religion--allowing the possibility that others exist independently of God? At first sight, it seems that Von Hildebrand would hold to the latter based on the distinction he makes between Christian morality and natural morality. The latter refers to that domain of morality which may be philosophically explored apart from Revelation. He observes further as follows:

Christian ethics in our terminology is, on the contrary, the philosophical exploration of the totality of morality, including the natural moral law and all moral and morally relevant values accessible to a noble pagan, as well as the morality embodied in the sacred humanity of Christ and in those men and women who have been transformed into Christ--saints.<sup>30</sup>

From this it seems that although he speaks of two different moralities, he makes the claim that there is really only one morality--Christian morality. His claim might be that at one time there was a natural morality which no longer exists. Evidence for this is in a footnote when he remarks, "Such a morality (natural) can no longer exist in the Christian era, and in a world penetrated by Christian ideas."<sup>31</sup> Yet, he makes the further claim that Christian

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 454.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

morality is simultaneously the fulfillment of all natural morality. Once Christian morality has been disclosed in our minds, we understand that all natural morality is a prelude to Christian morality, and that everything which is to be found in natural morality is found on a higher level and in its ultimate meaning only in the light of Christian morality.<sup>32</sup>

Concerning the justification of all morality, Von Hildebrand says as quoted on page 54 that "only the existence of a personal God . . . can justify the validity of this (moral) obligation." Based on this, Von Hildebrand seems to hold that: (1) there are two different moralities--Christian and natural; and (2) the natural is only fully understood and justified in the light of Christian morality. Thus, my conclusion is that Von Hildebrand takes all moral obligations to be dependent on theological judgments for their justification.<sup>33</sup> I further conclude that although Von Hildebrand hints to a linguistic dependence thesis, his logical dependence thesis does not presuppose a linguistic dependence.

Graber points out that the apologetic force of the logical dependence thesis entails that theological judgments must be meaningful and justified if ethical ones are to be

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., pp. 454-55.

<sup>33</sup>Graber in "Morality and Religion," p. 33 cites the following thinkers who make this move: Mitchell, Law, Morality and Religion in a Secular Society (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 108; George F. Thomas, Christian Ethics and Moral Philosophy (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), pp. 388-93; William Lillie, An Introduction to Ethics (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., University Paperbacks, 1961), pp. 303-8.

justified. No false or meaningless judgment can function as the premise of a sound argument or be entailed by a true proposition.<sup>34</sup>

#### Some Concluding Remarks

This concludes our discussion of the various senses in which it may be claimed that ethics is dependent on religion. I shall refer to the various dependence theses throughout this work. Chapters III, IV, and V are particularly concerned with metaethical issues involved in the theological derivist view I hold where "x ought to do action y" means at least in part "God commands x to do y." Thus, most of our attention will focus on the linguistic and logical dependence theses. In the concluding chapter of this study, I shall point out how my future program of research includes other forms of the dependence thesis discussed in this chapter.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

## CHAPTER III

### THE FIRST HORN OF THE EUTHYPHRO DILEMMA

#### Some Preliminary Remarks

Nielsen claims that his first major argument against religious ethics is in his first chapter entitled "Morality and the Will of God" and that this is in its essentials the argument set forth by Plato in his Euthyphro. Nielsen maintains that the argument is "designed to establish that a morality, even a religious morality, cannot simply be based on a belief in God."<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this chapter is to critically analyze his main argument based on the first horn of the Euthyphro dilemma. In this analysis, I shall both clarify and criticize the argument. The procedure concerning both the first horn as well as the second will be to use Nielsen's discussion as a framework by means of which to discover the major objections based on the Euthyphro. During this analysis, remarks will be made concerning Frankena and Robinson where their arguments touch areas of consideration by Nielsen.

The method of analysis in this chapter will involve the following elements of discussion: (1) some general

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<sup>1</sup>Nielsen, Ethics, p. 22.

observations on the Euthyphro, (2) a statement of Nielsen's argument, (3) a response to this argument, and (4) some concluding remarks.

### Some General Observations on the Euthyphro

In the Euthyphro Socrates asks, "Do the gods love piety because it is pious, or is it pious because the gods love it?"<sup>2</sup> The issue in the Euthyphro is whether the feature that determines piety is the fact that the gods love it, or whether piety in itself has some feature which accounts for the fact that the gods love it. Nielsen takes inspiration from the Euthyphro and attempts to build a case demonstrating that any version of a theological definism is impossible. Thus, based on our study of the various dependence theses, Nielsen hopes to show not only that the linguistic dependence thesis (that moral terms include religious terms as part of their meaning) is false but that the logical dependence thesis (that moral terms entail religious terms as part of their meaning) which follows from the linguistic thesis is also false. A theological definist analysis (x ought to do/avoid action y is defined as God commands x to do/avoid action y) is supposed to be impossible because of the insurmountable difficulties generated by the dilemma which Euthyphro himself faced. The general form Socrates' question has been given by contemporary moral philosophers

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<sup>2</sup> Plato, Plato in Twelve Volumes, ed. by G. P. Goold, trans. by Harold North Fowler, vol. 1: Euthyphro Apology Crito Phaedo Phaedrus (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1977).

may be put into the form of a dilemma. Either (1) God commands x because it is right (or good), or (2) it is right (or good) because God commands it. Concerning this dilemma Graber points out that it

certainly does not seem to possess any question-begging presuppositions. It is simply an enumeration of the logically possible alternatives, one or the other of which must (as a matter of logical necessity) be satisfied by any theory of ethics that makes reference to divine commands. Further, it could be established that no such theory is tenable if it could be shown that there are insuperable logical or<sub>3</sub> conceptual difficulties with both these alternatives.

Graber's latter comment is precisely what Nielsen and other secularists attempt on the basis of the Euthyphro dilemma. It is argued that the first horn of the dilemma results in standards of right and wrong which are logically independent of God's will. The consequences of the second horn, it is contended, consist of such difficulties as to warrant the conclusion that a system of ethics which appeals to religion is incoherent.

Graber observes that the "dominant trend in contemporary theology" is to adopt the first horn of Plato's dilemma and "learn to live with the consequent loss of apologetic resources." He notes that Protestant, Catholic, and Jew all take this line and cites respectively the works of Gustafson, D'Arcy, and Jacobs in Outka's and Reeder's Religion and Morality as examples.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Graber, "Critical Bibliography," p. 59.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

Before taking up the negative arguments based on the Euthyphro dilemma, some comments are in order concerning the dilemmatic form of argument and the procedure I shall adopt in responding to Plato's dilemma. A dilemmatic argument consists of a disjunctive proposition followed by two hypothetical propositions each of which has one of the disjuncts as its antecedent. Thus, "Either A is true or B is true and they both cannot be true." But "If A (one of the disjuncts) is true then C is true," and "If B (one of the disjuncts) is true then D is true." Graber observes that "A dilemma becomes 'unpleasant' when the conditional statements purport to show that each of the alternatives has unacceptable consequences."<sup>5</sup> Concerning the contemporary debate between secular and religious ethics, secularists insist that one is forced to choose secular ethics or a god unworthy of respect.

A. N. Prior in his article "Traditional Logic" notes three ways of responding to the dilemmatic argument form:<sup>6</sup> (1) "escaping between the horns," (2) "taking a dilemma by the horns," and (3) "rebutting" a dilemma. (1) involves denying the disjunctive proposition and positing a third

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<sup>5</sup> Idem, "In Defense of a Divine Command Theory of Ethics," American Academy of Religion 43 (March 1975): 64 (hereafter cited as Graber, "In Defense of a Divine Command Theory").

<sup>6</sup> The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1967 ed., s.v. "Logic, Traditional," by A. N. Prior, p. 43.

possibility as a viable alternative. (2) called by Graber, "breaking the horns," "consists in refuting the claim of unacceptable consequences with regard to one or both alternatives by showing either (a) that the claimed consequence does not follow at all or (b) that it is not unacceptable."<sup>7</sup> (3) involves constructing another dilemma based on the same body of facts but leading to a different conclusion.

I shall maintain that either horn of the Euthyphro dilemma can be "taken" by the theologian without involving himself in any of the unacceptable consequences which are cited as presenting fundamental logical or conceptual difficulties. It should be observed that only one opening is needed to escape the Euthyphro dilemma. However, since the thinkers chosen for this study raise objections involving both horns, I shall attempt to "break" both horns. Before engaging in that discussion, it is worth noting a few examples of those who attempt to avoid the dilemma without trying to "break" the horns.

J.R. Lucass tries to avoid the problem by emphasizing the omniscience of God. He compares obedience to God with obedience to human parents and points out that although a parent sometimes lays down rules which transcend the comprehension of their children, they are nonetheless subject

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<sup>7</sup> Graber, "In Defense of a Divine Command Theory, p. 65.

to them. Similarly, although the Christian cannot always comprehend the commands of God, he should consider them as "wise instructions of an infinitely farsighted being" who knows which things are best.<sup>8</sup> Lucass may be referring to the epistemological dependence thesis as having psychological implications. Belief in God's concern for his creatures serves certain psychological attitudes, motives, dispositions, and effects. A major problem with the view of Lucass is that his view does not establish as strong a connection between religion and morality as wanted by most theologians.

MacLagan attempts to escape the Euthyphro dilemma by maintaining the ontological thesis that God is the Moral Law. Although he does not want to hold to an identity relation in the strict sense, he does hold to the linguistic claim that the term "God" can mean nothing different from "moral law." Further, he makes the claim that the moral experience is an index to what is meant by "God."<sup>9</sup> However, he holds that the former is logically prior. This view has the unfortunate implication that we can justify what God commands only after knowing independently what is demanded by the moral experience.

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<sup>8</sup>J. R. Lucass, "Discussion of P. H. Nowell-Smith's 'Morality: Religious and Secular'," in Christian Ethics and Contemporary Philosophy, ed. by Ian T. Ramsey (New York: MacMillan Co., 1966), pp. 129-31.

<sup>9</sup>W. G. MacLagan, The Theological Frontier of Ethics (New York: MacMillan Co., 1961), pp. 81-82.

### Nielsen's Argument Set Forth

The first horn of the Euthyphro dilemma (God commands x because it is right [good]), it is argued, results in standards of right and wrong which are logically independent of God's will.<sup>10</sup> Nielsen makes this objection in different places in his own writings. The earliest statement of this objection I can find among Nielsen's writings is the following:

. . . there is a crucial logical difficulty about basing any morality on religion. This difficulty has been noted and ignored again and again ever since Plato stated it in the Euthyphro. . . . Before we know whether we ought to do x, we must know that what God wills is good. And in order to know that what God wills is good, we would have to judge independently that it is good.<sup>11</sup>

Nielsen modifies and extends his argument in a later article entitled "Some Remarks on the Independence of Morality from

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<sup>10</sup>This philosophical objection has been made by various thinkers. For the purposes of this study, I shall concentrate on Nielsen as a representative of this line of critique. He serves well as a representative since he is one of the most articulate spokesmen for a line of reasoning adhered to by many analytical philosophers. Consider the following as just a few additional examples of this objection. P. H. Nowell-Smith, "Morality: Religious and Secular," Rationalist Annual (1961); reprinted in Divine Command Morality, ed. by Janine Marie Idziak (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), p. 274; Keith Campbell, "Patterson Brown on God and Evil," Mind 74 (October 1965): 582-84; Antony Flew, God and Philosophy, (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1966), pp. 109-11; Ronald W. Hepburn, Christianity and Paradox, pp. 42-43, 130-31; Thomas C. Mayberry, "God and Moral Authority," The Monist (January 1970): 110.

<sup>11</sup>Kai Nielsen, "Religion, Morality, and Bertrand Russell," The Amherst Review (Spring 1959): 15.

Religion," but adheres to his earlier conclusion that acceptance of a divine command ethics depends on the moral agent's ability to judge independently that what God commands is good. He notes:

Before we know whether we ought to do x, we must know that what God wills is good. And in order to know that what God wills is good, we should have to judge independently that it is good. . . . The moral agent must independently decide that whatever God wills or commands is good.<sup>12</sup>

Later, in Ethics Without God, Nielsen quotes A. C. Ewing as making the same objection.

If it were said . . . that God's commands determined what we ought to do but that these commands were only issued because it was good that they should be or because obedience to them did good, this would still make judgements about the good, at least, independent of the will of God, and we should not have given a definition of all fundamental ethical concepts in terms of God or made ethics dependent on God.<sup>13</sup>

If this is the case, there must be some standard to which God himself is subject. In either case, at least some judgments about what is good, right or obligatory must be based upon a criterion independent of God's will. The conclusion of this according to Ewing and Nielsen is that we have not succeeded in giving a definition of ethical concepts in terms of God or made ethics dependent upon God. Further, it appears likely that all normative judgments could be

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<sup>12</sup> Idem, "Some Remarks on the Independence of Morality from Religion," p. 231.

<sup>13</sup> A. C. Ewing, "The Autonomy of Ethics," p. 39; quoted in Nielsen, Ethics, p. 17.

determined without reference to God being essential to this determination.

Nielsen further argues that the believer must have an understanding of an ethical standard independent of knowledge of God by virtue of the fact that the believer speaks of God as "worthy of worship." He observes as follows:

Morality cannot be based on religion. If anything, the opposite is partly true, for nothing can be God unless he or it is an object worthy of worship and it is our own moral insight that must tell us if anything at all could possibly be worthy of worship.<sup>14</sup>

Although Nielsen does not call specific attention to it, there is another point that might be made to demonstrate that the theologian tacitly admits morality to be logically prior to religion. In the use of the moral argument for the existence of God, the theologian argues from the moral experience of man to the existence of a supreme being. But, it might be claimed that in this line of reasoning the theologian holds that religion is logically dependent on morality rather than morality being logically dependent on religion. Flew makes this point as one of two implications of an ethical standard(s) independent of God's will. The two implications according to Flew are: (1) it gives substantial praise (though not truth) to the claim that God is righteous--but at "the cost of raising the question whether such praise could possibly be well-grounded," and (2) more

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<sup>14</sup>Nielsen, Ethics, p. 17.

importantly, "it abolishes all hope of arguing to the existence of God from the meaning of moral terms."<sup>15</sup>

### A Response to Nielsen's Argument

The above statements from Nielsen and Ewing are sufficient to get before us a major philosophical objection against a theological definist analysis. Nielsen's argument seems to revolve around the following two propositions:

- (1) If A (we can know what God wills is good) then B (judgments about the good are logically independent of God's will).
- (2) If B (judgments about the good are logically independent of God's will) then C (ethics are not logically dependent on God).

In proposition (1), Nielsen makes the epistemological claim that if we can know what God wills is good, then any judgment about the good must be logically independent of God's will. This entire proposition is based on Nielsen's own remarks while the consequent of proposition (2) has been supplied as the obvious conclusion Nielsen intends for his reader to draw. Among other reasons, it is obvious from the titles of his own books and articles, e.g., Ethics Without God and "Some Remarks on the Independence of Morality from Religion."

Proposition (2) could be made the major premise of a modus ponens argument with the antecedent of proposition (2) functioning as the minor premise and the consequent

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<sup>15</sup> Flew, God and Philosophy, p. 110.

functioning as the conclusion. Based on the preceding discussion, support for the minor premise (B--we have the ability to judge independently that whatever God wills is good) is found in the following: (a) We do make value judgments independent of God's commands; (b) the theologian presupposes a prior ethical standard to even speak of God as "worthy of worship"; and (c) the theologian admits a prior ethical standard in his use of the moral argument for the existence of God. If it can be shown that the major premise is false, then Nielsen's conclusion is unwarranted.

Ewing's argument takes a form similar to Nielsen's. It seems to revolve around the following two propositions:

- (1) If D (God commands x because it is good or does good) then B (judgments about the good are logically independent of God's will).
- (2) If B (judgments about the good are logically independent of God's will) then C (ethics are not logically dependent on God).

Proposition (2) is the same as proposition (2) in Nielsen's argument. The remarks I made about (2) in Nielsen's argument apply equally to Ewing's argument.

Thus far, the arguments appear straightforward enough but closer examination reveals some ambiguity. Ewing (and Nielsen although not as explicitly) claims that a non-theological analysis of non-moral value terms warrants the conclusion that "we should not have given a definition of all fundamental ethical concepts in terms of God or made

ethics dependent on God."<sup>16</sup> This is the statement upon which the consequent of the major premise in both Ewing's and Nielsen's argument is based. Graber notes that the "statement is ambiguous due to the absence of a quantifier."<sup>17</sup> Ewing does use the quantifier "all" in the first part of his statement but does not in the second part. Concerning this point, Graber comments as follows:

It is not clear whether he means to say: (a) "We should not have made all of ethics dependent on God"--i.e. that we have left some one or more parts independent of theology; or whether he means, rather, to say: (b) "We should not have made any of ethics dependent on God"--i.e. that no necessary connection to theology has been established for any part of ethics at all.<sup>18</sup>

I shall argue that whether the consequent of the secularist's major premise is taken as (a) or (b), it does not warrant the conclusion that a theological definist analysis is unwarranted.

#### The Claim of Selective Independence

First, consider the claim that "if B (judgments about the good are logically independent of God's will) then C(a) (we should not have made all ethics dependent on God)." If the major premise is to be interpreted this way, then it is compatible with a theological definist analysis. Concerning this, both Nielsen and Ewing may be criticized on at

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<sup>16</sup>Ewing, "The Autonomy of Ethics," p. 39.

<sup>17</sup>Graber, "Morality and Religion," p. 86.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

least two points: (1) they fail to acknowledge that there are a variety of ethical terms; and (2) they fail to acknowledge that one or more of these terms may be given a theological analysis while others may be given a non-theological analysis.

Concerning (1), it may be observed that there are at least four different types of terms in the general field of ethics: (a) moral obligation terms, (b) non-moral obligation terms, (c) moral value terms, and (d) non-moral value terms. Moral obligation terms function in theories of moral obligation (where one speaks about actions or kinds of actions) and include such terms as "ought," "duty," "obligation," "should," "must," "right," and "wrong," as they occur in such expressions as, "one ought to do x," "one has a duty to do x," "one has an obligation to do x," "one should do x," "one must do x," "x is the right thing to do," and "x is the wrong thing to do." Non-moral obligation terms include the above terms but are used in judgments which have no interest in moral philosophy. Examples of such judgments are "you ought to buy a new car," "you should go to the concert," etc. Moral value terms function in theories of moral value (where one speaks not about actions or kinds of action but about persons, motives, intentions, etc.) and include such terms as "good," "bad," "desirable," "blameworthy," and "worthwhile" as they occur in such expressions as, "he is a good man," "he is a bad man," "his traits

of character are desirable ones," "he is blameworthy for what he did," and "his pursuit is worthwhile." Non-moral value terms function in theories of non-moral value (where one speaks not merely about actions, persons, motives, etc., but about all sorts of things such as cars, paintings, experiences, etc.) and include such terms as "good," "bad," and "desirable" as they occur in such expressions as, "that is a good car," "that is a bad painting," and "he enjoyed a desirable experience."<sup>19</sup>

I pointed out in (2) on the preceding page that Nielsen and Ewing fail to acknowledge that one or more of the above terms in the family of ethical terms may be given a theological analysis while others may be given a non-theological analysis. The possibility exists that terms which function in theories of moral value and/or non-moral value are both linguistically and logically independent of religion, while moral obligation terms are logically dependent on religion. Nielsen and Ewing both presuppose that non-moral value terms must be analyzed with respect to religious concepts. (Note their reference to "good" in their statements.)

I want to note at least three examples of different ethicists who offer a theological analysis of moral obligation terms only, without necessarily committing themselves

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<sup>19</sup>Frankena, Ethics, pp. 8-10.

to a theological analysis of other terms in the family of ethical terms.

The first example is Adams' "modified divine command theory of ethical wrongness."<sup>20</sup> According to Adams' theory, "when a believer says something is (ethically) wrong, at least part of what he means is that the action in question is contrary to God's will or commands."<sup>21</sup> Thus, Adams maintains that not all of the religious person's value concepts depend upon God and his will, "but only his ability to appraise actions (and possible actions) in terms of their relation to a superhuman, nonnaturally objective, law."<sup>22</sup> It is logically possible to hold to a standard of non-moral value such as the standard by which the believer measures how some things affect human welfare independent of a theological standard of obligation. Valuations of the former standard "are not judgments of ethical right and wrong and do not of themselves imply judgments of ethical right and wrong."<sup>23</sup> Such judgments would include those judgments (referred to by Nielsen and Ewing) about the good independent of God's will. On the contrary, judgments on the basis of Adams' theory of ethical wrongness are judgments of ethical right and wrong and are dependent on God. Thus, on Adams' view, one part of ethics (his theory of ethical

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Merrihew Adams, "A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness," in Religion and Morality, ed. by Gene Outka and John P. Reeder, Jr. (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1973), pp. 330-34.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 334.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 331.

wrongness) is dependent on theology, while other ethical concepts are independent of theology.

The second example is Graber's theory of obligation which is stated as follows: "'one ought to do (avoid) x' means (in part) 'God commands that one do (avoid) x.'"<sup>24</sup> At least two features about Graber's theory should be noted: (1) Graber's theological analysis is represented as a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the application of the ethical term ("ought") defined. This aspect of necessity warrants the conclusion that morality is dependent on religion since it "is necessity that makes for dependence."<sup>25</sup> (2) Graber's theological analysis offers a definition of one specific moral term ("ought") and it does not follow that the theological analysis of this one term means that all ethical terms in the family of ethical terms (outlined above) must contain references to theological concepts in their analysis.

Graber restricts the claim of linguistic and logical dependence on theology to the domain of moral obligation terms and allows the possibility that moral and non-moral value terms are both linguistically and logically independent of theological concepts.<sup>26</sup> Graber's theory of

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<sup>24</sup> Graber, "Morality and Religion, p. 52.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 16. See also p. 52 for some remarks relative to this point.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 86-87.

obligation, like Adams' theory of ethical wrongness, is made dependent on God. Reference must be made to theology to explain, defend, or derive notions of obligation and ethical wrongness.

The third example is Locke's moral theory outlined in Book II of his Essay Concerning Human Understanding, chapters 20, 21, and 28. I mention Locke because both Adams and Graber credit Locke as a well-known philosopher attempting to do what they themselves outline; namely, to combine a non-theological theory of value with a theological theory of obligation. Locke says,

Good and Evil, . . . are nothing but Pleasure or Pain, or that which occasions or procures Pleasure or Pain to us. Morally good and evil, then, is only the Conformity or Disagreement of our voluntary Actions to some Law, whereby Good or Evil is drawn on us, from the Will and Power of the Law-maker; . . . .<sup>27</sup>

Locke begins his theory by distinguishing three different laws by which actions are judged to be morally good and evil: (1) the divine law, (2) the civil law, and (3) the law of opinion or reputation. Divine law is the measure of sin and duty. Civil law is the measure of crimes and innocence. The law of opinion or reputation is the measure of virtue and vice. According to Locke "virtue" and "vice" are closely connected to the praise and blame of society. The terms "duty" and "sin" are connected with the

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<sup>27</sup> John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, ed. by Peter H. Nidditch (New York: At the Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 351; Book II, Chap. XXVIII, par. 5.

rule of God by which men should govern themselves. Concerning this rule, Locke notes that: (1) God has a right to give a rule--we are his creatures; (2) God has the goodness and wisdom to direct our actions for the best; and (3) God has the power to enforce it by rewards and punishments.

The Divine law . . . is the only true touchstone of moral Rectitude; and, by comparing them to this Law, it is, that Men judge of the most considerable Moral Good or Evil of their Actions; that is, whether, as Duties, or Sins, they are like to procure them happiness, or misery, from the hands of the ALMIGHTY.<sup>28</sup>

In summary, Locke's analysis reveals the following: (1) By "good" and "evil" is meant (non-theologically) pleasure and pain. (2) By "moral good" and "moral evil" is meant that our actions conform or disagree with some law by which the moral agent stands to be rewarded or punished. (3) By "duty" and "sin" (the most important type of good and evil) is meant (theologically) actions which are apt to cause happiness or misery (non-theologically speaking) as they agree or disagree with the rule of God.

The three theories outlined above (although having shades of difference) have two basic features in common: (1) They all acknowledge that there are a variety of ethical terms; and (2) they all acknowledge that at least some of these ethical terms may be given a theological analysis while others may be given a non-theological one. Neither Nielsen nor Ewing acknowledge this. If the consequent of the major premise under consideration (ethics are not

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 352; Book II, Chap. XXVIII, par. 8.

dependent on God) is interpreted to say that we should not have made all ethics dependent on God, then it should be clear from the examples just outlined that the premise is compatible with a theological definist analysis of some ethical terms.

### The Claim of Total Independence

Second, consider the claim that "if B (judgments about the good are logically independent of God's will) then C(b) (we should not have made any of ethics dependent on God)." This premise constitutes one of three premises in Ewing's argument which may be set out in the form of a hypothetical syllogism.

- (1) If D (God commands x because it is good or does good) then B (judgments about the good are logically independent of God's will).
- (2) If B (judgments about the good are logically independent of God's will) then C(b) (we should not have made any of ethics logically dependent on God).
- (3) If D (God commands x because it is good or does good) then C(b) (we should not have made any of ethics dependent on God).

Ewing's argument requires that the consequent (C(b)) be entailed by the antecedent B; otherwise, premise 2 of the argument is false and the argument unsound. Consider this inference. Premise (2) is simply the claim that a non-theological analysis of non-moral value terms warrants the conclusion that no necessary connection to theology has been established for any part of the ethical sphere. I would

simply point out (as already observed) that it is clearly possible to join a theory of non-moral value (independent of theology) with a theory of moral obligation (dependent on theology) without any logical difficulties. Thus, one area of ethics (theory of obligation) is dependent on religion while another area (theory of non-moral value) is not dependent on religion. If this is the case, then Ewing's claim that there can be no necessary connection between religion and anything in the ethical sphere is unwarranted.

Ewing might abandon this argument and attempt to derive C(b) from D directly. Consider the inference of C(b) from D. Following Graber's line of reasoning, it should be observed that D (God commands x because it is good or does good) is ambiguous itself due to the ambiguity in the question Ewing poses to generate D. The question is "Why should God command one thing rather than another?" Graber says that this question could be taken in one of two ways: (1) a request to know God's motives, or (2) a request to know what justification God had for commanding one thing (x because it is good or does good) rather than another (with other consequences). (1) If the former interpretation is taken, a theological definist can supply an answer which has no logical difficulties. God's motivation could be that he commands one thing rather than another because the one thing is good or does good and God himself is benevolent. This is not inconsistent with a theological definist analysis because

the standard of goodness is made independent of theology, and thus of God's commands. God commands what makes for human happiness, a point which is significant and not inconsistent with a theological definism in attributing the motive of benevolence to God. This is not to say that a theological definist must hold that this is God's motive, but it does not rule out the possibility that this is God's motive.<sup>29</sup>

Further, a theological definist might have reasons for not supplying an answer to Ewing's question at all, but these reasons do not constitute logical difficulties. He might refuse to supply an answer on the basis that: (a) he does not have sufficient evidence to make a judgment concerning God's motives; (b) he can never have sufficient evidence to make a judgment with absolute certainty; and (c) he might think it an impious move for a finite being to ascribe motives to an infinite being. Although there are difficulties here, they are not logical difficulties.<sup>30</sup>

(2) If Ewing's question is interpreted as a request to know a justification for God's commands, then the theologian, according to Ewing is faced with a serious problem. In answer to the question, "Why should God command one thing rather than another?" the theologian might be tempted to respond, "God commands x because it is good or does good."

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<sup>29</sup>Graber, "Morality and Religion," pp. 90-91.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

But, if good is defined as commanded by God, this statement translates into "God commands x because he commands x." Thus, the theologian's answer would be a circular one which is really no answer at all. Ewing notes that "in the definition of good or right as willed by God goodness in a properly ethical sense is already presupposed, the definition is a circular one and leaves undefined some fundamental ethical term."<sup>31</sup>

However, the theologian might avoid these difficulties by refusing to answer Ewing's question at all. Ewing's demand (if taken as a request for a justification of God's commands) is question-begging. Graber points this out well when he says,

If one justifies the content of a command by showing that it is in line with moral right and duty, then to demand that one justify what God commands and to take it as a point of logic that the justification will be unacceptable if it is circular is to presuppose that it is impossible for obligation-terms to be analyzed in terms of what God commands. . . . In any system of standards or norms, the result of applying the fundamental standards or norms to themselves will always and necessarily be a tautology. . . . it begs the very question at issue for Ewing to make this demand in the context of a debate about the linguistic and logical features of obligation terms, for the demand itself presupposes, that what God commands, is not itself the fundamental standard of obligation.<sup>32</sup>

Before concluding this discussion of the secularist's argument based on the first horn of the Euthyphro dilemma, I wish to make an observation on a distinction

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<sup>31</sup>Ewing, "The Autonomy of Ethics," pp. 40-41.

<sup>32</sup>Graber, "Morality and Religion," pp. 92-93.

between the first premise of Nielsen's argument and that of Ewing's argument. I stated the first premise in Nielsen's argument as follows: If A (we can know what God wills is good) then B (judgments about the good are logically independent of God's will). The first premise in Ewing's argument is: If D (God commands x because it is good or does good) then B (judgments about the good are logically independent of God's will). The difference here is that "whereas the logical requirement proclaimed by Ewing is merely that some non-circular justification or other must be provided for what God commands," Nielsen specifies "a particular standard by reference to which the justification must be made."<sup>33</sup> Nielsen's request for a standard of obligation separate and distinct from God's commands misunderstands (like Ewing) the nature of standards. Graber observes,

The basic or fundamental standards of any system cannot (logically) be justified in terms of the system itself. But, since this is true, it cannot be said of any particular principle or standard within a given system that it must be possible to provide a justification for it without thereby assuming that it is not the basic standard.<sup>34</sup>

#### Some Concluding Remarks

In summary, according to Nielsen and Ewing, the first horn of the Euthyphro dilemma (God commands x because it is right [or good]), results in standards of right and wrong which are logically independent of God's will.

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 95.      <sup>34</sup>Ibid., pp. 95-96.

Further, they hold that a non-theological analysis of non-moral value terms warrants the conclusion that ethics cannot be logically dependent on God. I pointed out that it was not clear whether this was (1) a claim for selective independence (that not all ethics are dependent on God) or (2) a claim for total independence (that not any ethics are dependent on God). (1) I argued that if the former interpretation is given that Nielsen and Ewing fail in establishing their conclusions because both fail to acknowledge (a) the variety of ethical terms, and (b) that one or more of these terms may be given a theological analysis while others may be given a non-theological analysis.

(2) I argued that if the latter interpretation is given that: (a) it is false to say that a non-theological analysis of non-moral value terms warrants the conclusion that no necessary connection to theology has been established for any part of the ethical sphere; and (b) the antecedent in Ewing's first premise (God commands x because it is good or does good) is ambiguous due to the ambiguity of the question Ewing posed to generate it. I further argued that Ewing's question ("Why should God command one thing rather than another?"), if taken as a request to know God's motives, can be answered by the theologian without logical difficulty and if taken as a request to know the justification for God's commands is question-begging. Finally, I argued that Nielsen's request for a standard

separate and distinct from God's commands shares Ewing's misunderstanding of the nature of standards themselves.

Before concluding this chapter, some positive aspects of what has been achieved should be noted. (1) In this Chapter I have shown, contrary to the thinking of secular ethicists, that a religious ethic is possible and specifically that a theological definist analysis of ethical terms is possible, i.e. it is possible to make moral obligation a function of what God commands. A theological definist view is just the formula for a deontological theory of moral obligation which does not make duty merely a function of the good which may be produced. (2) I have also shown that the sphere of morality can be treated from a theological perspective in a way that does not commit one to the view that the whole of morality has a religious heritage. I have done this by showing that a non-theological analysis may be given of non-moral value terms. On this, I agree with both Nielsen and Ewing. I do not agree that such an analysis warrants the conclusion that ethics are not logically dependent on God.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SECOND HORN OF THE EUTHYPHRO DILEMMA

#### Nielsen's First Argument Set Forth

It is argued that the second horn of the Euthyphro dilemma has a number of implications. It takes a bit of ferreting to get clear delineations from Nielsen's writing concerning this horn of the dilemma. This is the case in large measure because of his piecemeal quotations from Ewing and the fact that he confuses various shades of distinction concerning the dependency of ethics on religion. I shall attempt to make as clear as possible the first implication of the second horn of the dilemma. Nielsen observes as follows:

But as Ewing points out, if 'being obligatory' means just 'willed by God,' it becomes unintelligible to ask why God wills one thing rather than another. . . . Furthermore, it becomes senseless to say what the believer very much wants to say, namely, 'I ought always to do what God wills' if 'what I ought to do' and 'what God wills' have the same meaning.<sup>1</sup>

Although Ewing uses neither "unintelligible" nor "senseless" in his discussion, Nielsen's unintelligibility claim is probably based on a possible response Ewing considers to his own question, "Why God should command any one thing rather than another?" He notes, "We cannot say that he commands it

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<sup>1</sup>Nielsen, Ethics, p. 44.

because it ought to be done, for that would have to be translated into 'God commands it because it is commanded by God.'<sup>2</sup> The second part of the Nielsen quotation above is in the context of another question raised by Ewing; namely, "Why obey God's commands?" Ewing observes that if one answers by saying "I ought to do so" then: "Since 'I ought to do A' is held to mean 'God commands me to do A,' this can only mean that I am commanded by God to obey God's commands, which supplies no further reason whatsoever."<sup>3</sup>

My conclusion is that the above remarks are grounds for concluding that both Nielsen and Ewing are making a linguistic claim (and not a logical claim) that there is some sort of fallacy involved in any effort to analyze or define a moral concept ("being obligatory") by a religious one ("willed by God"). I shall argue below that this version of Nielsen's first charge, while including elements of Plato's Euthyphro, actually traces back to G. E. Moore's characterization of the "naturalistic fallacy." Further, I shall show that the "senseless" element in Nielsen's claim specifically relates to Moore's "open question argument" (one way by which Moore supports the charge of a naturalistic fallacy). Thus, Nielsen's first argument against any theological definist analysis might be phrased as follows:

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<sup>2</sup>Ewing, "The Autonomy of Ethics," p. 39.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 39-40.

It is false to say that any ethical judgment can be defined or analyzed by any theological judgment.

This first argument by Nielsen corresponds to the more explicit claim of the theologian to which Frankena refers. Frankena observes that if morality is logically dependent on religion then, among other claims, the following is entailed:

The terms and concepts of ethics . . . are to be defined by reference to (derived from or analyzed into) those of religion . . . i.e., the judgments of ethics can be translated into theological ones.<sup>4</sup>

This is precisely the claim that Nielsen as well as Ewing wish to deny when they argue that if one identifies an ethical judgment (such as "I ought to do x") with a theological one (such as "God commands x") then it is unintelligible to ask why God wills one thing rather than another. Frankena shares Nielsen's view that theological definitions have been rebutted since Plato's Euthyphro. Frankena calls attention to Richard Price in the eighteenth century as making the chief argument against any theological definist analysis. Price's statement in its original formulation is worth being noted.

Right and wrong when applied to actions which are commanded or forbidden by the will of God . . . do not signify merely, that such actions are commanded or forbidden [by the will of God] . . . [If this] were true, it would be palpably absurd in any case to ask, whether it is right to obey a command [of God], or wrong to disobey it, and the proposition, obeying a command [of God] is right . . . would be most trifling as expressing

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<sup>4</sup>Frankena, MLDR, p. 298.

no more than that obeying<sup>5</sup> a command [of God] is obeying a command [of God] . . . .

Among other matters in this statement, Price makes the significant point that "the proposition, obeying a command (of God) is right . . . would be most trifling, as expressing no more than that obeying a command (of God) is obeying a command of God . . . ." This is the claim that Ewing wishes to make when he says that if one answers the question "Why obey God's commands?" by saying, "I ought to do so" then: Since "I ought to do x" or to use Price, "x (a command) is right" means the same thing as "God commands me to do x," this can only mean I am commanded by God to obey God's commands, which furnishes no additional reason; thus, as Price says, "the proposition obeying a command (of God) is right . . . would be most trifling . . . ." Thus, Price, in the eighteenth century, called attention to a major problem for a theological definist analysis. In summary, the problem according to Price (as well as Nielsen and Ewing) is that what appears, on the surface, to be a significant statement (i.e., a non-tautological statement)--"God's commands are right" or "you ought to do what God commands"--turns out, upon analysis, to be tautological.

Frankena observes concerning criticisms of theological definitions such as Price's (and thus Nielsen's and Ewing's) that they "do not seem to me to be as immediately

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Price, "A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals," in Divine Command Morality, ed. by Janine Marie Idziak (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), p. 208.

fatal as they are usually thought to be . . . ."6 However, he does make some additional penetrating remarks which will be considered in the following critique. At this point, my purpose is to show that Frankena makes basically the same objection as does Nielsen.

#### A Response to Nielsen's First Argument

Definist theories, in general, allege that ethical terms can be defined in terms of non-ethical ones. Ethical judgments are disguised assertions of fact of some kind. Frankena notes that definists divide into two general groups: (1) ethical naturalists who hold that ethical judgments are disguised assertions of empirical facts and (2) metaphysical moralists who hold that such judgments are disguised assertions of metaphysical or theological facts. In each case, the proposed definitions may be: (1) reportive, i.e., they may explicate what we ordinarily mean by the term defined or (2) reforming, i.e., they are recommendations of what we should mean by them.<sup>7</sup> As an example of an ethical naturalist, Ralph Barton Perry suggests reforming definitions as: "good" means "being an object of favorable interest (desire)," and "right" means "being conducive to harmonious happiness."<sup>8</sup> As a

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<sup>6</sup>Frankena, MLDR, p. 303.

<sup>7</sup>Idem, Ethics, p. 98.

<sup>8</sup>Ralph Barton Perry, Realms of Value (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954), pp. 3, 107, 109.

metaphysical moralist, the reportive theological definist could suggest that "good" or "right" simply means "commanded by God." The secularist charges that such a translation is unwarranted because it commits the naturalistic fallacy.

The naturalistic fallacy has been debated thoroughly since Moore introduced the expression in Principia Ethica. It is not very easy to determine precisely from Moore's comments what constitutes the naturalistic fallacy. His discussion is frequently unclear and imprecise. The first time he uses the expression in Principia Ethica is in the context of reprimanding those who equate the term "good" with the descriptive properties of a thing. It is interesting that in his major work, Ethics, published nine years after Principia Ethica, the expression "naturalistic fallacy" is never used. In an unpublished Preface in 1920, Moore says that when someone commits this fallacy "he is either confusing good with a natural or metaphysical property or holding it to be identical with such a property or making an inference based upon such a confusion."<sup>9</sup> The various confusions surrounding the naturalistic fallacy have been clarified in a landmark article by Frankena who renames it the "definist fallacy." I shall understand Moore's naturalistic fallacy to be what Frankena calls the definist fallacy which "is the process of confusing or identifying

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<sup>9</sup>This quotation is found in Robert Phillip's "Intuitionism Revisited," Journal of Value Inquiry 6 (Fall 1972): 186.

two properties, of defining one property by another, or of substituting one property for another."<sup>10</sup>

First, it must be asked whether a theological definism commits the naturalistic fallacy? In answer to this, it is clear that on Moore's version of the fallacy, it is not necessarily the case that a theological definism commits the fallacy. For example, Graber argues that his own theory of obligation does not commit the fallacy. Graber's view is: "'one ought to do (avoid) x' means (in part) 'God commands that one do (avoid) x.'" Moore's charge is only in connection with attempts to define non-moral value terms (simple terms) like "good" and "bad"--not with attempts to define moral obligation terms (complex terms) like "ought," "duty," "obligation," and the like. Thus, on a strict interpretation of Moore's naturalistic fallacy, attempts to define moral obligation terms do not commit the fallacy because: (1) the fallacy is restricted to efforts to define simple terms which include non-moral value terms; and (2) the fallacy does not apply to efforts to define complex terms which include moral obligation terms.<sup>11</sup>

The fallacy cannot be so easily dismissed because there are those who disagree with Moore's view of the status

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<sup>10</sup>Frankena, "The Naturalistic Fallacy," Mind 68 (October 1939): 464-77; reprinted in Readings in Ethical Theory, ed. by Wilfred Sellars and John Hospers (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970), p. 59. This and future references indicate the location in the latter volume.

<sup>11</sup>Graber, "Morality and Religion," p. 65.

of moral obligation terms and argue that such terms involve the naturalistic fallacy the same way as do moral value terms. Graber calls attention to this and observes that Sir David Ross argues this very point in The Right and the Good and furnishes considerable evidence that Moore himself chose to take this view in his later work, Ethics.<sup>12</sup> From this, it may be argued that definist theories of Graber's type or other such definist theories (where "x is good" means "God commands x") are charged with committing the naturalistic fallacy.

Second, Frankena has observed that opponents of definist theories beg the question if they charge a definist with committing the naturalistic fallacy without pointing out precisely the definist's mistake.<sup>13</sup> The mistake in all efforts to translate ethical terms into non-ethical terms can be shown, it is argued, by the "open-question argument." If this argument is sound, it is never possible to define good in terms of any natural term (empirical) or non-natural term (theological). The argument may be stated in more than one sense: (1) a phenomenological-atomistic analysis and (2) a linguistic analysis.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>13</sup> Frankena, Ethics, p. 99.

<sup>14</sup> George Nakhnikian in his article "On the Naturalistic Fallacy," in Morality and the Language of Conduct, ed. by Hector-Neri Castaneda and George Nakhnikian (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965), pp. 145-58 calls attention to these distinctions.

(1) According to the phenomenological-atomistic analysis, one is supposed to see immediately that moral terms like "good" cannot be defined (that it is simple) by holding it as it were, "before the mind." Moore's view of this is stated as follows:

But whoever will attentively consider with himself what is actually before his mind when he asks the question 'Is pleasure (or whatever it may be) after all good?' can easily satisfy himself that he is not merely wondering whether pleasure is pleasant. And if he will try this experiment with each suggested definition in succession, he may become expert enough to recognize that in every case he has before his mind a unique object, with regard to the connection of which with any object, a distinct question may be asked. Every one does in fact understand the question 'Is this good?' When he thinks of it, his state of mind is different from what it would be, were he asked 'Is this pleasant, or desired, or approved?'<sup>15</sup>

This phenomenological-atomistic analysis is not conclusive against attempts in principle. To demonstrate this, consider (a) the phenomenological aspect of Moore's analysis. If the definist (or philosopher in general) were asked to take a phenomenological "look" at the object of thought when he uses the moral term "good," he would be perplexed. He could very well claim, as Frankena has observed,<sup>16</sup> that he is just not aware of any such object before his mind. Thus, the definist would not be confusing or identifying two properties or defining some indefinable

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<sup>15</sup>G. E. Moore, Principia Ethica (Cambridge: University Press, 1903), pp. 16-17.

<sup>16</sup>Frankena, "The Naturalistic Fallacy," p. 61.

characteristics. The definist, Frankena continues, would not, properly speaking, commit error. Rather, he would at most have a type of moral blindness analogous to color-blindness.

(b) The atomistic aspect of Moore's analysis is equally deficient. Moore claims that the object of thought represented by the term "good" when placed before the mind, is simple. Nakhnikian questions this when he says,

The notion of absolute simplicity is nonsense. Simplicity is always relative to some respect. Indivisibility into parts is not a respect. We have first to specify the respect in which the parts are to be distinguished from the whole.<sup>17</sup>

Graber makes a similar point when he considers Moore's claim that what is before the mind is a unique object.

. . . I cannot begin to see how the fact of its uniqueness--i.e., its non-identity with the objects of thought represented by all other terms--could be read off on this basis. One could only be confident of the uniqueness of references after he had compared the object of thought represented by the term in question with the notion represented by every other term in the language . . . .<sup>18</sup>

It seems then that on the phenomenological-atomistic reading of the open-question argument, that Moore has not given any conclusive reason for debunking all definist's attempts.

(2) Consider Moore's linguistic conception of analysis concerning the open-question argument. The argument, on this reading, is essentially the sense in which

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<sup>17</sup>Nakhnikian, "On the Naturalistic Fallacy," p. 147.

<sup>18</sup>Graber, "Morality and Religion," pp. 70-71.

A. J. Ayer used it: for any *x*, it is never contradictory to raise the question, "But is *x* good?"<sup>19</sup> If two expressions *x* and *y* really mean the same thing, then questions like, "Is *x* *y*?" or "This is an *x*, but is it a *y*?" will be senseless, unintelligible, or "closed" questions in the same way as "Is *x* *x*?" is a closed or self-answering question.<sup>20</sup> For example, the question "Is a brother a male sibling?" is a closed or self-answering question to one who understands the language just as "Is a brother a brother?" This appeal to ordinary discourse underlies the argument. The argument continues by considering definitions of moral terms like "good" and results in open questions. For example, if by "good" one means "having *P* as a property" where *P* stands for "pleasure," questions like "Is pleasure good?" or "This has *P* (pleasure), but is it good?" seem to be genuine, significant, open questions. But, if the definition were correct, this could not be said sensibly for it would be like saying (as I noted above) "Is *x* *x*?" or "This has *P*, but does it have *P*?" Thus, one can say "This has *P* (pleasure), but is it good?" without contradiction which would be impossible if the definition were correct. But, since it can be asked significantly, the definition must be incorrect.

In response to this linguistic analysis, note that the naturalistic fallacy (the definist fallacy) reflects the

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<sup>19</sup>A. J. Ayer, Language, Truth, and Logic, p. 105.

<sup>20</sup>Graber, "Morality and Religion," p. 67.

motto of Principia Ethica borrowed from Butler, "Everything is what it is, and not another thing." Thus, goodness is what it is and not another thing. From this maxim, Moore contends that one is making a fundamental mistake when "good" is identified with something else, for it is a mistake to confuse or identify two properties.<sup>21</sup> The question is, "Do those who define ethical terms in non-ethical terms make this mistake?" The definist could say that the maxim is too strong and that he is not identifying two properties. In ordinary discourse, the meaning of words like "good" or "right" is not as clear as the meaning of "brother" or "male sibling." Thus, when a clarifying definition of ethical terms like "good" or "right" is suggested, it will not retain all that is vaguely associated with it. The substitute, although it will not be the same as the original, may turn out to be an acceptable definition.<sup>22</sup> Thus, in a sentence like "Goodness is pleasantness," "good" is not identical with "pleasant," yet this is an acceptable manner of speech. It is simply not necessarily the case that when one says things possess the property goodness, that one makes a senseless, unintelligible, or unimportant statement. The open-question argument cannot work universally. It works only in cases in which ordinary discourse is quite

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<sup>21</sup> Frankena, "The Naturalistic Fallacy," p. 59.

<sup>22</sup> See Nakhnikian's "On the Naturalistic Fallacy," p. 148, and Frankena's Ethics, p. 99 for some comments on this reasoning.

clear as to whether or not an expression of the form "This has P, but it is not good" is self-contradictory.

Third, if the theological definist can escape the above problems involved in a linguistic analysis, he has another obstacle to overcome. Frankena argues that whether theological definitions are taken as reportive or reforming, the theological definist must furnish reasons for their acceptance. Frankena contends that in either case, accepting a definition of any term that can be called ethical is tantamount to accepting a moral principle. Thus, if one takes "right" to mean "commanded by God" and uses it as a basis for one's speech, thought, and action, he, in effect, is accepting the ethical principle, "We ought to do what God commands."<sup>23</sup> If this is the case, "when a theological definition is offered us, we may always ask why we should adopt this definition, and to answer us the theologian in question must provide us with a justification of the corresponding moral principle."<sup>24</sup>

In response to Frankena, we might simply dispute his claim that the justification of a definition will always be tantamount to justifying the corresponding ethical principle. Different arguments might be suggested as reasons for accepting a particular definition. Thus, one who knows little or nothing about Physics, might develop a case for

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<sup>23</sup>Frankena, MLDR, 303.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 303-4.

accepting some technical term in this discipline without reference to any claims in the science of Physics itself. The definition might be defended solely on the basis of social and/or institutional factors, e.g., it was offered by a person well regarded in the field or other physicists who have heard (and understood) this person have found the rationale behind the definition plausible. Thus, the definition should be accepted.

Similarly, one might justify a theological definition of ethical terms by reference to issues other than the fundamental ethical principle expressed in the definition itself. Thus, one might defend the definition of an ethical term by appealing to the social status of a person, e.g., the person who offers the definition is regarded as a saint or other religionists who have heard (and comprehended) the definition have found it to be sensible; hence, the definition should be accepted. Again, a theological definition might be defended on institutional grounds, e.g., it was offered by the Church. If this reasoning is plausible, it seems that a theological definition of an ethical term may be justified independent of the fundamental ethical principle expressed in the definition, and thus Frankena's claim is unwarranted.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>I am indebted to Glenn C. Graber for his suggestions in formulating this response.

### Nielsen's Second Argument Set Forth

The second argument advanced by Nielsen against a religious ethic is closely related to the first; namely, that one cannot derive evaluative statements from purely factual statements. It is my conviction that he does not make an effort to distinguish this argument from the first. This is the case because he himself says that his argument in his first chapter is that morality cannot be based on religion in the sense that "no moral statements at all can be derived from religious claims about what there is."<sup>26</sup> But, this argument is not the same as what I have called Nielsen's first argument against the impossibility of a theological definist analysis. His first argument (though spoken of by him as a logical matter) is a linguistic matter and distinct from his second argument which is a logical claim. I wish to distinguish the linguistic claim from the logical claim (along the lines set out in Chapter II) and will try to maintain that distinction throughout this study.

One of the major reasons Nielsen rejects both a natural-law ethics and an ethics of divine commands is that they both confuse factual and moral issues. In an earlier publication than Ethics without God, Nielsen makes his point quite clearly:

No command, God's or anyone else's, can simply, as a command, serve as our ultimate moral standard; and that this is so is purely a matter of logic and not

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<sup>26</sup> Nielsen, Ethics, p. 44.

just a result of "sinful, prideful rebellion" against God's law.<sup>27</sup>

Again he writes:

That we know what we ought to do when we have found out (assuming that in some sense we can 'find out') what God really wishes us to do, is just the point in question.<sup>28</sup>

Further he observes, "Indeed we cannot derive what we ought to do from any statements which merely assert that so and so is the case . . . ." <sup>29</sup> In sum, Nielsen's second argument against religious ethics is this: It is false to say that evaluative statements can be derived from purely factual statements.

Before suggesting some critical remarks regarding Nielsen's second claim. I wish to make an additional clarification. Nielsen's first charge is that ethical terms and concepts cannot be defined or analyzed by religious terms. While this actually traces to Moore's "naturalistic fallacy" (a linguistic or conceptual matter), Nielsen is charging the theologian with committing what Frankena called the "definist fallacy."

Nielsen's second charge that evaluative statements cannot be derived from purely factual statements has to do with what is commonly known as the "Is/Ought" fallacy (a

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<sup>27</sup> Idem, "Some Remarks on the Independence of Morality and Religion," p. 232.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 233

<sup>29</sup> Idem, Ethics, p. 23.

logical matter) dating to Hume's Treatise, Book III, Part i, section 1. It is not uncommon at all for philosophers to lump the naturalistic fallacy or definist fallacy with the Is/Ought fallacy; and, although Nielsen lumps the two together, progress in critical analysis can be made much better if they are kept separate as much as possible. Below, I suggest why Nielsen lumps the two fallacies together. This suggestion will also show the relationship that Frankena's arguments have to Nielsen's.

It may be he has in mind that his logical considerations imply something like his linguistic considerations. Frankena notes the possibility of this (although not speaking of Nielsen or anyone in particular). Frankena notes four claims of the theologian.<sup>30</sup>

- (1) The terms and concepts of ethics (A) are to be defined by reference to (derived from or analyzed into) those of religion (B); i.e., the judgments of ethics can be translated into theological ones.
- (2) The judgments of ethics (C) can be logically inferred, deduced, or derived from those of theology (D).
- (3) Ethical judgments can be justified by being derived logically from theological ones.
- (4) Ethical judgments can be justified only by being logically inferred from theological ones, that is, they depend logically on religious beliefs for their justification.

The first is a linguistic claim (and basically the same as the first charge of Nielsen) while claims (2), (3), and (4)

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<sup>30</sup> Frankena, MLDR, p. 298.

have to do with logical matters. Frankena observes, "It is hard to see how (2), (3), or (4) can be maintained without at least implying (1) or something like it . . . ." <sup>31</sup> Moreover, Frankena's considerations of claim (1)--the linguistic claim--is in the context of the possible support it may lend to claim (2)--a logical claim. My treatment of claim (1) was in the context of Nielsen's first argument based on the second horn of the Euthyphro.

Frankena deals specifically with the Is/Ought fallacy under his consideration of the theologian's claim (2)--that certain religious beliefs logically entail certain ethical beliefs, and that the latter can be logically deduced from the former. Claim (3)--that ethical judgments can be justified by being derived from theological ones--in part repeats claim (2) but, it says more; namely, that ethical judgments would in fact be justified if they were shown to be based on certain theological beliefs. The two are so closely related that claim (3) warrants consideration along with claim (2) under the general discussion of the Is/Ought question. Claim (4) that ethical judgments can be justified only by being logically inferred from theological ones is for Frankena the most crucial claim. This claim and Frankena's criticism of it will also be considered in conjunction with Nielsen's second implication from the second horn of the Euthyphro dilemma.

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

The response to Nielsen's discussion concerning whether evaluative statements can be derived from descriptive statements will apply equally to Robinson's charge that religion does not provide an entailing reason for morality.<sup>32</sup> Robinson charges that there can be no entailing reason for a moral law except another moral law. In short, an "ought" can only be derived from an "ought"--not from an "is." Frankena, as well as Nielsen, agrees with Robinson. Frankena says,

any theologian who offers us an argument of the form  
 (a) God loves us,  
 (c) therefore we ought to love one another,  
 thinking that (c) follows logically from (a) alone  
 without the help of any (b) which introduces the  
 term "ought," is making a logical mistake.<sup>33</sup>

#### A Response to Nielsen's Second Argument

A note is necessary concerning the procedure I shall adopt in my response to Nielsen's claim that evaluative statements cannot be derived from factual statements. As I set out in the beginning of this chapter, Nielsen's discussion constitutes the framework to discover the objections based on the Euthyphro. As already pointed out, Frankena considers four claims of the theologian, three of which may be subsumed under the present consideration of some logical matters. These three claims provide a good outline for a response to Nielsen's second argument. Below,

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<sup>32</sup>Robinson, An Atheist's Values, pp. 130-31.

<sup>33</sup>Frankena, MLDR, p. 300.

I shall consider the merits of each of these claims and show the precise relationship each has to the Is/Ought problem. I shall examine claims two and four before claim three. The final part of my response to Nielsen's second argument has to do with the difficulties the secularist himself faces concerning the Is/Ought principle.

#### Claim Two of the Theologian

First, Frankena addresses this problem specifically under claim (2) of the theologian that certain religious beliefs logically entail certain ethical beliefs, and that the latter can be logically deduced from the former. This simply means, for example, that the proposition "God commands x" entails the proposition "One ought to do x" and that the latter can be logically deduced from the former.

The theologian might argue in response to this that his claim that evaluative conclusions can be derived from factual premises is not to be taken this strictly. Thus, he should not be taken to say strictly: (a) God loves us, therefore (c) we ought to love one another. Here he appears to reason from a theological premise to an ethical conclusion, but he may be really assuming some ethical premise (b) we ought to love those whom God loves. His enthymematic argument would then take the form:

- (a) God loves us.
- (b) We ought to love those whom God loves.
- (c) Therefore, we ought to love one another.

By taking this approach, the theologian does not deduce his ethical conclusion from theological premises alone, but from the conjunction of a theological premise (a) and an assumed ethical premise (b). And, since the premises include an "ought," he does not make a fallacious move in drawing a conclusion including an "ought." In general, it may be claimed that a moral inference is acceptable when there exists an unexpressed premise (an ethical one) which, if added to the expressed premise (a factual one), would make the inference logically follow. If the principle that an "ought" cannot be derived from an "is" is taken this way, my conclusion is that the principle is false.

The theologian might not wish to take this line of reasoning as a viable alternative. This is the case because, in presupposing certain unexpressed ethical premises like "One ought to do whatever God commands," he does not really hold to the view that morality is logically dependent on religion. Further, in presupposing certain ethical premises, he opens himself to the charge of having prior ethical notions, and thus makes ethics independent of God. Frankena notes that for morality to be logically dependent on religion, the theologian "must believe that his '(a), therefore (c)' is, sometimes at least, the whole story--that certain theological propositions by themselves logically entail certain ethical conclusions."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 299.

Frankena suggests that there are at least four different approaches the theologian might take to buttress his claim (2) that evaluative statements can be derived from purely factual statements. I shall consider these four suggestions and submit a fifth as a more viable response.

(a) Frankena notes that it might be argued that ethical premises could be logically inferred from non-ethical ones by appeal to inductive reasoning. He points out, however, that whatever might come of this reasoning, it cannot help the theologian much since the inferences they are interested in would not be classified as inductive ones to begin with.<sup>35</sup> I am in agreement with Frankena on this point.

(b) He observes that one might appeal to some "third logic" (in addition to induction and deduction) the tenets of which warrant ethical conclusions from factual premises. Frankena correctly observes that this idea has not been convincingly worked out, and it is not clear that it could help justify the desired inferences.<sup>36</sup>

(c) One might question the sharpness of the distinction between theological and ethical judgments and contend that theological beliefs are not really so purely factual as we have assumed, and that they themselves include an ethical commitment.<sup>37</sup> This is the approach taken by Patterson Brown when he says,

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 300.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 300-1.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 301.

. . . 'God' is ordinarily a partially moral term. In our civilization, and thus in our language, it would not be strictly proper to call a being 'God' whose actions were not perfectly good or whose commands were not the best of moral directives. That God is good is a truth of language . . . .<sup>38</sup>

Frankena maintains that this reasoning simply makes theological beliefs complex (each consisting of an ethical belief conjoined with a non-ethical one). Then, the question would be whether any ethical conclusion would follow logically from more carefully stated non-ethical propositions alone. Frankena holds that the answer to this is negative. He further maintains that it is difficult to see what is gained by saying that ethical beliefs rest on religious ones if these religious beliefs turn out to be in some sense ethical.<sup>39</sup>

It seems clear to me that Frankena is correct in his latter statement but not the former. The theologian wants to say that ethical beliefs rest on religious ones. He is not successful in his effort if he argues that his religious beliefs are simply disguised ethical beliefs. And, if ethical beliefs ultimately rest on ethical beliefs then perhaps Robinson is right when he says that "there is a good sense in which ethics has no basis and cannot have a basis."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Patterson Brown, "Religious Morality," Mind 72 (April 1963): 235-44; reprinted in Divine Command Morality, ed. by Janine Marie Idziak (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), pp. 247-48. This and future references are from the latter volume.

<sup>39</sup>Frankena, MLDR, p. 301.

<sup>40</sup>Robinson, An Atheist's Values, p. 131.

(d) Frankena's denial that ethical conclusions would follow logically from more carefully stated non-ethical propositions alone may serve to introduce his fourth suggestion (claim (1)) for the theologian to support claim (2). Claim (1) of the theologian is that the judgments of ethics can be translated into theological ones. Treatment of this claim was in the context of Nielsen's first argument under the second horn. Frankena says that his denial does not hold if a theological definist analysis is possible. He admits this when he says if claim (1) is true then claim (2) is true.<sup>41</sup> Under the first horn of the Euthyphro dilemma, I argued that a theological definist analysis of moral obligation terms was possible. Under the second horn, I cast doubt on Nielsen's first argument (that it is false to say that any ethical judgment can be defined or analyzed by any theological judgment) that a theological definist analysis commits the definist fallacy. Thus, claim (2) of the theologian holds and thus it follows that an "ought" can be derived from an "is." This claim will be further defended in my remarks specifically relating to the Is/Ought principle.

Second, apart from Frankena's suggestions for the theologian, I wish to point out that claim (2) can be supported by contending that the principle that an "ought" cannot be derived from an "is" taken in a strict

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<sup>41</sup>Frankena, MLDR, p. 298.

sense is simply false. It may be that some philosophers have taken it for granted that ethical statements cannot be derived from factual statements; i.e., Hume in the last paragraph of Book III, Part i, Section 1, of his Treatise established a dichotomy between "is" and "ought" and the view has been uncritically accepted ever since. Hume's statement is either quoted in full or referred to with approval by a number of philosophers. Laird observes that "many British moralists of the present time would agree with Hume's short but pregnant criticism (469 sq.) that his opponents in this matter had illegitimately attempted to deduce ought from is . . . ." <sup>42</sup> A. N. Prior speaks of "Hume's demand . . . to show how ethical propositions may be deduced from non-ethical ones." <sup>43</sup> Nielsen makes reference to "Hume . . . [who demonstrated] that no fundamental moral claim is entailed by an empirical claim." <sup>44</sup> Again, Frankena observes, "Hume's point is that ethical conclusions cannot be drawn validly from premises which are nonethical." <sup>45</sup>

In response to this, I shall make two separate points: (1) I shall point out that the intent of Hume's Is/Ought dichotomy can be questioned. (2) I shall show that \_

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<sup>42</sup> John Laird, Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature (London: Methuen, 1932), p. 215.

<sup>43</sup> A. N. Prior, Logic and the Basis of Ethics, (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1949), p. 33.

<sup>44</sup> Nielsen, Ethics, p. 80.

<sup>45</sup> Frankena, "The Naturalistic Fallacy," p. 56.

the alleged impossibility of deriving an ought from an is can be questioned. Concerning (1), Max Black wonders whether Hume intends to offer an argument or merely raises skeptical doubts.<sup>46</sup> Black maintains that considered as an argument, what Hume says is "singularly unconvincing." Others hold that if Hume meant what many philosophers have taken him to mean, then Hume himself was the first to violate the rule. MacIntyre says Hume was only raising a question about the derivation of "ought" from "is" and notes further that Hume himself violated the rule in his discussion on justice.<sup>47</sup> He says that Hume justifies the rules of justice by an appeal to that which is in the public's interest and quotes Hume as follows:

But however single acts of justice may be contrary, either to public or to private interest, 'tis certain, that the whole plan or scheme is highly conducive, or indeed absolutely requisite both to the support of society, and the well-being of every individual.<sup>48</sup>

Even Richard Robinson agrees with MacIntyre and says "MacIntyre has convincingly argued that Hume meant only to say that such a derivation requires examination and defense."<sup>49</sup> Robinson then says,

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<sup>46</sup>Max Black, "The Gap Between 'Is' and 'Should,'" Philosophical Review 73 (April 1964): 165-181; reprinted in The Is/Ought Question, ed. by W. D. Hudson (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1969), p. 100. This and future references indicate the location in the latter volume.

<sup>47</sup>A. C. MacIntyre, "Hume on 'Is' and 'Ought,'" Philosophical Review 68 (October 1959): 455.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid, p. 456.

<sup>49</sup>Robinson, "Ought and Ought Not," Philosophy 46 (July 1971): 198.

At any rate Hume himself made such a derivation in another place. In his essay "Of the Original Contract" he wrote: "If the reason be asked of that obedience, which we are bound to pay to government, I readily answer, because society could not otherwise subsist." That is a derivation of ought and is.<sup>50</sup>

Thus far, I have shown that a number of philosophers have accepted Hume's dichotomy between "is" and "ought," but that this dichotomy insofar as Hume's intent is concerned can be and has been called into question. It remains to be seen whether the Is/Ought principle holds universally. Below, I shall attempt to show that the principle can be questioned with respect to: (1) non-moral obligation terms as they are used in judgments which have no interest in moral philosophy, and (2) moral obligation terms as they are used in judgments having to do with moral philosophy.<sup>51</sup> Concerning both (1) and (2), it would be unreasonable to hold that an "ought" cannot be derived from an "is." Such inferences involving evaluative conclusions from factual demands are quite common. For an example of (1), at any given baseball game an umpire will say, "You are out; so, you should return to the dugout." For an example of (2) consider this; "You are the teacher; so, you ought to decide the direction of the class." Among other things, it may be

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid. Robinson's statement should not be taken as a denial of his position in An Atheist's Values (pp. 130-31) that there can be no entailing reason for a moral law except another moral law. I cite him here because he lends support to the view that Hume's intent can be questioned.

<sup>51</sup>For a fuller discussion concerning the variety of ethical terms, see Frankena's Ethics, pp. 9-11.

objected that such derivations are not to be taken as rigorous analytic inferences and that the Is/Ought principle still holds. Still, others might object by saying that in both cases, ethical premises are presupposed and maintain, as was observed in the beginning of the response, that an enthymeme is really being asserted. The first example presupposes the premise "All persons who are called out are persons who should return to the dugout." The second example implies the notion of responsibility in the very concept of "teacher;" thus, the premise, "All teachers are persons who ought to direct the class."

In general, religionists and secularists alike agree that in popular speech such derivations are quite acceptable. Thus, Robinson says concerning inferences of the above sort (though he does not cite these examples), the following:

It would be absurd to say that all such inferences are bad. Obviously many of them are good. They guide our lives and should do so. The doctrine that an ought cannot be derived from an is, if it were meant to reject all such inferences, would be ridiculous. It would amount to saying that facts have no relevance to our duties.<sup>52</sup>

The secularist, like Robinson, might hold that though this is true, the Is/Ought principle nevertheless holds true for rigorous analytic inferences. This is what the thinkers under consideration (Nielsen, Robinson, and Frankena) mean and apparently what Hare means when he says,

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<sup>52</sup>Robinson, "Ought and Ought Not," p. 198.

. . . nothing can appear in the conclusion of a valid deductive inference which is not, from their very meaning, implicit in the conjunction of the premisses.  
 . . . all deductive inference is analytic in character  
 . . . .<sup>53</sup>

Black points out that this is not so in general and cites the simple argument--A citizen is a person; therefore a married citizen is a married person. Although the word "married" occurs for the first time in the conclusion, the argument is nevertheless valid, without any additional premise(s). An obstacle to the recognition of this is the well-known concept that the conclusion of a valid argument be "contained" in the premises. This seems to be what Hare means when he says above that nothing can appear in the conclusion of a valid argument that is not from their very meaning implicit in the premises. Black, though not referring to Hare, makes the following point:

. . . there is no useful sense in which the conclusion of a valid argument can be said to be 'contained' in the premise; that is thereby a misleading way of saying that the conclusion really does follow from the given premises<sup>54</sup>, without the addition of supplementary assumptions.

Putting these remarks aside, I shall suggest two examples involving non-moral obligation terms and moral-obligation terms respectively, which challenge the

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<sup>53</sup>R. M. Hare, The Language of Morals, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 32. Concerning this statement, Robinson says it is "probably true" ("Ought and Ought Not," p. 198). However, I do not think that Robinson should be taken here to express some uncertainty concerning the Is/Ought principle, especially in view of his statement in An Atheist's Values, pp. 130-31.

<sup>54</sup>Black, "The Gap Between 'Is' and 'Should,'" p. 101.

Is/Ought principle and show that there is not an unbridgeable gap in Hume's dichotomy between "is" and "ought." These examples are not original on my part. Although appeal could be made to various philosophers and logicians, I suggest two from a respected logician, Max Black. The first example involves non-moral obligation terms<sup>55</sup> and refers to some game in progress.

1. Fischer wants to mate Botwinnik.
2. The one and only way to mate Botwinnik is for Fischer to move the Queen.
3. Therefore, Fischer should move the Queen.<sup>56</sup>

Black's example involving moral obligation terms is much the same, though he recognizes it is not possible to opt in or out of morality as it is a game. He argues that the main difference in a "should" conclusion which follows exclusively from "is" premises and the conclusion "Q" in the argument, if P then Q, and that P therefore Q, is this:

To assert the premise in question while showing signs of doubting or wondering about the conclusion would be an indication of stupidity, failure to understand, or some other cognitive deficiency. . . . But a man might refuse to say 'You should do M,' even though he had affirmed the factual premises whose truth constituted a conclusive reason for making the 'should' statement.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Although both examples are from Black, the distinctions between non-moral obligation terms and moral-obligation terms should not be attributed to him.

<sup>56</sup> Black, "The Gap Between 'Is' and 'Should,'" p. 102. Black is not unaware of objections that can be made to his examples. He considers at least two. For this discussion consult pp. 103-9.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

Since giving advice involves a voluntary action, a man may simply abstain from the authority without leaving himself open to the charge of irrationality. Nevertheless, he insists that given the willingness to draw a moral conclusion, there is only "a single possibility" of moral advice.<sup>58</sup> Thus, whether non-moral obligation terms are involved or moral obligation terms,

Given the truth of the factual premises concerning man's end and the necessary and sufficient condition for attaining that end, and given that one is to make some second-person 'should'-statement, one<sup>59</sup> must say 'You should do M'--and nothing else will do.

As an example of a valid argument from factual premises to a moral conclusion, Black offers the following:

1. Doing A will produce pain.
2. Apart from producing the pain resulting from A, doing A will have the same consequence that not doing A would have had.
3. Therefore, A ought not to be done.<sup>60</sup>

Black says that if he is to be shown mistaken,

. . . somebody will have to demonstrate that a person ready to make a moral judgment and accepting the premises could decline to make the moral judgment expressed by the conclusion, without thereby convicting himself of failure to understand the terms used, or some other cognitive defect.<sup>61</sup>

Respecting the theologian's effort to support claim (2), I have shown that: (a) though Hume's dichotomy between "is" and "ought" has been accepted by different

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., pp. 110-11.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

philosophers, the intent of this dichotomy can be questioned; and (b) the impossibility of deriving an "ought" from an "is" can and has been questioned by respected philosophers and logicians, not the least of whom is Max Black.

#### Claim Four of the Theologian

Temporarily putting aside claim (3), Frankena notes claim (4) that religious or theological propositions are logically necessary for the justification of all ethical judgments and principles. This claim for Frankena is "the most crucial" and may take different forms: (a) the claim that certain religious or theological premises are logically necessary for the justification of a certain ethics such as the Christian tradition, and (b) the claim that some religious or theological premises are logically necessary for the justification of any and every ethical judgment and principle whatsoever. (c) Graber suggests an important third possibility; namely, that theological premises are logically necessary for any ethical judgment that is valid or acceptable.<sup>62</sup> Frankena regards the second form as more important. He notes that any ethical principle which involves religious or theological terms seems bound to presuppose religious or theological premises. However, the important question is whether the justification of ethical

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<sup>62</sup> Graber suggested this possibility to me in conversation.

principles that do not contain religious or theological terms (e.g., "We ought to love one another;" "It is wrong to kill") logically requires an appeal to such premises.<sup>63</sup>

Frankena considers three attempts to which the theologian may resort in an effort to defend claim (4). I shall consider each of these and then make some additional suggestions as to why claim (4) should not be accepted by the theologian.

First, the theologian may bring in claim (1) and argue that the justification of all such principles must involve an appeal to theistic premises since such terms as "ought" and "wrong" are to be defined in theistic terms. But, "if this is the line taken in defense of claim (4), then everything depends on the status and justifiability of the definitions offered."<sup>64</sup> It may be asked why we should accept them and the answer to this question does not logically require an appeal to religious or theological beliefs. Earlier in this chapter, I argued that one may give different arguments for accepting a particular definition. Further, I claimed that a theological definition of ethical terms might be justified by reference to issues other than the fundamental principle expressed in the definition itself.

The principles to which Frankena refers at the

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<sup>63</sup>Frankena, MLDR, pp. 298, 305.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., pp. 305-6.

beginning of the preceding paragraph refer to those judgments involving moral obligation terms, e.g., "One ought to do x." This recalls some previous remarks to which I shall briefly refer.<sup>65</sup> If Frankena calls for the justification of an ethical principle in terms of some other principle or standard, then this demand is question-begging. It is the nature of a fundamental principle or standard that justification by some more ultimate principle or standard cannot be given. To make such a demand is to assume that a fundamental standard is not fundamental but that there is some other more fundamental standard. Thus, it is the secularist who begs the question--not the theist.

The second attempt discussed by Frankena to defend claim (4) has to do with the meaning of the word "justified." A theologian could say:

. . . religious or theological beliefs are logically required for the justification of ethical ones because what we mean by saying that a belief is "justified" is that it is shown to be based on a set of religious or theological presuppositions about man and the universe.<sup>66</sup>

Frankena holds that this view is mistaken because we do not hold theistic premises to be required for the justification of scientific or historical beliefs. Further, a belief based on theistic presuppositions does not in itself constitute justification for any belief. For the belief to

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<sup>65</sup>For a fuller discussion of this reasoning, see pp. 80-81

<sup>66</sup>Frankena, MLDR, p. 306.

be justified the presuppositions themselves must be justified by considerations other than their being theistic. If it is replied that this is what we ought to mean by "justified," then Frankena maintains that reasons would have to be given for a justification of this proposal, and he says, "it is not obvious that such a justification could be given or that it would have to include an appeal to religious presuppositions."<sup>67</sup> Frankena concludes by noting that we should regard a belief as justified only if it is logically entailed by a basic view of man and the universe (whether the view is theistic or not).<sup>68</sup>

I am in basic agreement with Frankena concerning this effort to support claim (4). I neither hold that the word "justified" means a belief is based on religious considerations nor do I hold that the theologian should mean this by the word. What is crucial in Frankena's statement is the contention that the considerations upon which a belief rests be themselves justified. However, this task is not within the scope of this work. Thus, I agree with Frankena that a belief should not be regarded as justified unless it is "entailed by a basic view of man the universe."

For the third attempt to defend claim (4) Frankena appeals to S. E. Toulmin who has suggested that the justification of moral or ethical rules logically entails an appeal to considerations of the general welfare because what

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 307.      <sup>68</sup>Ibid.

we mean by calling a rule "moral" or "ethical" is precisely that its justification rests on such an appeal.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, a theologian might argue that what makes theological propositions logically necessary for the justification of ethical judgments is the meaning of "morality" itself--"that we mean or should mean by a moral justification of an action or principle of action only one which relates it to a set of religious views about the world"<sup>70</sup> (e.g., being commanded by God).

Frankena's response to this recalls his previous remarks concerning definitions. If the theologian offers his definition of "moral" and "morality" as an elucidation of what we do mean, he is probably mistaken inasmuch as many people (including atheists, secularists, and even some theologians) do not use the term "moral" as he holds they do. If, on the other hand, the theologian offers his definitions of "moral" and "morality" as a recommendation of what we should mean, then we may ask for reasons why we should give assent. Until reasons are produced, he cannot claim that morality is logically dependent on religion.<sup>71</sup>

Frankena's demand for reasons requests that the theologian provide a justification of a corresponding moral principle. But, as I wrote earlier, such a demand asks too much. Justification of a principle which is itself the fundamental principle would necessarily result in circularity.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 307-8.

Frankena's former point concerning what the theologian does mean introduces my suggestions as to why the theologian should not accept claim (4). His former point is that the theologian offers his definition of "morality" as an institution relating to a set of religious views. Frankena makes this point more explicit when he says that claim "(4) says that they [theistic presuppositions] are necessary for the justification of all ethical judgments."<sup>72</sup> He makes the point even more explicit when he says that claim (4) may take the form that theistic premises are logically necessary for the justification of any and every ethical judgment and principle whatsoever.<sup>73</sup> If this is what claim (4) says, I reject it as well as Frankena's claim that if claim (1) is true then claim (4) is true.<sup>74</sup>

I reject it on the grounds considered in Chapter III; namely, that there are a variety of ethical terms and judgments (a point very familiar to Frankena). I argued that one or more of these terms may be given a theological analysis while others may be given a non-theological analysis. If this is the case, then the theologian does not have to maintain that "any and every" ethical judgment depends on theological premises. He can hold that only judgments including moral obligation terms are judgments dependent on theological premises. If by "ethical judgments," Frankena restricts himself to moral obligation

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 298.      <sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 305.      <sup>74</sup>Ibid.

judgments, then what I said does not follow. However, I am not sure that he would adopt such a restriction, especially in view of one of his examples of ethical judgments; namely, "The good is communion with God."<sup>75</sup> This judgment includes the term "good" which is a non-moral value term--not a moral obligation term.

#### Claim Three of the Theologian

Finally, Frankena considers claim (3) that ethical judgments can be justified by being derived logically from theological ones.<sup>76</sup> In part, claim (3) repeats claim (2) that ethical judgments can be logically inferred from theological propositions and has therefore already been covered. But claim (3) says more than claim (2); namely, "that ethical judgments would in fact be justified if they were shown to be based on certain theological beliefs." Frankena is right (as already shown) in rejecting claim (3) by virtue of the meaning of "justified." Further, if by "ethical beliefs" he means moral obligation judgments then he is right in saying that these judgments should not be viewed as justified unless the theological beliefs upon which they

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 313. Actually before considering claim (3) Frankena notes six arguments which have been advanced to support the view that morality is dependent on religion. It is not necessary to note these arguments in any direct way as they do not constitute matters necessary to consider Frankena's discussion of the four major claims involved in the thesis that morality is logically dependent on religion.

rest can in some way be rationally justified. Unless this is done, claim (3) cannot be regarded as true; but this task cannot be undertaken in this work.

### The Secularist and the Is/Ought Principle

This concludes my discussion of the merits of the three claims of the theologian involving logical matters. One final note should be made concerning the Is/Ought principle in general; namely, that although the secularist wishes to make it a problem for the religionist, the secularist himself cannot escape the difficulties involved. Of the secular ethicists under consideration, Robinson and Nielsen especially must face this. Robinson observes that for the law "thou shalt not kill," the religious ethicist must supply the premise "thou shalt do whatever God commands" in addition to "God commands us not to kill."<sup>77</sup> However, regarding his own ethical system, in making the move from saying a certain action increases misery to the conclusion "one should not do that action," he must provide the evaluative premise "misery is an evil."

Nielsen faces a similar problem in holding that happiness is good, since we all want to be happy. By making this claim, Nielsen recognizes that he is open to the charge of having confused factual and moral issues. He quickly mentions the Is/Ought principle--An "ought" cannot be

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<sup>77</sup>Robinson, An Atheists' Values, p. 131.

derived from an "is." We cannot deduce that something is good from a discovery that it will make people happy.<sup>78</sup> Although he continues to maintain that he does not confuse factual with moral issues, he says,

But we do justify moral claims by an appeal to factual claims, and there is a close connection between what human beings desire on reflection and what they deem to be good. 'X is good' does not mean 'X makes for human happiness,' but in deciding that something is good, it is crucial to know what makes human beings happy.<sup>79</sup>

The theologian wants to know about this "close connection" between what people desire and what they deem good. If the connection is not a logical one then how does Nielsen prove that happiness is good? Nielsen answers this when he says, "I cannot prove that happiness is good . . . Secular morality starts with the assumption that happiness and self-awareness are fundamental human goods . . . ."<sup>80</sup> Nielsen says it may be altogether impossible to ever prove this "but if people will be honest with themselves they will see that in their behavior they clearly show that they subscribe to such a principle."<sup>81</sup> The principle is that "happiness is good." Note that proof of this principle is in the "behavior" of people. The behavior of people has to do with what they in fact seek; namely, happiness according to Nielsen. Thus, it seems clear that though he claims not to confuse factual with moral issues, he (like Robinson) does so confuse the issues.

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<sup>78</sup> Nielsen, Ethics, p. 55.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., pp. 56, 58.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

Some Concluding Remarks

In this Chapter I have challenged Nielsen's first two arguments based on the second horn of the Euthyphro dilemma. First, he made the linguistic claim that it is false to say that any ethical judgment can be defined or analyzed by any theological judgment. A theologian claims that ethical terms can be defined by reference to those of religion. The secularist claims that such a translation commits the definist fallacy. In response to this, I showed (1) that on Moore's version of the fallacy, theological definism does not commit the fallacy. Further, I pointed out (2) that the open question argument (stated in a phenomenological-atomistic or linguistic analysis) does not work universally, and thus does not show a theological definist view to be untenable. (3) Concerning Frankena's claim that the justification of a definition will always be tantamount to justifying the corresponding ethical principle, I disputed this claim by suggesting that a theological definition of ethical terms might be justified solely on the basis of social and/or institutional factors without reference to the fundamental ethical principle expressed in the definition.

Second, Nielsen made the logical claim that it is false to say that evaluative statements can be derived from purely factual statements. The secularist's claim on this point is that the religionist commits the Is/Ought fallacy

when he holds that ethical judgments can be logically derived from those of theology. After clarifying the distinct relationship between Nielsen's two arguments, I argued (1) that Frankena's claim (2) of the theologian (the judgments of ethics can be logically inferred, deduced, or derived from those of theology--an "ought" can be derived from an "is") could be shown to be true on the basis that (a) the judgments of ethics can be translated into theological ones (the conclusion of my response to Nielsen's first argument). (b) I argued further that claim (2) of the theologian might be supported by challenging the principle that an "ought" cannot be derived from an "is" with respect to both (i) non-moral obligation terms and (ii) moral obligation terms.

(2) I argued that claim (4) of the theologian (theistic presuppositions are necessary for the justification of all ethical judgments) should be rejected on the grounds considered in Chapter III, that there are a variety of ethical terms and that one or more of these terms may be given a theological analysis while others may be given a non-theological analysis.

(3) Concerning claim (3) of the theologian (ethical judgments can be justified by being derived logically from theological ones), I maintained that moral obligation judgments should not be considered justified unless the theological beliefs upon which they rest can in some way be

rationally justified, a task unable to be undertaken in this study.

(4) Finally, I contended that although the secularist wishes to make the Is/Ought principle a problem for the religionist, that the secularist himself cannot escape the difficulties involved.

One final note should be made regarding the positive outcome of this chapter. With respect to Nielsen's linguistic claim, if his claim is false and it is true that ethical terms and judgments can be defined or analyzed by theological terms and judgments, and it is also true that ethical terms like "right" and "ought" are meaningful (i.e. they have meaning), and since theological terms and judgments are equivalent in meaning with these ethical terms and the judgments in which they are used, then they (i.e. ethical and theological terms and judgments) are also equivalent in meaningfulness. Thus, if one is committed to the view that ethical terms and judgments are meaningful, then he also commits himself to the view that religious terms and judgments are meaningful.

Concerning Nielsen's logical claim, if his claim is false, and it is true that ethical terms and judgments are dependent on theological ones for their truth or for their justification, then theological terms and judgments must be meaningful. It is a point of logic that no false or meaningless statement can function as a premise in a sound argument

or be implied by a true proposition. Thus, as Graber observes, "the morally serious skeptic is faced with the following dilemma: he must either abandon his belief that moral principles are true (or valid) and justified or grant that the relevant theological principles are meaningful and true."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>Grabber, "Morality and Religion," p. 34. See his discussion of the linguistic and logical dependence theses for some excellent remarks concerning their apologetic consequences (pp. 20-34).

## CHAPTER V

### THE SECOND HORN OF THE EUTHYPHRO DILEMMA (CONCLUDED)

#### Nielsen's Third Argument Set Forth

The third argument against religious ethics raised by Nielsen which relates to the second horn of Plato's dilemma is couched in Ewing's question, "Why obey God's commands?"<sup>1</sup> He considers four possible answers: (1) because I ought to do so, (2) because God is good, (3) because I love God, and (4) because God will punish me if I do not obey. Concerning (1) Ewing says, "Since 'I ought to do A' is held to mean 'God commands me to do A,' this can only mean that I am commanded by God to obey God's commands, which supplies no further reason whatever." (2) Ewing says that on the definition given, (2) could only mean that God carries out his own command. Response (3) to the question "Why obey God's commands?" presupposes two independent assumptions (that I ought to obey the commands of God if I love him and that I ought to love God) which could not without circularity, be validated by referring to God's commands. Response (4) might be a good reason from the prudential point of view but considerations of self-interest

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<sup>1</sup>Ewing, "The Autonomy of Ethics," pp. 39-40.

cannot be an adequate basis for ethics. Even if there were a connection between command and obligation, a powerful being by his mere commands cannot create an obligation. Nielsen adds to this that Ewing asserts the following:

Unless we assume that God is morally perfect, unless we assume the perfect goodness of God, there can be no necessary 'relation between being commanded or willed by God and being obligatory or good.'<sup>2</sup>

Nielsen then goes on to say that he will argue that even granting the goodness of God (or even the perfect goodness of God), it does not follow that morality is dependent on religion. Nielsen argues that his analysis of the logical status of "God is good" reveals that whether the expression is taken as a substantive statement or as a truth of language, the concept good must be understood independently of the concept of God.<sup>3</sup>

#### A Response to Nielsen's Third Argument

In response to Nielsen's criticism of a theologically based ethic, I shall make two moves: (1) I shall show by clarifying the question that whether it is taken as a request for (a) justification (either a moral justification or a non-moral justification), or (b) motivation, Nielsen's case cannot be sustained. This response itself is sufficient to show that it is not the case that the theist cannot answer coherently the question, "Why obey God's commands?" (2) I shall critique Nielsen's argument against the

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<sup>2</sup>Nielsen, Ethics, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

theist that "God is good," taken substantively or analytically, assumes, prior to God's commands, a fundamental moral criterion.

First, the question, "Why obey God's commands?" needs clarification. Frankena notes that questions of the "Why should . . .?" variety are ambiguous leaving open whether the request is for motivation or justification.<sup>4</sup> Further, if the question is taken as a demand for (1) justification, then is the request for (a) a moral justification or (b) a non-moral justification for doing what God commands?

(a) According to Ewing, such answers as he has suggested produce circular definitions. However, this is only the case if the question, "Why obey God's commands?" is taken as a request for a moral justification for doing what God commands. If taken this way, the answer would be circular. This follows because on a theological definist analysis "One ought to do x" means (at least in part) "God commands that one do x," which translates into "One is commanded by God to obey God's commands" which is hardly a significant statement. On a theological definist analysis, "what God commands" is the fundamental moral principle or standard and to request a moral justification for such a standard is to demand "a moral justification for doing what

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<sup>4</sup>Frankena, Ethics, p. 114.

morality requires."<sup>5</sup> But, if "what God commands" is the fundamental moral standard, nothing else can be said from a moral perspective to justify an action. To attempt something else will involve circularity and to expect something else is to misunderstand the nature of a fundamental moral standard; namely, that it is something which cannot receive further justification within the system.

(b) Graber suggests that Ewing's question may be a request for a non-moral justification and suggests several thinkers as examples.<sup>6</sup> He points out, however, that before a criticism of the morality of "what God commands" can be successful from a non-moral perspective at least three logically prior issues must be settled.

(1) It must be established that there are certain points of view higher than the moral point of view on the basis of which it is legitimate to demand justification for morality itself. (2) These points of view must be specified and analyzed so that there can be a basis for agreement about what would be justified in terms of them and what would not be. (3) The morality of 'what God commands' must be examined and evaluated in terms of this standard.<sup>7</sup>

These issues have not been settled and thus the demand for a non-moral justification is unwarranted.

The question, "Why obey God's commands?" could be

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<sup>5</sup> Graber, "Morality and Religion," p. 134.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 134. See Frankena, Ethics, pp. 96f; Kurt Baier, The Moral Point of View, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1958), chap. 12; Paul W. Taylor, Normative Discourse (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1961), pp. 114-18, esp. p. 123.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

taken as a request to know (2) the motivation for obeying God's commands. Such a request might be found in Ewing's consideration of the possibility that one might obey God's commands because God will punish one if he does not obey. Frankena does not allude to any problems with such a reply if taken as a motivation, though it could be questioned whether it is a proper moral motivation; however, he says that if the reply "is intended to justify the claim that we ought to obey God, then it presupposes a basic ethical egoism . . ."<sup>8</sup> This is probably what Ewing and Nielsen have in mind when they say that such a reply may be a self-interested or prudential reason for doing what God commands, but it is scarcely a morally good reason since considerations of self-interest cannot be an adequate basis for morality.<sup>9</sup> Further, Robinson is probably thinking along the same lines when he argues that religion does not provide a non-entailing reason for a moral law such as "that there is a god, who commands us to obey them and will burn us eternally if we do not."<sup>10</sup>

Although it seems that the above secularists discuss such notions as fear of punishment as a reply to "Why obey God's commands?" from the perspective of justification, they

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<sup>8</sup> Frankena, Ethics, p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> Ewing, "The Autonomy of Ethics," p. 40; Nielsen, Ethics, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Robinson, An Atheist's Values, p. 132.

could be interpreted as discussing the motivation for obeying God's commands. Thus, they might argue that motivation out of hope of reward or fear of punishment might be good from a prudential point of view, but this is not a morally good motivation for obeying God's commands.

All three of the above-mentioned secularists, with the possible exception of Frankena, fail to understand that motivation to obey God's commands is not based exclusively on any one thing. Motivation for such action may be out of: (a) hope of reward, (b) fear of punishment, and/or (c) love for God. Secularists say that it must be (a) and/or (b) and that neither of these is a morally good motivation and overlook (c) entirely. However, this is to neglect the goodness and love of God as motivating factors, both of which are in harmony with the Christian tradition. Graber points out that, "We may still find his benevolence and loving-kindness the basis of our attraction to him, the feature that evokes the responses of love, worship and obedience."<sup>11</sup> Two points may be established on the basis of this statement: (a) God is benevolent; and (b) the trait of benevolence evokes the responses of love, worship and obedience. The record of the Bible bears out both of these claims. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalms 46:1).

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<sup>11</sup> Graber, "Critical Bibliography," p. 66. See also Graber's "In Defense of a Divine Command Theory," p. 66 for some remarks on this point. I will have more to say about the attributes of God later in this chapter.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Further, "We love him because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). This last statement clearly supports Graber's point, namely that the response of love is evoked by the trait of benevolence. Surely, Nielsen, Ewing, and Robinson recognize the distinction between prudentialism and love of God and would not deny love of God as a morally good motivation.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps these secularists would deny love of God as a justification for obeying God's commands. This is what Ewing attempts in his third suggested possible answer to the question, "Why obey God's commands?" He holds that to answer "because I love God" involves one in circular reasoning. However, I have already observed that this is only the case if "Why obey God's commands?" is taken as a request for a moral justification for doing what God commands. To make a request for moral justification of the fundamental moral standard is unwarranted.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, it does not seem that the question, "Why obey God's commands?" poses insurmountable difficulties for the theologian. To request a moral justification is to misunderstand the nature of a fundamental moral standard. To

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<sup>12</sup>See Bernard Williams' Morality: An Introduction to Ethics (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 68-78 for a good discussion of this.

<sup>13</sup>See pp. 130-31 for further details on this point.

request a non-moral justification is to request something involving issues which, as yet, have not been settled. Finally, to charge that motivation for obeying God's commands must be prudential overlooks that there may be other motivations such as love for God.

Second, Nielsen's argument against the theist's attempt to answer the question, "Why obey God's commands?" is unwarranted. Nielsen correctly says that for the believer "God is all good; he is the perfect good," but this assumption does not allow him to say that morality is grounded in religion. Nielsen goes beyond Ewing and contends that even if the believer is granted the assumption that God is good (or even the perfect good), it still does not follow that morality is dependent on religion and that we can know what we ought to do by knowing what God wants us to do. To understand this claim, Nielsen considers the logical status of the statement, "God is good." He argues that whether the statement is taken (1) as a non-analytic or (2) an analytic claim, the theist faces insurmountable difficulties.<sup>14</sup>

(1) If "God is good" is taken as a substantive claim then Nielsen poses the epistemological question, "How does one know the statement 'God is good' is true?" Two avenues of response are open to the theist: (a) experiential data

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<sup>14</sup>The remarks in this and the following paragraph are from Nielsen's Ethics, pp. 5-7.

and (b) Biblical data. On the basis of these, the believer predicates of God perfect goodness. On the basis of (b), the believer might suggest two reasons for claiming to know God is good: (i) God is good because he is omnipotent and omniscient, and (ii) God is good because he tells us to do good and to love one another--in short, God exhibits his goodness and love for his human creatures. Concerning (i), Nielsen quotes Hepburn who points out that there is nothing logically improper about saying "X is omnipotent and omniscient and morally wicked."<sup>15</sup> Nielsen rejects (ii) on such considerations as children's hospitals and concentration camps. Nielsen notes further that if one even assumes God is good, that to make such a judgment, one must use his "own logically independent moral criteria."<sup>16</sup> But, if this is true, then the theist can no longer maintain God's commands as the ultimate moral standard.

(2) If "God is good" is taken as an analytic claim (a truth of language), then the proposition is true by definition; i.e., "goodness" is a necessary defining characteristic of God. But, if the theist takes this option, Nielsen is quick to point out that linguistic evidences clearly show that the concept good can be understood quite

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<sup>15</sup>Ronald Hepburn, Christianity and Paradox, p. 132. Hepburn admits that a moral evaluation of God's nature would be the sort of answer to seek to justify the judgment, "God ought to be obeyed."

<sup>16</sup>Nielsen, Ethics, p. 7.

independently of any reference to deity--that morality without religion is possible. Nielsen attempts a demonstration of this point by the use of such analogies as below:

If we had no understanding of the word young, and if we did not know the criteria for deciding whether a dog was young, we could not know how correctly to apply the word puppy. Without such a prior understanding of what it is to be young, we could not understand the sentence 'puppies are young.' Similarly, if we had no understanding of the use of the word good, and if we did not know the criteria for deciding whether a being (or if you will, a power or a force) was good, we could not know how correctly to apply the word God. Without such a prior understanding of goodness, we could not understand the sentence 'God is good.'<sup>17</sup>

The capacity to judge something as good independent of God's commands is, for Nielsen, proof that there must be some fundamental moral criterion independent of God's commands as the fundamental moral criterion. Thus, the theist as well as the non-theist must decide for himself what is right and wrong, good and evil. According to Nielsen, the theist cannot allow any more objectivity for his fundamental moral standard than the non-theist. Thus, whether the theist takes "God is good" substantively or analytically, Nielsen claims that he must admit to possessing an independent standard of morality.

From this discussion, it is clear that although Nielsen's point starts with a possible answer to the question "Why obey God's commands?" which constitutes his third argument under the second horn of the Euthyphro dilemma, the end results have to do with considerations already noted

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

under the first horn which alleges standards of right and wrong independent of God's commands. Nevertheless, a brief discussion of this point is necessary as there are some further observations which have not as yet been noted.<sup>18</sup>

Various approaches might be taken to respond to Nielsen's claim that the theist holds to an independent moral criterion. Below, I shall: (1) note some approaches to Nielsen's claim I find inadequate, (2) argue how fundamental moral criteria can be justified without arguing from premises based on God's goodness, and (3) suggest a possible way in which one may speak of God's goodness.

(1) For the first inadequate approach, one might recall (a) some remarks I made in Chapter III concerning W. G. MacLagan. MacLagan is inclined to say that "God" is no more than a synonym for "Moral Law." It does not seem that MacLagan means to say that there is a sort of identity relation between God and the moral law. "God" may mean more than what is meant by "Moral Law" and may be of utmost significance to our lives. However, insofar as the moral demand is taken by itself, "God" just means "Moral Law." Although MacLagan would allow theological considerations to interpret moral experience, he would not view God as a causal explanation of morality.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>See Chapter III for a detailed treatment of Nielsen's view that there must be a moral standard logically independent of God's commands.

<sup>19</sup>W. G. MacLagan, The Theological Frontier of Ethics, pp. 81-82.

(b) Another approach is that of Dom Illyd Trethowan. He says that "the existence of God is apprehended in the recognition of moral obligation or that the recognition of moral obligation occurs in the apprehension of God. The apprehension of God is the recognition of moral obligation and vice versa."<sup>20</sup> When the theist says "God is good,"

He is not attempting a definition, for God is beyond definition, he is the unlimited source and good of the human spirit, the supreme and original value from which all other values derive, apprehended in and through those values. They are 'good' only because they derive from the Good. . . .

. . . in saying that something is 'good' in this sense he will be referring to it as deriving from God, and he will be therefore referring to God as both the source and the criterion of created goodness . . . .

. . . To ask whether God is morally good is to ask a meaningless question.<sup>21</sup>

(c) My third example is that of Patterson Brown who argues,

that 'God' is ordinarily a partially moral term. . . . it would not be strictly proper to call a being 'God' whose actions were not perfectly good or whose commands were not the best of moral directives. That God is good is a truth of language . . . . In referring to some being as 'God', we would in part be saying that he was morally faultless. . . . the appellation 'God' is reserved for that particular being who is the ultimate

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<sup>20</sup> Dom Illyd Trethowan, "The Philosophical Concept of Morality," in The Springs of Morality, ed. by John M. Todd (Burns and Oates, 1955), p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> Idem, "Why Be Moral?" The Downside Review 91 (October 1973): 251, 252, 253.

Christian criterion of the good. . 22. God is good because he is the standard of goodness.

Here are three examples of those who give a theological interpretation of moral notions. Most theists, however, would not agree with MacLagan in the equivalent claim of "God" and the "Moral Law." More theists would argue that the Moral Law is one thing and God is quite a different thing. MacLagan's claim that God is not a causal explanation of morality would be equally rejected by many theologians.

Trethowan's approach has many good points. Although his idea that God is apprehended in moral obligation is clear and has merit, his view that moral obligation occurs in the apprehension of God is not so clear. Just what exactly does Trethowan mean when he says this? Does he mean that without any feeling of moral obligation, one can find himself standing before God and that this in turn leads to a feeling of moral obligation? If so, the details of such an experience would have to be disclosed in order for me to comprehend fully what he claims. Nevertheless, he makes some interesting remarks which should be considered.

In accordance with Brown, most Christian theists would restrict the term "God" to a perfectly good being. However, not all would agree that God, by definition, is good. It seems that it must be conceded to Nielsen that "God is good" is not primarily (if at all) a definitional

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<sup>22</sup>Patterson Brown, "Religious Morality," pp. 247-48.

truth. The major reason for this is that few would admit that a matter of fact (e.g. "God is good") can be established by a definition (e.g. of "God"). This is not to say that some serious efforts have not been made to confirm matters of fact by definitions. One has only to consider Anselm's ontological argument as one such effort which is respected by many. Patterson Brown's effort itself should not merely be brushed aside. I simply do not believe his approach is entirely satisfactory to answer Nielsen.

(2) The theist holds that a good, omnipotent, omniscient being exists. According to Nielsen (assuming that some form of teleologism is necessarily true), any judgment about the goodness of such a being and his commands requires an independent moral criterion. Therefore, God cannot be the ultimate criterion of right and wrong as theists hold. As mentioned under the discussion of "God is good" as a substantive claim, Nielsen will allow that an omnipotent, omniscient being exists, but that goodness cannot be predicated of him without admitting a prior standard. However, this is the case only if one appeals to a moral criterion which has been rationally formulated independent of God. The theist need not admit this.

Nielsen says that if one assumes "God is good," then he makes a judgment which presupposes some independent moral criterion. Nielsen does not allow the possibility of justifying "what God commands" apart from some other fundamental moral criterion. Accordingly, he does not allow for the

justification of "what God commands." In response to this, consider the proposition "God is good because he is omnipotent and omniscient." For the sake of argument, Nielsen would allow the theist to assume that an omnipotent and omniscient being (called "God") exists and has revealed himself. What cannot be assumed without admitting a prior standard, according to Nielsen, is the goodness of God.

One important point which should be noted concerning Nielsen's above claim is that he apparently assumes that a deontological theory of moral obligation is logically impossible and that some form of teleologism is necessarily true. What Nielsen does not recognize is that it is fundamental to a deontological system (and my divine command view) that rightness is independent of goodness. Thus, it is consistent for a deontologist to hold to the view that "God is good" independent of considerations about rightness. "To assume otherwise is to presuppose that rightness (and obligation) is necessarily a logical function of goodness . . . ." <sup>23</sup> Further, if we take what is allowed by Nielsen, the following may be established: (a) God is omniscient, i.e., he knows whatever is possible to know. Specifically, I affirm that he is in a better position than anyone to know which instances of "x ought to be done" are claims of truth or falsity. (b) God is omnipotent, i.e., God can do

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<sup>23</sup> Graber, "In Defense of a Divine Command Theory," pp. 68-69. I shall have more to say about this particular point under Nielsen's fourth argument.

whatever is possible to be done. Specifically, God is able to reveal what we ought to do. These points apply no matter whether the source of obligation is God's command or something independent. The only grounds according to Nielsen and Hepburn for not accepting what God commands as a fundamental moral criterion are that it is logically possible for an omniscient and omnipotent God to be morally wicked.

Alan Zaitchik observes that if we knew that (c) "God never deliberately lies to us" then a code of divine commands would be justified.<sup>24</sup> It seems that (c) could be known without arguing from premises about God's goodness (thus, avoiding the need for an independent moral criterion). We might come to have solid evidence for (c) based on God's previous behavior, if, e.g. he was never found to have lied to us in the past, if he had always kept his promises to us, promises that for all we know are evil.<sup>25</sup> Thus, if we can hold that God is consistent, it seems that what God commands can be accepted as a fundamental moral criterion; but, on this argument, only epistemically--not necessarily logically fundamental.

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<sup>24</sup>Alan Zaitchik, review of Ethics Without God, by Kai Nielsen, in Philosophical Review, 84, January 1975, p. 134. I am indebted to Zaitchik for the reasoning in this and the following paragraph. See Graber's "Critical Bibliography," p. 61 for a similar line of reasoning.

<sup>25</sup>I point out later in this chapter that such evidence can be found for example in the record of the Bible.

If Nielsen objects that (c) is more fundamental than what God commands, then it should be noted that (c) must be established in order to justify what God commands. In this sense, (c) might be more fundamental than what God commands, but in this sense other propositions are equally fundamental, e.g. "God exists," "Persons exist," and "God has revealed a set of commands." Thus, (c) may be fundamental, but it is not a fundamental moral criterion nor does it presuppose any.

(3) I have shown how a fundamental moral criterion can be justified without arguing from premises based on God's goodness. It remains to be asked, however, in what sense one may speak of God's goodness? No analysis of morality in the Christian sense would be complete without providing some sense in which one can claim God is good. Without going into a detailed analysis of this, it seems clear that when the theist says, "God is good," he means something like "God is benevolent" or "God is beneficent." I argue in greater detail, later in this chapter, that God is both benevolent and beneficent to his human creatures. To say that God is benevolent is to say that he wills the good and to say that he is beneficent is to say that he does the good. "Good" in these senses is understood by Adams to be a synonym for "kind."<sup>26</sup> But this does not constitute a

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<sup>26</sup> Adams, "A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness," p. 338. See Adam's discussion, pp. 337-41 for other senses in which one may speak of "God is good."

serious problem for the theological definist as it is the nature of a deontological theory that goodness is independent of rightness. Further, the theologian may say "God is good" since his view (as I set out in Chapter III) allows the possibility that some things can be valued independently of God's commands. It is just when the theist speaks of right and wrong/ought and ought not, that he presupposes a moral standard of obligation.

Consider Nielsen's rejection of "God is good" on the basis that "God exhibits his goodness and love for his human creatures." As noted, Nielsen rejects this claim on the basis of such considerations as hospitals and concentration camps. The latter, according to Nielsen, function as evidence against an exhibition of God's goodness and love. Apparently, Nielsen means that the total situation surrounding hospitals and concentration camps is incompatible with the concept of the goodness of God. By this, Nielsen calls attention to the problem of evil which alleges that the Christian concept of God is self-contradictory. Epicurus was one of the earliest philosophers to call attention to this problem when he asserted that there is a logical incompatibility between asserting on the one hand that a good omnipotent thing exists, and on the other hand that evil exists.<sup>27</sup> This constitutes one of the major reasons

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<sup>27</sup>Quoted by Lactantius, "A Treatise on the Anger of God," in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, ed. by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Company, 1886), 7: 271.

Robinson rejects religion. He attempts to bring out the self-contradiction involved as follows:

A god who was all-powerful but left much misery in the world would not be all-benevolent. An all-benevolent god in a world containing much misery would not be an all-powerful god. A world containing a god who was both all-powerful and all benevolent would contain no misery.<sup>28</sup>

It is not within the scope of this study to give a detailed analysis of the so-called problem of evil. Neither Nielsen nor Robinson give any further details than what I have mentioned above. Thus, a brief note on the general direction a theist might take will be sufficient for my purposes. The theist might argue that there is no incompatibility between the existence of evil in the world and a good omnipotent thing by arguing that: (a) this world is the best of all possible worlds for God's purposes in creation; (b) sin (i.e., transgression of God's law) is the only intrinsic evil; (c) every instance of human suffering results from some condition which is necessary in God's purposes in creation; and (d) human suffering in no way diminishes or conflicts with the goodness of his purposes.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Robinson, An Atheist's Values, p. 124.

<sup>29</sup>For detailed treatments of such elements as these with a view to reconciling evil with the concept of a good omnipotent thing note the following: Austin Farrer's Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1961); John Hick's Evil and the God of Love (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1966); Francois Petit's The Problem of Evil, trans. by Christopher Williams (New York: Hawthorn Books, Publishers, 1959); and Thomas B. Warren's Sin, Suffering and God (Jonesboro, Arkansas: National Christian Press, 1980). Warren's theology also includes a critique of Farrer, Hick, and Petit.

If the existence of evil and the existence of a good omnipotent thing can be so explained as to avoid logical contradiction, then Nielsen's claim that it is false to say, "God exhibits his goodness and love for his human creatures" on the basis of the existence of hospitals and concentration camps is itself false.

From this discussion, it does not appear that Nielsen's third argument based on the question, "Why obey God's commands?" constitutes for the theologian an insurmountable problem. The question can be answered consistently on a theological definist analysis on the basis of motivation for obeying God's commands. Such motivation can be found, among other motives in one's love for God. Love and obedience to God's commands might be justified on the basis of God's attributes such as his holiness and benevolent concern for his human creatures. However, this is a point for further study which I undertake in my evaluation of Nielsen's fourth argument which follows.

#### Nielsen's Fourth Argument Set Forth

A fourth implication of the second horn of Plato's dilemma, it is argued, is that it makes ethical principles arbitrary. Although this is not found explicitly in Nielsen's discussion, it is mentioned implicitly when Nielsen says, "there can be no reason for his willing one thing rather than another, for his willing it eo ipso makes

whatever it is he wills good, right or obligatory."<sup>30</sup> Nielsen makes this observation in the context of his discussion of Ewing. It is probable that he had the following statement by Ewing in mind:

If what was good or bad as well as what ought to be done were fixed by God's will, then there could be no reason whatever for God willing in any particular way. His commands would become purely arbitrary, and while the idea of God as issuing arbitrary commands has sometimes been welcomed as tribute to his omnipotence, omnipotence without goodness is surely an idea of no religious value whatever, and the idea of God would be deprived of all ethical content. For to say that God was good would be just to say he was God: he would be good by definition whatever he should do. Since there was no ethical reason for his commands, God might in that case just as well command us to cheat, torture and murder, and then it would really be our duty to act like this.<sup>31</sup>

There are successive steps in this statement that I wish to note individually in stating this objection to religious ethics. If good were defined in terms of God's will: (1) there would "be no reason whatever for God willing in any particular way," and thus; (2) God's "commands would become purely arbitrary," the consequence of which is that morality is contingent upon the "caprice" of God;<sup>32</sup> hence (3) God might "just as well command us to cheat, torture and murder" as to be fair, kind, and beneficent, and (4) "it would really be our duty to act like this."

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<sup>30</sup>Nielsen, Ethics, pp. 3-4.

<sup>31</sup>Ewing, "The Autonomy of Ethics," p. 39.

<sup>32</sup>The "caprice" element in this remark is from Flew's God and Philosophy, p. 110.

A Response to Nielsen's Fourth Argument

The procedure I shall adopt in responding to this argument is to evaluate carefully points (1), (2), and (3) based on Ewing's quotations. However, before this I wish to point out that the general form of this objection is not new with Nielsen, Ewing, Frankena, or other secular moralists of today. Historically, besides Socrates' formulation in Plato's Euthyphro, the objection is raised by the theologian/philosopher Joseph Glanville, who in the seventeenth century, wrote that "the first Errour, which is the ground of the rest, is, That things are good and just, because God Wills them so to be . . . ." <sup>33</sup> Again, in the eighteenth century, Richard Price, in arguing "that morality is a branch of necessary truth" observes that if right and wrong were made "dependent on the Divine will" then we would have to "give up all necessary truth." <sup>34</sup>

First, Ewing observes that if good were defined in terms of God's will or commands, there would be no reason for God to will in any particular way. Antony Flew mentions this in reference to the Euthyphro dilemma and observes that to say conduct is right because God commands it implies "that there can be no inherent moral reason why this rather

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<sup>33</sup> Joseph Glanvill, "A Letter Concerning George Rust's A Discourse of Truth," in Divine Command Morality, ed. by Janine Marie Idziak (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press 1979), p. 189.

<sup>34</sup> Price, "A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals," p. 211.

than that ought to be thus commanded."<sup>35</sup> In arguing for a religiously based ethic in the form of God's commands, I grant the truthfulness of both Ewing's and Flew's claim. It is not my claim that the moral foundations of right and wrong are to be found in the nature of actions themselves. My claim is that the fundamental standard of moral obligation is what God commands. However, this is far from saying that there are no reasons why this rather than that ought to be commanded. It is clearly the case that God can have no ethical reason for whatever he commands. This point has emerged before in this study and I have pointed out that to demand an ethical reason for God's commands is to assume that what God commands is not the fundamental standard of obligation; and thus, such a demand is to misunderstand the nature of a standard itself. God's commands can have non-ethical reasons and/or motives such as his interest in the welfare of his human creatures which emerges out of his loving kindness.<sup>36</sup>

Second, Ewing holds that if there is no reason for God to will in any particular way, then God's commands are arbitrary, and thus capricious. In response to this, note (1) the background of such an objection. The background has to do with the anti-authoritarian attitude characteristic of

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<sup>35</sup>Flew, God and Philosophy, p. 109.

<sup>36</sup>This concept and a possible objection to it will be developed more fully under the next major point.

a great part of modern society. It may be that this is what has led some to object to religious ethics on the basis that it reduces ethics to a matter of worship of power.<sup>37</sup> The concern over connections between authoritarian attitudes and morality is brought out clearly by Robinson.

Great harm is done to morality by its authoritarian connexions, by the notion that the parson is the depository of it, by the habit of turning to the parson when the question is what is morally right. The average parson is a worse judge of right and wrong than the average layman, and that is simply because he takes his moral laws on authority. Never go to church to learn how to behave unless the sermon is preached by a layman.<sup>38</sup>

Robinson clearly says that the average parson is a poor judge of morality "simply because he takes his moral laws on authority." It may be true that the average parson is not a very good judge of morality, but Robinson has not established this, nor has he established that because the parson's judgments are based on authority that one should reject a theologically based ethic.

Anti-authoritarian attitudes may be "based upon certain factual beliefs about human nature."<sup>39</sup> Human beings

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<sup>37</sup>A number of critics of religious ethics mention this. See Antony Flew's "The 'Religious Morality' of Mr. Patterson Brown," Mind 74 (October 1965): 579. Ewing, "The Autonomy of Ethics," p. 41. D. Goldstick, "Monotheism's Euthyphro Problem," Canadian Journal of Philosophy 3 (June 1974): 585-89; reprinted in Divine Command Morality, ed. by Janine Marie Idziak (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), pp. 280-86.

<sup>38</sup>Robinson, An Atheist's Values, p. 133.

<sup>39</sup>Graber, "In Defense of a Divine Command Theory," p. 68.

have the capacity (but not necessarily the tendency) to be malevolent, self-interested, and capricious. Thus, we fear to grant absolute power to any one with these capacities because he may misuse it. However, this still does not (without further clarification) argue against religious ethics. It may be and probably is good grounds for not granting absolute power to any single human being or groups of human beings, but it is not good grounds against God and his commands. The reason for this will become clearer as I make an additional distinction concerning Ewing's charge that God's commands are arbitrary and thus capricious.

(2) It is simply not the case that God's commands are arbitrary and thus capricious. Ewing is confused concerning the meanings of "arbitrary." Some distinctions concerning "arbitrary" and some related words will help clarify this objection. Edwards notes that "arbitrary" takes its meaning from its opposite notion "rational." Generally, "nonarbitrary" just means "rational," and where these terms are understood to refer to that which is logically inferred then (a) arbitrary refers to that which is not logically inferred. Edwards says,

In this sense of "arbitrary," the ultimate norms of value are indeed arbitrary, but so are all other paradigms of rationality such as the axioms of mathematics, geometry, and logic, the principle of the uniformity of nature which underlies all scientific and inductive reasoning, and all the basic principles of all human knowledge whatsoever.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Edwards, Pleasures and Pains (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 135. See Graber's "Critical

Although Edward's remarks are in the context of a defense of utilitarianism, they may serve to provide some insight to a theologically based ethic. In my view, God's commands are arbitrary much like Edward's ultimate norms in that they are (a) not logically inferred and are ultimate. God's commands are, in the root sense of "arbitrary," "decided or fixed at the discretion of an arbiter or judge"<sup>41</sup> who is God himself. Further, I would maintain that God's commands are, on this view, "purely arbitrary" as they are not decided upon by any other fundamental standard. To hold that they must be decided upon by some other standard is to beg the question, as the establishment of a fundamental standard is the point at issue.

A further distinction which should be made is that if "nonarbitrary" means "rational" and these terms are understood to refer to that which is reasonable then (b) arbitrary refers to that which is unreasonable. This is the caprice element to which Ewing and Flew refer, and they would be correct to say that any claim is unreasonable or capricious if no grounds could be provided to support the claim. However, God's commands are not arbitrary in this sense.

As I pointed out in response to Ewing's first point,

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Bibliography," p. 60 for some helpful suggestions on distinctions of "arbitrary."

<sup>41</sup>Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1961 ed. s.v. "Arbitrary."

God can have non-ethical reasons and/or motives for his commands; namely, his interest in promoting the general welfare of his human creatures. This is far from being unreasonable. This desire on God's part is an expression of his love and benevolence. When the New Testament speaks of God's love, it employs agape which is unconditional (it is not given on the basis of special features of the object loved) and universal (it is for all his creatures--human and non-human). This benevolent feature of God seeks the highest good possible on the part of every person. Other attributes come into play here such as omnipotence and omniscience. God is omnipotent and thus can do and command whatever is possible to be done and to be commanded. Thus, he has the power to bring about the welfare of his human creatures. Further, God is omniscient and thus knows what is in the best interest of his human creatures. Since God is omnipotent, omniscient, and all-loving, then he has the power, knowledge, and motive for commanding what he does. This is clearly not arbitrary in the sense of being unreasonable. Therefore, I conclude that Ewing's claim that God's commands are arbitrary and thus capricious or unreasonable does not follow. The love of God dismisses the possibility that God commands what is not good for his human creatures and further demonstrates that authority in connection with morality is not necessarily an undesirable feature.

Some possible objections to the above view should be

considered. (1) It might be objected that reference to the concept of benevolence introduces an alien standard of moral obligation. This is the case because if God is benevolent, he wills the good and this implies that his knowledge of the good is logically independent of his willing it; thus, standards of goodness must be logically independent of God's will. However, as I noted concerning Nielsen's third argument, this is compatible with a theological definist analysis. Graber notes on this the following:

To assume otherwise is to presuppose that rightness (obligation) is necessarily a logical function of goodness--or, in other words, to assume that deontological theories of moral obligation are logically impossible and some form of teleologism necessarily true. The view that rightness is independent of goodness is fundamental to all forms of deontologism and not just to a divine command theory.<sup>42</sup>

I have argued that because of God's benevolence he has the motive for his commands; namely, the promotion of the general welfare of his human creatures. It might be objected (2) that what God commands is not in the best interest of his human creatures. Robinson says that "it is always possible that, if he [God] exists and ordains certain laws, these laws are in conflict with those that would do most to lessen misery on earth."<sup>43</sup> If God's commands conflicted with commands which would lessen human misery or brought about such misery, then those commands would not be

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<sup>42</sup> Graber, "In Defense of a Divine Command Theory," pp. 68-69.

<sup>43</sup> Robinson, An Atheist's Values, p. 132.

in the best interest of human beings; thus, his benevolence would not prove to be a sufficient non-ethical reason and/or motive for his commands. Robinson holds that it is not only possible that God's commands are in conflict with the interests of humanity, but that they are in fact in conflict with such interests. The ethical commands with which Robinson is concerned are those of the New Testament. A discussion of his rejection of these ethical commands can be subsumed under two heads: (a) the general character of the ethical teaching of the synoptic Gospels and (b) the ethical teachings of Jesus. I agree with Robinson that

We ought to judge these precepts as we judge any other precepts or valuations, weighing their value in the light of reason and love, considering whether to adopt or reject them by asking<sup>44</sup> whether they lessen human misery or do not lessen it.

My discussion will be brief but to the point to establish that Robinson's claim is unwarranted.<sup>45</sup>

(a) Robinson's criticism of the general nature of the ethical teaching of the Synoptics can be summarized in five points:<sup>46</sup> (i) "it is quite unsystematic." The ethics of Jesus do not constitute a treatise or even a methodical list like the Ten Commandments. On the contrary,

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>45</sup>For some theologians who have developed more fully the kinds of points I make regarding the ethical teaching of Jesus, see Thomas' Christian Ethics and Moral Philosophy; Ramsey's Basic Christian Ethics; and Henry's Christian Personal Ethics.

<sup>46</sup>Robinson, An Atheist's Values, pp. 143-44.

the teaching consists of many separate and independent sayings with nothing mentioned as to how it is all to be coordinated. (ii) "a great deal of the teaching is vague, puzzling, or obscure." (iii) "The teaching includes both very general precepts on which great emphasis is laid, and discussions of middling matters . . . ." (iv) "The teaching is paradoxical and intended to be so." (v) "The teaching has a prominent strain of harshness in it."

Concerning (i), I wish to emphasize the following. Apparently, Robinson thinks that the ethical teaching of the New Testament is deficient because it is not systematized. However, Jesus was not concerned to produce a systematic treatise. On the contrary, he was concerned to lay down fundamental principles such as love of others (concern for the welfare of others) which are to be interpreted and applied to specific situations. This responds also to (iii) as it is the intention of Jesus to emphasize general precepts. Further, he gives concrete examples such as the parable of the good Samaritan which may be applied in principle to different situations. Does it follow that Jesus' ethics should be rejected on the basis of their unsystematic nature? If so, many other ethical systems such as Socrates' ethics would have to be rejected.

Points (ii) and (iv) can be considered together. Neither warrants a rejection of God's commands. If the teaching is vague, puzzling and obscure for some such as

Robinson, it does not follow that it is such for everyone. Robinson's point could be made about other ethical systems as well. In all probability, Kant's system would be vague, puzzling, and obscure to some. Further, an examination of the context and/or cultural background of Jesus' statements will usually reveal a clearer statement than initially thought. Concerning the paradoxical feature of Jesus' ethics, practical reasons can be suggested for it. Jesus attracted attention to his fundamental principles, illuminated aspects of truth formerly overlooked, and challenged thought.<sup>47</sup>

Concerning (v), it should be admitted that some of Jesus' statements have a strain of harshness but it does not follow that they should be rejected on this basis. Some of these statements can be better understood if they are viewed against the background of Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees, mentioned by Robinson, where often times his condemnation was of their hypocrisy. Other harsh sayings can be explained on the basis of his benevolence. He wants the welfare of his human creatures, therefore he makes some statements warning of punishment. Instead of harsh, this could be interpreted as kind in that one receives instruction and/or commands which can motivate one to avoid certain terrible consequences. Although more could be said

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<sup>47</sup> For a good discussion of the paradoxes of Jesus, see Ralph W. Sockman's The Paradoxes of Jesus (New York: Abingdon Press, 1936).

on these matters, perhaps this is sufficient to demonstrate that the character of God's commands is not entirely represented properly by Robinson. The meaning and significance of God's commands is open to a different interpretation than that provided by Robinson. Thus, I conclude that he has not given adequate grounds to reject the ethical teaching of the New Testament.

(b) Robinson criticizes the general nature of the ethics of Jesus as well as precepts in particular. According to Robinson, the general nature of the ethics of Jesus should be rejected, in short, because (i) they are not comprehensive enough--they do not provide all the values and rules we need. He holds that such ideals as beauty, truth, and knowledge are "wholly absent" from Jesus' teaching. (ii) Further, the virtue of conscientiousness (respect for the moral law) does not occupy a high place in his teaching. (iii) Jesus does not deal with any social questions except that of divorce and says little on the question of sex. (iv) His teachings do not recognize the conflict between the commands, much less provide judicious guidance in cases of conflict. Moreover, their unsystematic character entitles us to pick and choose as we so judge. He concludes that neither the Old Testament nor the Synoptics live up to the claim made for them; namely, the high tone of their precepts.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Robinson, An Atheist's Values, pp. 148-51.

Most of what Robinson says is simply not the case.

(i) The ethics of Jesus are more comprehensive when viewed against the ethics of the Old Testament. Whereas the Ten Commandments were primarily concerned with regulation of overt actions, Jesus' ethics go beyond this and take account of thoughts and/or motives out of which actions proceed. As a case in point consider Jesus' statement,

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart (Matthew 5:27,28).

Further, they are more comprehensive than Robinson might think. Robinson claims that Jesus does not treat beauty by which Robinson means "that which gives us pleasure of sense."<sup>49</sup> Although the New Testament does not have anything like an extended treatment of beauty, it does treat it. Thus, Jesus calls attention to the lilies of the field and Paul calls attention to the world of nature as evidence of some of God's attributes (Matthew 6:28; Romans 1:20).<sup>50</sup>

Robinson is not warranted in claiming that Jesus neglects truth and knowledge nor in his claim that Jesus never recommends the virtue that seeks and leads to

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>50</sup> Robinson on p. 148 of An Atheist's Values mentions this as a possible reference to the ideal of beauty but rejects it on the basis that it is used "to enforce the lesson of improvidence." See my comments on the latter on pp. 168-69.

knowledge, namely reason."<sup>51</sup> It is not within the scope of this study to give a detailed analysis of the concepts Robinson claims are neglected by Jesus. If Robinson's procedure of study were followed, it might be argued that such is unnecessary since he merely makes his claim without giving any concrete reasons for his assertion. Nevertheless, some brief remarks should make clear that Robinson's charge may be challenged.

Various views have been advanced as attempts to discover the nature of truth. It has been suggested that truth consists in some sort of correspondence between belief and fact. Pragmatists and instrumentalists have claimed that truth consists in some kind of satisfaction. Advocates of the coherence theory maintain that truth consists in a body of beliefs which forms a completely rounded system.<sup>52</sup> Bertrand Russell maintains that if the nature of truth is to be discovered any theory must fulfill at least three requirements. It must: (ia) allow truth to have an opposite--falsehood, (ib) make truth a property of beliefs, and (ic) make "it a property wholly dependent upon the relation of the beliefs to outside things."<sup>53</sup> If these are the

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>52</sup>For a more detailed treatment of these views see Roderick M. Chisholm's Theory of Knowledge (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), chap. 7. Also, Bertrand Russell's The Problems of Philosophy (London: Oxford University Press, 1912), chap. XII.

<sup>53</sup>Russell, The Problems of Philosophy, p. 123.

requirements a theory must meet (and I believe they are) then we must accept something like correspondence with fact as constituting the nature of truth. Thus, a true belief or assertion is one which "corresponds with the facts."

If this is what Robinson claims Jesus neglects, then his claim is unwarranted. Consider the belief, "Jesus is the Son of God." Throughout the Gospel of John, the writer attempts to establish the truthfulness of this belief by advancing various arguments intended to show that the belief corresponds with certain facts warranting the conclusion that the belief is a true belief. Jesus uses truth in other senses besides propositional truth, e.g. he says of himself, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: No man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). The sense of truth to which Jesus refers here is that he is the embodiment of all that is necessary for one to know to reach Heaven. He speaks of himself as the personification of all saving truth and thus, calls upon others to follow him. More should be said about matters relative to truth, but this is sufficient to show that Robinson's claim may be challenged.

I shall comment on Robinson's charge that knowledge is "wholly absent" from New Testament ethics and that Jesus "never recommends . . . reason" which leads to knowledge when I consider Robinson's rejection of the precept to believe in Jesus.

(ii) Robinson claims that conscientiousness appears

to offend Jesus in that the mere keeping of moral commandments is Phariseeism.<sup>54</sup> Robinson fails to understand that mere overt activity is not sufficient in the ethics of Jesus. Jesus' concept of conscientiousness extends beyond this to include motives. Jesus did not take exception to the keeping of the moral commandments by the Pharisees per se, but knowing their hearts, he knew that their motives were not pure; thus, he was offended by their hypocrisy. Had the Pharisees been genuine in their keeping of the commandments, Jesus would not have been offended.

(iii) Concerning the claim that Jesus does not deal with many social questions, it should be observed, as already noted, that Jesus lays down fundamental principles and that these principles may be applied to social questions. Thus, it is not necessary for Jesus to provide an extended treatment of social questions in particular. He challenges and expects each person to make the application of his principles.

The charge that the teachings of Jesus do not recognize the conflicts between commands nor provide for guidance in cases of conflict simply is not the case. Conflict circumstances arise in the ethics of Jesus just as in other ethical systems. Further, he gives some hints as to how to deal with conflict cases. On different occasions Jesus dealt with conflict situations by making it clear that prima

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<sup>54</sup>Robinson, An Atheist's Values, p. 149.

facie obligations could be overridden. Nowhere is this clearer than in Jesus' treatment of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was to be kept but allowed for such acts of beneficence as healing another human being. Jesus defended acts of beneficence by pointing out that the Jews recognized that prima facie obligations could be overridden. They themselves violated the Sabbath by performing the rite of circumcision (in accordance with the law of Moses that required circumcision of every male child eight days old--Genesis 17:10-12) in those circumstances where the day the child was to be circumcised fell on the Sabbath day. In addition to allowing the rite of circumcision, which would be classified as an act of work on the Sabbath, it is interesting that the Jews of the day recognized an act of beneficence toward animals (e.g. an ox in the ditch) on the Sabbath but failed to recognize beneficence toward other persons on the Sabbath.

If it is objected to my view that a case of healing was not an overriding obligation but only an extension of the Sabbath law itself, then I maintain that it was an overriding obligation in the sense that the principle of beneficence should be recognized in those circumstances where one had to choose between observing the meticulous duties thought by the Jews to be required on the Sabbath or render a good samaritan act. Support for this view is found in Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees for their failure to

observe the weightier matters of the law (Matthew 23:23). In short, Jesus maintained "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath." At any rate, it will not do for Robinson to make the blanket assumption that there are conflicts and that Jesus did not provide a judicious way to resolve them. My response is at least a starting point one might take to show that Robinson's claim is unwarranted.<sup>55</sup>

My conclusion is that the ethics of Jesus are much more comprehensive than Robinson allows. Robinson in general overlooks many aspects of Jesus' ethics and apparently does not understand that Jesus' ethics are based on fundamental principles and examples, the application of which must be made on an individual basis.

Robinson criticizes in particular what he believes to be the five main commandments of Jesus' ethics; namely, "love God, believe in me, love man, be pure in heart, be humble."<sup>56</sup> Robinson holds that we should reject both precepts, (i) love of God and (ii) believe in me along with the values associated with them (piety, faith, and improvidence). It is improbable that there is a god but even if it were probable, it would not justify Jesus' demand for piety (by which Robinson means devotion) because, among other things, Jesus "is reckless of its' effects on humanity."

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<sup>55</sup> Though there are many references to Jesus' activities on the Sabbath, the incidents concerning circumcision (John 7:21-23) and those in Matthew 12 are particularly interesting and substantiate my claim.

<sup>56</sup> Robinson, An Atheist's Values, p. 148.

Robinson mentions that "man's most horrible actions have been done out of piety" such as the "shameful wars of religion."<sup>57</sup> Robinson fails to understand that wars and other crimes which were done in the name of religion were not sanctioned by Jesus who taught to love even those who are enemies of Christianity. It may be claimed that wars and other crimes may be the result of following Jesus' command. But, surely no ethical position should be held accountable for its misuse. Further, if it is claimed that the ethics of Jesus are untenable because horrible actions may be the result of following Jesus' commands, then any ethical position could be claimed to be untenable. Mill provides this insight when he says, "There is no difficulty in proving any ethical standard whatever to work ill if we suppose universal idiocy to be conjoined with it . . . ."<sup>58</sup>

Jesus, according to Robinson, is guilty of blasphemy against reason (the virtue which leads to knowledge) in that he demands the moral wrong "to form one's beliefs in view of something other than truth and probability . . . ."<sup>59</sup> He makes statements throughout his discussion of religion and

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 151. Bertrand Russell, in his Why I am Not a Christian, pp. 201-2, makes this same basic point when he argues that religion and Christianity in particular have had harmful effects on humanity. Among other things, Russell calls attention to the deeds of horror resulting from the Crusades. This same point was made in classical antiquity by Lucretius.

<sup>58</sup> Mill, Utilitarianism, p. 23.

<sup>59</sup> Robinson, An Atheist's Values, p. 151.

reason to the effect that Christianity flouts reason and that the Christian draws conclusions in spite of evidence. It was noted earlier that Robinson claims that knowledge is "wholly absent" from New Testament ethics. Though Robinson does not tell us what he means by "knowledge," we may accept Chisholm's definition of "know" for our purposes: "S knows at t that h is true, provided: (1) S believes h at t; (2) h is true; and (3) h is evident at t for S."<sup>60</sup> Chisholm defines "know" in terms of "evident" and "evident" in terms of "more reasonable." The question at issue is whether Jesus allows anything like this in his teachings, and I think we shall find the answer to be in the affirmative.

Great emphasis is placed on knowledge throughout the New Testament. It is only by means of knowledge that one can achieve a right relationship with God (cf. John 8:32; II Peter 2:20). Further, consider the proposition I mentioned earlier--"Jesus is the Son of God." According to Chisholm's definition this proposition could not be said to be known unless (1) it is believed, (2) it is true, and (3) it is more reasonable for it to be believed over its contradictory. These steps are consistent with Jesus' teaching. Jesus' demand to believe in the proposition under consideration was made only after adequate evidence (such as that of his miracles) had been presented which warranted the conclusion that belief in it was a true belief and the

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<sup>60</sup>Chisholm, Theory of Knowledge, p. 23.

additional conclusion that it was more reasonable to believe in it than its contradictory. Even others, such as Peter, called on others to believe in Jesus only after presenting various lines of evidence such as Jesus' miracles and fulfilled prophecy (cf. Acts 2:14-36). In view of such considerations, it does not appear that Jesus is guilty, as Robinson claims, of blasphemy against reason.

Robinson holds that we should reject the praise of poverty and improvidence which are based on these first two precepts. Jesus opposes all prudent provision of material goods in order to avoid poverty and provide for the future. Further, he contends, "Human life depends on material resources, and they should not be neglected or thrown away. A proper concern for the misery of creatures involves the husbanding of our wealth."<sup>61</sup> Apparently, in Robinson's study of the Synoptics he has failed to take account of the parable of the unjust steward where Jesus commended the steward for his prudence in providing for his future (Luke 16:1-9). Further, Jesus' ethics are extended by Paul such that Paul claims that if any provide not for his own he is worse than an infidel (1 Timothy 5:8).

Further, he has not shown how poverty and improvidence are based on the precepts "love God" and "believe in me." It may be that he is thinking of Jesus' "Take no thought for the morrow" (Matthew 6:25-34) and claiming that

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<sup>61</sup>Robinson, An Atheist's Values, p. 152

this outlook on things will bring about poverty and improvidence. If this is his claim, it is a misunderstanding of Jesus' statement. Jesus warned against a certain outlook on life; namely, one that was fearful, fretful, and anxious. He was not saying "Do not be concerned about the future" but rather "Do not be anxious." Thus, it seems clearly possible that one might simultaneously hold to the above precepts and material resources.

Concerning (iii) love man, Robinson says that it should be accepted along with "most of the consequential attitudes that he indicates, generosity, gentleness, mercy, and the observance of the golden rule."<sup>62</sup> However, he sees some problems with Jesus' version of love for man. He finds fault with the attitude of forgiveness in that there is something injudicious in his "seventy times seven." Further, he claims that Jesus' law of love entails invariable non-resistance to evil and this does not appear acceptable on all occasions.<sup>63</sup> Again, he claims that it is difficult to harmonize this precept with Jesus' law demanding poverty and improvidence.<sup>64</sup>

Jesus' teaching on forgiveness should be viewed against the Jewish background which interpreted such statements as "For three transgressions . . . and for four"

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid.    <sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 146. Since I have already remarked on Robinson's claim concerning improvidence, I shall not comment on it here.

(Amos 1:3) as implying a limit on the number of times one should be forgiven. In contrast, Jesus enforces the concept to be willing to forgive always upon one's penitence (Luke 17:3,4). Perhaps what Robinson finds injudicious about Jesus' concept of forgiveness is that forgiveness may on occasion lead to hurt. A case illustrating this is Willard Gaylin's The Killing of Bonnie Garland.<sup>65</sup> In this case Richard Herrin hammered to death his defenseless college sweetheart Bonnie Garland while she was sleeping in her parents' home. Richard's first encounter after the killing--half naked and covered in blood--was with a Catholic priest who within minutes rallied to his support. Further, he received support both emotionally and financially by the Catholic community. Within two months of the killing, instead of being in prison, he was attending University classes and working in a religious bookshop.

Gaylin observes that this ready forgiveness of Herrin contributed to Herrin's bitterness since society in general responded unfavorably to him though he had forgiven himself and had been forgiven by the Church. Further, the parents of Bonnie Garland were hurt and embittered since they felt justice had not been carried out. The question at issue for the purposes of this study is whether this case supports Robinson's view that there is something injudicious about Jesus' 'seventy times seven.'

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<sup>65</sup>Willard Gaylin, The Killing of Bonnie Garland (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), esp. pp. 10-13, 140.

In response to this, it should be noted that though the ethics of Jesus require forgiveness upon penitence, his ethics also recognize the concept of justice. Justice is recognized not only in this life but in the after-life. Thus, it might be argued that though Herrin was forgiven by some (the Catholic community) and did not receive the justice which would ordinarily be handed down for such a crime as murder, that he was not forgiven by others (society in general and the Garlands in particular) and that real justice should have been carried out. It may be that there is no clear answer to this issue. If Robinson has in mind something like the forgiveness of a murderer like Herrin, then I find myself in agreement with him, though I believe it is consistent with Jesus' ethics that in such cases justice be required. The answer to the vengeance for which the Garlands pled clearly did not prove satisfactory to them. It is consistent with Jesus' ethics that if justice is due, justice will be executed. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Romans 12:19). My general conclusion is that though we should recognize Jesus' concept of forgiveness upon penitence, that our recognition be balanced against the requirements of justice.

Only a brief comment is necessary for Robinson's additional point concerning love of man. Regarding his claim that Jesus' ethics require non-resistance to evil it should be made clear that although one should not return

insult for insult (as when Jesus was slapped on the cheek), Jesus' ethics allow for self-preservation from bodily injury to himself or family. This point is underscored by a point I made earlier where one is required to provide for his own. Clearly, this would involve providing the necessary defense for one's self or family.

Robinson does not recommend (iv) that we "regulate our thoughts in the same ways as we are to regulate our actions,"<sup>66</sup> if it is understood as directed against such things as the imagination and suggests that it might be understood "as an injunction not to encourage dangerous emotions or desires . . . ."<sup>67</sup> This is the way I take this precept. Jesus' ethics are concerned to regulate dangerous emotions such as anger and lust which often times give rise to such actions as murder and unlawful sexual activities.

As to (v), humility, Robinson notes that the words "humility," "pride," and "vanity" involve complicated functions about human nature. Most of the points he suggests raise no significant issues to be discussed. However, he does seem to misrepresent Jesus when he says that "we should know the true value of others as well as of ourselves; and in that sense we should reject Jesus' 'judge not'." He says further that it would be absurd to give up the law courts

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<sup>66</sup> Robinson, An Atheist's Values, p. 153.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

and never decide that an act or agent was wrong.<sup>68</sup> This misrepresents Jesus' view of "judge not" in that Jesus does not forbid all types of judgments and further encourages judgment, not according to appearance, but according to righteousness (Matthew 7:16; John 7:24).

It does not appear that Robinson has established that God's commands, specifically the commands and precepts of Jesus, are not in the general interest of his human creatures. Until this can be shown, it can be held that by referring to God's benevolence we can remove any doubt that God's commands are capricious or unreasonable.

The third element in Ewing's quotation is that God might "just as well command us to cheat, torture and murder" as to be fair, kind, and beneficent.<sup>69</sup> Frankena calls attention to this by saying that this is the kind of argument used by Cudworth. Frankena says, "he points out that, if theological voluntarism is true, then, if God were to command cruelty, dishonesty, or injustice, these things would be right and obligatory."<sup>70</sup> Some adherents of a theological definist analysis such as William Ockham and

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., pp. 153-54.

<sup>69</sup> Ewing, "The Autonomy of Ethics," p. 39.

<sup>70</sup> Frankena, Ethics, p. 29. For Cudworth's remark, see "Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality," p. 159. Historically, Anthony Earl of Shaftesbury also made this point in his "Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times," in Divine Command Morality, ed. by Janine Marie Idziak (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), p. 198.

Ralph Cudworth have been willing to accept both elements of this conditional.<sup>71</sup> I also accept the conditional but deny the antecedent. My denial will be based on two points: (1) the attributes of God and (2) the record of what God has commanded.

Crucial to fully understanding (1) is the view that God is infinite in all of his attributes. He should not be thought of as merely possessing his attributes. He is infinite in power, knowledge, love, goodness, justice, and in all other qualities. Further, if God is infinite in his basic nature, he does not change in quality. It should also be understood that no one attribute nullifies any other attribute. Although God is infinite in power, this does not mean that God can do any and everything. Some things cannot be done even by God; e.g. God cannot make a square circle or a round square. Rather than say God cannot do these things, one would be better to say that these things simply cannot be done, i.e. they are not subject to power. Aquinas made this point when he said,

. . . whatever implies contradiction does not come within the scope of divine omnipotence, because it cannot have the aspect of possibility. Hence it is better to say that such things cannot be done, than that God cannot do them.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>William Ockham, "On the Four Books of the Sentences," in Divine Command Morality, ed. by Janine Marie Idziak (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), p. 56.

<sup>72</sup>St. Thomas Aquinas, Summae Theologiae, trans. by Thomas Gilby, O. P. 60 vols. (Blackfriars ed.; New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, n.d.), 5: 165; Prima pars, Question 25, article 3.

God is infinite in power, but he will do only those things which are in harmony with his perfect nature. Thus, God's perfect goodness demands that he cannot lie.

If these thoughts are applied to Ewing's claim, it seems the theist can escape the force of the claim. God does not command cheating, torturing, and murdering because such commands would be out of harmony with his perfect character. It is not that God does not have the "freedom" to make such commands; it is simply that such commands would not be issued by one who is infinite in all his attributes.

At least two possible objections should be considered to my case. Frankena says (a) that such reasoning may include an appeal to ultimate ethical standards independent of God's commands.<sup>73</sup> The reasoning here is that if one rules out the possibility that God would command such acts as cheating, torturing, and murdering, then it must be because one judges God is good and such a judgment requires an independent standard of moral goodness.

One may escape the force of Frankena's objection by recalling some remarks I made in Chapter III. I argued that there are a variety of ethical terms and that the possibility exists that terms which function in value judgments (both moral and non-moral) are both linguistically and logically independent of religion. Thus, since some things may be valued independently of God's commands, the theologian

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<sup>73</sup> Frankena, Ethics, pp. 29-30.

may say "God is good." It is only when the theist speaks of right and wrong/ought and ought not that he presupposes a moral standard obligation. Further, in the first paragraph of (1) I pointed out that because God is infinite in his basic nature; he does not change in quality; he is consistent in his activities. I made this point further in response to Nielsen's third argument. If we can know that God is consistent in his basic nature, then we can know he is consistent in his commands. Thus, we can know he would not issue commands to cheat, torture, or murder.<sup>74</sup>

It may be objected (b) that God's basic nature cannot be an adequate basis for morality on the grounds that it is not completely knowable. Frankena addresses this by asking, "How can we know what God commands or forbids?"<sup>75</sup> The significance of this objection is brought out by Graber when he says, "No [one] wants a moral theory that entails that we cannot know what is right or wrong."<sup>76</sup> Traditionally, knowledge of God's commands has been based (i) externally, on what he has written through the agency of men. Specific reference here is to the record of the Bible. For this claim to be sustained, it would ultimately have to

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<sup>74</sup> See Zaitchik's review of Ethics Without God, p. 134 and Graber's "Critical Bibliography," p. 61 for similar statements. See Edward's Reason and Religion, pp. 184-85 for another approach.

<sup>75</sup> Frankena, Ethics, p. 29.

<sup>76</sup> Graber, "Critical Bibliography," pp. 65, 66.

be shown that the Bible is God's word. Such an endeavor would take us far away from our present task.

Knowledge of God's commands might be found (ii) internally in certain religious experiences. Specifically, I would maintain that the conscience could be interpreted as a datum of experience through which God discloses himself and some of his commands. This, like the first claim, would have to be established, but it at least provides a possible source of knowledge of God's commands which is adequate to respond to Frankena's question.<sup>77</sup>

Further evidence that God would not command such activities as cheating is found in (2) the record of what he has commanded. In the Christian tradition, this record includes either the Old Testament or the New Testament or both. In any case, a careful reading of both these testaments reveals that the exact opposite is the case. Two cases may be mentioned briefly as possible instances against my conclusion.

The first involves God's command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22). Two points could be made here: (a) This command is inconsistent with the promise made previously to Abraham that in his seed the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3; 13:5). (b) This command is inconsistent with God's commands against child

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<sup>77</sup>For further details on the conscience, see Chapter VI.

sacrifice, regarded as an abomination before God. In no less than sixteen passages child sacrifice is condemned (Leviticus 18:21; 20:1-8; Deuteronomy 12:31; 18:10; II Kings 13:27; 16:3; 17:17, 31; 21:6; 23:10; Jeremiah 7:31; 19:5; Ezekiel 20:31; Micah 6:7; II Chronicles 28:3; 33:6). Concerning (a), Abraham was convinced that God was able to do what he had promised even if it required raising Isaac from the dead (Romans 4:20, 21; Hebrews 11:17-19). Thus, Abraham was convinced concerning the consistency of God's nature, that he would do what he promised to do.

Perhaps (b) brings out in a clearer way the objection to my case. The question at issue is, "How could God be consistent with his own nature (including his perfect holiness) and order someone to murder his own son? Clearly, this would show that God is neither consistent with his own nature nor with his commands. Louis Jacobs points out three different attitudes which have been adopted by Jewish thinkers which are in my view equally applicable to Christian thinkers.<sup>78</sup> (i) The first emphasizes the story's "happy ending." Abraham is eventually commanded not to slay his son. The entire "episode was only a 'test,' a divine vindication of Abraham's absolute trust in God." On this reading God, because of his infinite knowledge, knew that

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<sup>78</sup> Louis Jacobs, "The Problem of the Akedah in Jewish Thought," in Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling: Critical Appraisals, ed. by Robert L. Perkins (University, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1981), pp. 1-2.

Abraham would demonstrate faithfulness to his command, and thus, never intended for Abraham to kill Isaac. God, being the God he is, could never deny his perfect holiness and wish a man to commit a murder in obedience to him.

(ii) The second attitude emphasizes the original command and traces back to Kierkegaard.<sup>79</sup> This view can imagine God commanding an act of murder and while it is true that the command is revoked at the last minute the point is made by Kierkegaard that so far as "the knight of faith" is concerned, there can be a "teleological suspension of the ethical." Abraham, both an "ethical man" and "knight of faith," goes in "fear and trembling" but for him, the ultimate is not the ethical but his individual relationship with God.

(iii) The third view attempts a kind of compromise in which both aspects are viewed not as contradictory. This view maintains that God could never, really, betray his own nature and command murder, and yet if he could, Abraham would be obliged to comply. I am not sure that any final verdict can be given concerning the case of Abraham and Isaac or that such a verdict is even necessary. My only obligation as far as this study is concerned is to give a logical explanation of the episode which does not involve God in commanding actions which would be contradictory with

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<sup>79</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, trans. by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941).

his own nature or with his commands. It seems to me that view (i) provides such an explanation. This view emphasizes the happy ending and underscores the idea that God's command was really more for Abraham's benefit. After all, the command was a once-and-for-all matter; it was never repeated; and, was not carried out in practice even in the case of Abraham himself.

Similar observations can be made about a second case that may be alleged to be against my case. The instance involves God's command to destroy the Amalekites (I Samuel 15:1-3). The charge here is that God did command an action inconsistent with his basic nature and with his other commands such as the Sixth Commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." To this, it might be said that the command was not inconsistent with the Sixth Commandment since the significance of this commandment is to do no murder and at least some acts of killing are not to be classified as murder. Further, given the perfect holiness of God, he cannot fail to demand punishment for sin. This appears to be what he demands against the Amalekites in fulfillment of his promise to destroy them (Exodus 17:14-16). My conclusion is that these two cases do not warrant the claim that God has commanded such acts as cheating and murder.

#### Some Concluding Remarks

This chapter concludes an investigation into Nielsen's last two objections, "Why obey God's commands?"

and "God's commands are arbitrary." Concerning the first of these, I argued (1) that the question needed clarification and that it could be interpreted either as a request for justification or motivation. If the former were taken, I argued that taken as a request for (a) moral justification of what God commands was in effect to request a moral justification for what morality requires and taken as (b) a non-moral justification involved issues which as yet have not been settled. If the question is taken as a motivation to obey God's commands, I argued that Ewing and Nielsen are mistaken in assuming that motivation must be prudential and argued that motivation could be out of love for God.

Nielsen argued also that (2) an analysis of "God is good" reveals that one must hold to a fundamental moral standard independent of God's commands. I showed (a) that this is not the case by showing that what God commands could be justified without making a moral evaluation of God's character or appealing to ultimate standards independent of God's commands. I argued that knowledge that God does not lie, that he is consistent in his commands was sufficient to justify a code of divine commands.

(b) Against Nielsen's claim that evil demonstrates the falsity of the proposition "God is good," I suggested that the theist could maintain that: (i) this is the best of all possible worlds for God's purposes in creation; (ii) sin (i.e., transgression of God's law) is the only intrinsic

evil; (iii) every instance of human suffering results from some condition which is necessary in God's purposes in creation; and (iv) human suffering in no way diminishes or conflicts with the goodness of his purposes.

Second, with respect to "God's commands are arbitrary," I argued three major points: (1) I maintained that although God cannot have an ethical reason for what he commands, he can have non-ethical reasons and/or motives such as his interest in the welfare of human creatures. (2) I argued further that it is not the case that God's commands are arbitrary and thus capricious on the basis that God's commands are arbitrary in the sense that they are decided upon by God (the ultimate arbiter) and not by any other fundamental standard. Further, I pointed out they are not arbitrary in the sense that they are unreasonable as God does have non-ethical reasons and/or motives for his commands. Again, I showed that it is not the case (a) that an appeal to God's benevolence introduces alien standards of moral obligation and (b) that God's commands are not in the best interest of human creatures.

(3) I pointed out that it is not the case that God could command such acts as cheating and murder by arguing (a) that a consideration of God's perfect nature warrants the claim that he would not command such acts and (b) that the record of what he has commanded indicates that such acts are the exact opposite of what he has commanded.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

#### Some Preliminary Remarks

The preceding chapters have been concerned with the debate between religious and secular ethics as to the foundations of ethics. After introducing the problem (Chapter I) and discussing the various senses in which it has been claimed that ethics is dependent on religion (Chapter II), I argued (Chapters III, IV, and V) that a theological definist analysis of ethical terms is possible by maintaining that there are good grounds on which one can challenge the criticisms (based on the Euthyphro dilemma) of such an analysis. I pointed out at the beginning of this study that this task is the prelude to a larger research program I plan concerning normative considerations (the core of which has already been written).

This chapter outlines the general direction of that program and includes three areas of consideration: (1) a critical analysis of secular conceptions of value, (2) a critique of the secular position regarding moral obligation, and (3) a constructive study demonstrating that to claim knowledge of certain value considerations (specifically, the purpose of life) and moral obligation principles, one must

recognize a religious heritage behind them. These areas of study (like the present study) are concerned with Robinson, Nielsen, and Frankena. It is peculiar to these thinkers that in addition to their claims against religious ethics, they also claim to show that a secular ethic (unlike a religious one) can be successfully developed and defended. I reject this claim and outline below my reasons which will be more fully developed in my larger research program.

### Secular Ethics and Value Theory

The first basic problem of normative ethics concerns the question, "What is good in itself?" Theories dealing with this problem are called theories of value. No adequate analysis of the theories of moral obligation by Robinson, Nielsen, and Frankena could be given without first giving attention to the value theories upon which they are based. By their value theories, I mean what they think (in a non-moral sense) is desirable, good, worthwhile in life, or makes life worth living. The thinkers under consideration advance pluralistic theories of value, i.e. they hold that though pleasure is an intrinsic good, several other things (such as knowledge, truth, virtue, and beauty) are worth choosing or pursuing for their own sake.<sup>1</sup>

The request for what is desirable, good, worthwhile

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<sup>1</sup>See Rem Edward's Pleasures and Pains, pp. 18-20 for a discussion of the pluralistic approach and for other answers given to the question of value.

in life, or makes life worth living introduces two different questions: (1) What (if anything) is the purpose or point of our lives? and (2) What (if anything) could give our lives purpose or point?<sup>2</sup> These two questions address two different senses of "purpose." Nielsen says,

Sometimes 'purpose' is used to mean function or role; but sometimes 'purpose' is used to indicate that an action was deliberately or intentionally done, that it was the carrying out of someone's aim or wish.<sup>3</sup>

The first sense of purpose corresponds to question one and is rejected by Nielsen and other secularists because purpose in this sense conveys the notion of end, and "there is no good reason to believe living beings are tending toward some specifiable end."<sup>4</sup> Secularists limit themselves to the second sense of purpose (as far as what is good, worthwhile, or makes life worth living) and thus to question two. Whether there is any kind of final purpose for human beings will be part of my constructive study outlined at the close of this chapter. At this point, I shall limit my remarks to

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<sup>2</sup>Nielsen asks these questions in his "Linguistic Philosophy and 'The Meaning of Life,'" Cross Currents 14 (Summer 1964), pp. 313-34; reprinted in E. D. Klemke's The Meaning of Life (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 177-204. All references to Nielsen's article will be from Klemke's book (hereafter cited as Nielsen, "The Meaning of Life"). Some philosophers such as A. J. Ayer have argued that such questions are unanswerable. See his "The Claims of Philosophy," in Philosophy of the Social Sciences, ed. by Maurice Natanson (New York: Random House, 1963), pp. 469-86.

<sup>3</sup>Nielsen, Ethics, p. 39.

<sup>4</sup>Idem, "The Meaning of Life," p. 181.

the secular view that man has purposes in life which are set by man himself and that these purposes are sufficient to give meaning to life.<sup>5</sup> The remaining part of this chapter concerns two basic points: (1) the standard of value according to secular ethics, and (2) the good life according to secular ethics.

### Secular Ethics and the Standards of Value

The secularist holds that even in a Godless world, there are many things humans prize and are capable of giving life meaning and point. But, the only way to find these things is if we have "some criterion of worthiness," but these criteria must not demand too high a vision of human excellence, otherwise "nothing is worthy of attainment."<sup>6</sup> Nielsen's standard of value involves three elements: (1) expressing a preference for something, (2) being willing to give reasons for the preferences, and (3) believing that others, in relevant respects would have the same preference.<sup>7</sup> Robinson's standard includes two elements: (1) adopting an attitude toward something or an evaluation of something, on the basis of (2) principles (such as "Any kind of thing is bad if it, or the pursuit of it, increases the

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<sup>5</sup>The religionist agrees with the secularist that this sense of "purpose" is meaningful. His disagreement is with the claim that purposes set by man himself are sufficient to give meaning to life.

<sup>6</sup>Nielsen, "The Meaning of Life," p. 189.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

misery of living things upon the whole . . . .") and consequences with the latter functioning as the determinate factor of the former.<sup>8</sup> Frankena's criterion of value consists of: (1) pleasure, enjoyment or satisfaction; and (2) some kind or degree of excellence with (1) being a necessary and sufficient condition of something's being intrinsically good.<sup>9</sup>

It is interesting that there is a kind of gradation among these various standards. If one starts with Robinson's standard of value, one is immediately impressed with the truthfulness of his claim that he holds to "the subjective view." He further emphasizes this point when he speaks of his "private valuation" and "personal choices."<sup>10</sup> Though he offers reasons to recommend his values to others, his reasons are private in nature. Although Nielsen stresses individual preference and is very subjective (in Robinson's use of the word) in his basic outlook, his emphasis on being willing to give reasons and belief that others will make similar rational choices at least puts him a step away from Robinson. Frankena's view is an advance over that of both Robinson and Nielsen. Although his quasi-hedonistic view has shortcomings, it provides a more adequate basis for

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<sup>8</sup> Robinson's general view is outlined on pp. 35-43 of An Atheist's Values. The quoted material is found on p. 52.

<sup>9</sup> See Frankena's Ethics, pp. 91-92 for his discussion of the criterion of value.

<sup>10</sup> Robinson, An Atheist's Values, pp. 26, 46.

determining what is ultimately worthwhile and escapes the subjectivity which infects the views of Robinson and Nielsen. The direction some critical remarks might take can be made in conjunction with the matters discussed in the following section.

### Secular Ethics and the Good Life

The "good life" should not be understood generally to refer to the morally good life where we might speak of a person leading a virtuous life. Rather, for the purposes of this study, it refers to that life which is worth living, which includes such elements as happiness, satisfaction, contentment, peace, and security.

For Nielsen, the good life consists of the goals, aims, intentions, and ends humans set for themselves as worth being sought for their own sake. His main candidates for intrinsic goodness are (1) happiness, (2) self-consciousness, and (3) a sense of self-identity.<sup>11</sup> These things are taken as intrinsic goods since they are all sought for their own sakes and not as mere means. Nielsen devotes himself primarily to a consideration of happiness and gives practically no attention to self-consciousness and a sense of

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<sup>11</sup>Nielsen, Ethics, p. 65. In addition to these candidates for intrinsic goodness, Nielsen mentions on p. 54 the desire to alleviate suffering and regards this along with happiness the two central (but not the only) facets of morality. I am not sure why he omits it here unless he regards it as being encompassed with man's general pursuit of happiness.

self-identity. He maintains that one could be said to have lived a happy life if he had found permanent sources of satisfaction in this life and certain goals worthwhile and had been able to accomplish at least some of them. These sources of satisfaction in life include: (a) freedom from pain and want, (b) security and emotional peace, (c) human love and companionship, (d) creative employment and (e) the arts. This list does not exhaust the sources of human enjoyment. Nielsen's claim is that if some can be had, then a reasonable measure of happiness can be attained in a Godless universe.<sup>12</sup>

Robinson's classification of those elements which make up the good life include two major classes of goods: (1) personal goods, and (2) political goods.<sup>13</sup> Under personal goods, his main candidates for goodness are: (a) life, (b) beauty (including art and sex), (c) truth, (d) virtue (reason, love, and conscientiousness), and (e) religion. He accepts the first four as great goods but rejects religion as more of an evil than a good. Political goods are goods which arise out of the existence of governments and are also goods.

According to Frankena, the good life is the life it would be rational to choose and it consists of, as Plato

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 51-52.

<sup>13</sup> Robinson's discussion of these goods begins on p. 54 and continues to the remainder of his book. The personal goods he accepts are discussed on pp. 54-113.

said, a "mixed life." At least three elements make up the good life: (1) content (various activities and experiences), (2) pattern, and (3) subjective form.<sup>14</sup>

My critique of the good life according to the secularist would include two parts: (1) some comments relative to each thinker, and (2) some general observations on the secular view of life. First, the basic problem with (1) Nielsen's case is that he is never able to give us the kind of insight we want concerning happiness. According to Nielsen, happiness is good, but he never gives reasons for this claim. In the end, Nielsen says that he "cannot prove that happiness is good" and claims that it is something which simply must be admitted.<sup>15</sup>

(2) Regarding Robinson's view, a weakness of his standard of value as well as his view of the good life lies in the general negativity of his approach. His main principle concerning the good and the bad is a principle of counter misery. It provides a negative test for value considerations. He does have a positive principle ("Anything is good if the pursuit of it pleases somebody and does not increase misery")<sup>16</sup> but his negative principle takes precedence.

(3) For Frankena, the intrinsic good as well as that

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<sup>14</sup>Frankena, Ethics, pp. 87-88.

<sup>15</sup>Nielsen, Ethics, p. 56.

<sup>16</sup>Robinson, An Atheist's Values, p. 52.

which makes for all other goods is pleasure or satisfaction. Pleasure is a necessary and sufficient condition of an experience being ultimately worthwhile. Crucial to Frankena's criterion of pleasure are two points: (a) "All pleasures are intrinsically good" and (b) "Only pleasures are intrinsically good."<sup>17</sup> I would dispute both of these claims by arguing in response to (a) as Ross observes that (i) "the conception of merit does not support the view that pleasure is always good in itself and pain always bad in itself."<sup>18</sup> Further, I would cast doubt on Frankena's view by maintaining that (ii) there are bad pleasures and good pains. Concerning Frankena's claim (b), I would argue two points: (i) other values (such as knowledge) besides pleasure are intrinsically good; and (ii) intrinsic goodness is not limited to experiences of things.

Second, in response to the secular view of the good life, a theologian might develop the following points. (1) Some remarks concerning man's basic desires and needs should be discussed. Both the secularist and the religionist would agree that humans have certain needs and desires such as: (a) the psychological need to surrender oneself with absoluteness to something, and (b) the desire for happiness. The dispute is not over the need or the desire but over what

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<sup>17</sup> Frankena, Ethics, p. 84.

<sup>18</sup> W. D. Ross, The Right and the Good (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1930), p. 136. The following insight from Ross is from pp. 136-37.

satisfies both the need and the desire. The religionist holds to the view that in God alone can man's need for a unified ideal be satisfied and man's desire for real happiness be realized.<sup>19</sup> The secularist holds that the goods that can be had in this life are sufficient to meet man's needs and desires. This introduces a second point I would make.

(2) The religionist might argue that no finite good can satisfy man's needs and desires. Thus, he might advance (a) a moral argument to the effect that only what is in the religious sphere is worthy of absolute surrender and that to surrender oneself to any finite thing and thus regard it as an ultimate concern or unified ideal leads to undesirable consequences.<sup>20</sup> (b) The second direction a religionist might take involves psychological considerations and takes the form that no finite good can satisfy man's desire for happiness and that to make such an attempt has undesirable

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<sup>19</sup>The view that in God alone can man achieve real and lasting happiness is defended by John Hick in his "Belief and Life: The Fundamental Nature of the Christian Ethic," Encounter 20 (1959): 494-516, and also by Alasdair MacIntyre in Difficulties in Christian Belief (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1959), esp. pp. 102-8.

<sup>20</sup>Religionists have observed that to surrender oneself with absoluteness to anything short of the Absolute is to commit idolatry. The roots of this kind of argument are in Kierkegaard. For some statements of it, compare Tillich's Ultimate Concern (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1965), p. 57; Will Herberg's Judaism and Modern Man (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1951), pp. 93-95; Martin Buber's Eclipse of God (New York: Harper & Row, 1952), p. 62.

consequences including (i) disappointment, and (ii) misery and despair. (c) The theologian's final step in his argument would be to point out that in the mirror of the insufficiency of finite goods to satisfy man's most persistent moral demands is reflected a sphere capable of providing the kind of satisfaction man desires and needs.

### Secular Ethics and Moral Obligation

The second basic problem of normative ethics concerns the question, "What ought we to do?" Theories concerned with this problem are called theories of obligation by which I mean what one thinks (in a moral sense) is right or wrong, ought or ought not to be done. As in their value theories, the thinkers under consideration address the question of moral obligation in similar, yet different ways.

The kinds of answers given to the question of moral obligation may be classed into two broad groups: (1) teleological (goal-based) and (2) deontological (duty-based) answers. Teleological theories make judgments of obligation as well as judgments of moral value a logical function of judgments of non-moral value. The basis of our moral obligation lies in the consequences of our actions. The final and ultimate appeal in determining the right thing to do or what we ought to do is by the comparative amount of good brought into being, while eliminating, as much as possible, the bad. Goodness is the only right making characteristic. In deontological theories judgments of moral obligation are (at least

in part) fundamental--they do not depend on and are not a function of other judgments such as non-moral ones. I say at least in part because deontological theories with a principle of beneficence will be partially dependent on non-moral value. But, goodness is not in itself a right-making characteristic. Other considerations make an action right or obligatory besides the good brought into being, e.g., the fact that it keeps a promise, or, as this study would have it, that it is commanded by God.

The thinkers under consideration define the good independently of the right, and thus could be regarded to this extent, as teleological. Robinson is teleological in his approach; though, he does not make judgments of obligation a logical function of judgments of non-moral value. Nielsen is teleological but attempts to incorporate a deontological aspect. Frankena regards his view as deontological with a teleological aspect. Below I shall (1) outline some of the basic features of each thinker's view, and (2) raise some problems each must face.

#### Robinson's Theory of Moral Obligation

A distinctive feature of Robinson's An Atheist's Values, is just what is emphasized in the title of the book--the values of an atheist. Robinson devotes himself almost exclusively to value theory. Of the three principles in his ethical view, only one is a principle of moral obligation to which he gives less than half a page. This

principle says, "No kind of act may be forbidden unless its discontinuance would lessen misery upon the whole."<sup>21</sup> Thus, I shall maintain that his ethical theory is not complete and comprehensive enough to account for moral experience.

First, consider some of the general features of Robinson's ethical theory. (1) His view of moral obligation (as well as value) is teleological. Robinson's theory departs from traditional thinking concerning teleological theories in that it does not allow for the right or the obligatory thing to do to be determined by the comparative amount of good brought into being while eliminating as much as possible the bad. His view allows only for assessments concerning misery--not good.

(2) A second feature of his theory is its resemblance to utilitarianism. He notes, "This principle of counter-misery has some resemblance to utilitarianism; and people who like 'ism' words may wish to label it 'utilitarianism.'"<sup>22</sup> Frankena defines utilitarianism as

the view that the sole ultimate standard of right, wrong, and obligation is the principle of utility, which says quite strictly that the moral end to be sought in all we do is the greatest possible balance of good over evil (or the least possible balance of evil over good) in the world as a whole.<sup>23</sup>

However, Robinson's view differs from utilitarianism in that

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<sup>21</sup>Robinson, An Atheist's Values, p. 51.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>23</sup>Frankena, Ethics, p. 34.

it is the non-increase of misery which is required of all ends.

(3) The preceding point leads to a third feature of his view; namely, a kind of negative utilitarianism. Concerning this point he leans on K. R. Popper who says,

Instead of the greatest happiness for the greatest number, one should demand, more modestly, the least amount of avoidable suffering for all; and further, that unavoidable suffering . . . should be distributed as equally as possible.<sup>24</sup>

Second, concerning some problems in Robinson's theory, it is not adequate as an ethical theory because it lacks any positive theory of action. This may be established by making clear (1) the kind of principle of obligation he advances, and (2) the extent of moral obligation demanded by his view. Regarding (1), in sum Robinson's principle is one of non-maleficence.<sup>25</sup> The principle in

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<sup>24</sup>K. R. Popper, The Open Society and Its Enemies, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 1: 285. A careful reading of Robinson seems to indicate that Robinson's view is not one of strict negative utilitarianism which takes as its sole ethical principle, "One ought to remove evil." This is the case because it seems that Robinson's reference to Popper is for the purposes of his value theory; and further, Robinson's only principle of moral obligation appears to require less than negative utilitarianism. For a critique of negative utilitarianism see R. N. Smart, "Negative Utilitarianism," Mind, 67 (October 1958): 542. J. J. C. Smart makes a brief comment on the extreme view in Utilitarianism For and Against (Cambridge: University Press, 1973), pp. 28-30, though he adds little to what his brother, R. N. Smart, discusses.

<sup>25</sup>This principle appears in various ethical theories including Frankena's Ethics, p. 47; Ross' The Right and the Good, p. 24; Beauchamp's and Childress' Principles of Biomedical Ethics, pp. 106f; and Philippa Foot's "The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect" in Moral

Robinson's terms is--No kind of act may be forbidden unless its discontinuance would lessen misery upon the whole.

Robinson's principle is compounded by the negative language in which it is couched. If we take the term "forbidden" as equivalent to the moral obligation expression "ought not," it seems that Robinson's principle might be translated into simpler language as follows:<sup>26</sup>

A - If an act one is doing increases misery upon the whole, then one ought to stop doing the act.

It seems that his principle, if not the general thrust of his ethical view, would admit another reading:

B - If an act increases misery upon the whole, then one ought not to do the act.

The only difference in the two readings is that A refers to an actual act presently in progress whereas B refers to a potential act whose possibility may or may not be realized.

(2) A further distinction which should be made regarding Robinson's view involves the extent of moral obligation demanded by his principle. In a way, we have answered this question by describing the kind of principle he advances. But, more specifically, we want to know precisely the extent of obligation it imposes. Frankena makes some distinctions which are helpful on this point. Frankena

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Problems in Medicine, ed. by Samuel Gorovitz (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976). p. 73.

<sup>26</sup>I thank Glenn C. Graber for his suggestions on the translation of Robinson's principle and for his general help concerning Robinson's ethical position.

holds to the principle of beneficence which he claims includes four elements:<sup>27</sup>

- (1) One ought not to inflict evil or harm (what is bad).
- (2) One ought to prevent evil or harm.
- (3) One ought to remove evil.
- (4) One ought to do or promote good.

The scope of Robinson's ethical view falls under Frankena's first element. If we think in terms of obligations imposed on us by law, it is easily seen that Robinson's view demands no more than the law demands and it is for this reason that Robinson's view of moral obligation is inadequate. It satisfies less than the minimal requirements of moral responsibility. His principle needs some supplementary principles such as that of beneficence and justice. These principles are included in Nielsen's view to a certain degree, but in their purest form (as far as the secularist thinkers under discussion) in Frankena's view of obligation.

#### Nielsen's Theory of Moral Obligation

Unlike Robinson's theory, Nielsen's view is couched in a more positive tone and does not suffer from Robinson's major defect; namely, of failing to account for any positive theory of action.

First, note the general features of Nielsen's theory of moral obligation. The substance of his theory is found in the following consequentialist principle.

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<sup>27</sup> Frankena, Ethics, p. 47. Strictly speaking beneficence should be restricted to elements (2), (3), and (4) and non-maleficence used to refer to element (1).

I am, in effect, giving you to understand that actions, rules, policies, practices, and moral principles are ultimately to be judged by certain consequences: to wit, whether doing them more than, or at least as much as, doing anything else or acting in accordance with them more than, or at least as much as, acting in accordance with alternative principles, tends, on the whole, and for everyone involved, to maximize satisfaction, that is, to maximize happiness, minimize pain, enhance self-consciousness and preserve one's sense of self-identity. The states of affairs to be sought are those which maximize these things to the greatest extent possible for all mankind.<sup>28</sup>

(1) From this statement, it is clear that Nielsen, like Robinson, holds to a teleological view of moral obligation. However, unlike Robinson who limits his considerations to misery and misery alone, Nielsen's theory is broader in that it allows for the maximization of good as well as the minimization of misery. (2) From Nielsen's consequentialist principle, we can further distinguish his view as one of utilitarianism.

(3) A third distinction of Nielsen's view concerns the non-utilitarian features he incorporates into his theory of obligation. Though his consequentialist principle seems to represent the utilitarian view, Nielsen is not strictly utilitarian. This is the case because of two other principles he recognizes in his theory of moral obligation. (a) Nielsen claims to subscribe to the Kantian principle of respect for persons, "Treat every man as an end and never as a means only"<sup>29</sup> in the Kantian view which accords respect to persons (not because of utility value) because respect is something to which persons are entitled.

<sup>28</sup>Nielsen, Ethics, pp. 65-66.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

(b) The second non-utilitarian element in Nielsen's theory is a principle of distributive justice, i.e. justice in the distribution of good and evil. His view of distributive justice (like Frankena's) amounts to equality of treatment as he makes clear by saying, "The requirements of justice make it necessary that each person be given equal consideration."<sup>30</sup> In view of these non-utilitarian elements, it would be better to refer to Nielsen as a consequentialist rather than a utilitarian.

Second, regarding some problems in Nielsen's ethical theory, I find two major ones: (1) His view lacks internal consistency and coherence. Nielsen faces the problem of conflict between his consequentialist principle and his two non-consequentialist principles (respect for persons and justice). (2) His view is not complex enough to account for the whole range of our moral experience. Nielsen's view yields moral judgments (for example, on occasion one may treat persons purely as a means to an end) which are not acceptable with our ordinary moral notions.

My charge of (1) inconsistency and incoherence could be established by arguing that it is simply not the case that the careful, thoughtful, respectful, equal consideration of another can be defended on consequentialist grounds.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 59. The place Nielsen gives to this principle differs from Frankena in that Nielsen's principles of justice and respect for persons are regulated by his consequentialist principle.

Respect for persons is, for Nielsen, simply one value among many. If he maintains respect for persons, it is because such respect has utility value, e.g. better results will emerge in society. A consequentialist must hold that actions are right only insofar as they produce, or tend to produce, the best consequences. It will not do for Nielsen to hold that his basic position is one of consequentialism; nevertheless, he will incorporate non-consequentialist elements into his overall view. The Kantian principle to treat someone as an end is to respect one as an autonomous rational agent which includes recognizing one as having the capacity to have ends and goals and respecting the ends and goals one sets for him/herself. Though Nielsen claims to hold to Kant's principle, he really only pays lip-service to it. Proof of this is clear since when it comes to the question of the balance of goods over evils, Nielsen is ready to abandon Kant's principle and stick to his consequentialist position. In my larger research program I show in detail how he does this by applying the Kantian thesis to some desert-island cases mentioned by Nielsen.

(2) The previous point establishes my second point which claims that Nielsen's ethical view yields unacceptable moral notions. But, more specifically, what I have in mind here is an elaboration of some clear cut cases which show Nielsen's view morally intolerable. One of his desert-island cases which bears on this particularly is the case whether one person should be killed to provide serum from

his diseased body which would save others. Nielsen plainly admits that such serum-making would not be morally intolerable in all circumstances.<sup>31</sup>

### Frankena's Theory of Moral Obligation

Frankena's ethical theory in general recognizes two principles of obligation--one of utility and one of justice. The former involves doing the act or following the rule that brings about the greatest possible balance of good over bad. Like Nielsen, his principle of justice amounts to equal treatment of everyone. However, unlike Nielsen, his principle of justice may take (at least on some occasions) precedence over his principle of utility. Although the resulting theory would be a deontological one, it would be closer to utilitarian theories than many deontologisms; thus, Frankena calls his theory a mixed deontological theory.

First, consider the basic features of Frankena's theory. (1) Frankena holds we must recognize something like the principle of utility. This should be emphasized because he does not actually hold to the principle of utility as a basic premise. The reason is that something more basic underlies this principle; namely, the principle of beneficence--"that we ought to do good and to prevent or avoid doing harm."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>See his Ethics, p. 83, for this admission.

<sup>32</sup>Frankena's Ethics, p. 45. Actually, this principle includes four separate elements. See the previous discussion of Robinson's ethical view where I mentioned them.

(2) In addition to the principle of beneficence, Frankena holds that a principle of justice is needed. By "justice" he means distributive justice--justice in the distribution of good and evil. Distributive justice has to do with the comparative treatment of individuals. A case of injustice refers to that in which there are two individuals with the same similarities and one of them is treated better or worse than the other.<sup>33</sup>

Second, it should be observed that Frankena's view faces two general problems (problems mentioned by Frankena himself). (1) His theory faces the problem of conflict between its two principles. Frankena admits that he does not know of a formula to tell how to resolve conflicts. He is tempted to go with justice reigning supreme but allows that a small injustice might be preferred over a great evil. His own conclusion is that if everyone takes the moral point of view, we can agree "that the ideal state of affairs is one in which everyone has the best life he or she is capable of."<sup>34</sup> In such a state, the concerns of both the principle of justice and the principle of beneficence will be fulfilled. Further, he has a system of prima facie duties which helps deal with conflicts. The religionist might agree in general with Frankena's conclusion, but claim further that a theological definist analysis might give more insight and enable one to know better how to resolve

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 49.      <sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

conflicts. The insight of a theological analysis is particularly evident in the concept of beneficence where one's fellowman takes on a deeper significance than allowed by Frankena. The religionist treats another in a "brotherly way," i.e. his spiritual well-being is made supreme.

(2) Frankena's view also faces the problem of application. He says they ask so much but tell us so little. One principle says do good and eliminate evil, but where do we start? The other says to treat all people equally. But, does this mean that in treating all children equally, we treat children who are not our own exactly as if they were our own? Apparently, the two principles must be supplemented in some way in order to act on them in some sensible manner. Frankena's answer here is "that we need things like custom and law to help us channel our activities in the way of applying the principles of beneficence and equality . . . ." <sup>35</sup> Thus, institutions like the family may provide the kind of direction one needs in applying the principles. Again, the religionist might agree with this but maintain that a fuller understanding of how the principles are to be applied can be gained by leaning on divine revelation.

### Christian Ethics

In this section I shall sketch the general direction a study in Christian ethics might take. It should be

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

understood at the outset that any such study involves a number of issues such as the question of God's existence and for the Christian the question as to whether the Bible (believed to be God's revelation to man) is the inspired Word of God. These issues cannot be resolved here or even in my larger research project; thus, we must assume the truthfulness of these issues and discuss the kind of picture which might emerge concerning knowledge claims of certain value considerations (such as the purpose of life) and moral obligation principles. The Christian maintains that to make such knowledge claims, one must recognize a religious heritage behind them.

#### Christian Ethics and Value Theory

Christians are in agreement with secularists who insist that man has purposes in life set by man himself and that these purposes give meaning and significance to life; but, they take an additional step and advance the thesis that there is a purpose of life. It is for this reason that I would maintain that only certain value concepts have a religious heritage. To establish this it seems clear that such a purpose must be given or fixed "from the outside." The only way it could be given or fixed from the outside is if there were something transcendent of human existence to give or fix it. This insight shows that to ask "What is the purpose of our life?" is tied up with whether there exists a

being (God) capable of giving human life a purpose.<sup>36</sup>

Assuming the existence of God and the inspiration of the Bible the Christian might argue (1) that one's knowledge of such religious concepts results in a general knowledge of one's purpose or end on earth. From the Christian perspective man has as his basic purpose the becoming (a) a son of God, and (b) a brother to man.<sup>37</sup> (2) The theologian might argue that other epistemological consequences result in knowledge of God. (a) He might advance the epistemological dependence thesis that we never come to a knowledge of certain ethical principles (such as principles of right and wrong) apart from religious views. The directions this point might take are developed below under "Christian Ethics

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<sup>36</sup> That this is a possibility of what is meant when the question is asked is indicated by even such thinkers as Sartre, Heidegger and Camus. This view is further strengthened for the purposes of this study by both Nielsen and Robinson. In his discussion of whether there is any purpose of life Nielsen raises various objections to such a claim. These objections are based primarily on the question of God's existence. See Ethics, pp. 31-33. Robinson speaks of Plato's question, "What is the good?" in a religious sense as being the question, "What is the purpose of life?" See An Atheist's Values, p. 20. It might be contended that when one asks, "What is the purpose of our life?" one is asking whether ultimate reality is such that the historical process is necessarily teleological; and, if this is the case, what the end or telos is.

<sup>37</sup> See Edwin Lewis' Great Christian Teachings (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1933) for some helpful insights on this point. Of particular interest are some matters pertaining to his statement "that God is Father, therefore . . . God's expectation from men is for sonship and brotherhood" (p. 32).

and Moral Obligation." (b) He might claim further that knowledge of God will result in one understanding that many of the things that are regarded as objects of rational desire are really not ultimately worth having. Thus, we would relinquish much of what we might ordinarily prize and realize that many of our hopes are vain and that the possibility of realizing other, more lasting desires is real. (c) Knowledge of God will result in one understanding that many of the things that would otherwise be irrational to seek are really objects of rational desire. We will see that there is point to desiring things that would otherwise seem foolish. The common thread running through points (a), (b), and (c) is that knowledge of God can provide evidence for a different concept of value, morality, and understanding of human desires and interests in general.

(3) The theologian might maintain that certain psychological considerations follow from these epistemological matters. The point here is that knowledge of the religious sphere has implications of a psychological nature. In accordance with the psychological dependence thesis, the theologian might (a) argue that certain moral principles might not ever come to be believed without the impulse or motivation of religion. Further, he might maintain that his knowledge of God can serve certain psychological attitudes, motives, dispositions, and actions.

## Christian Ethics and Moral Obligation

The general claim of the Christian regarding moral obligation is that to claim knowledge of moral obligation principles, one must recognize a religious heritage behind them. An analysis would involve in short the recognition of moral obligation as an expression of the commands of God and include two basic moves: (1) some distinctions concerning the moral experience itself and (2) some implications of this experience.

First, regarding some distinctions about moral experience, it would have to be established (1) that all rational human beings (religious and secular alike) give evidence that they experience moral obligation. (2) The theologian might argue that the conscience imposes certain obligations on a person by presenting itself as the voice of authority.

Second, I would maintain that if the above two matters could be established that certain implications follow. (1) Some implications are of a logical nature. (a) The theologian might argue that the experience of moral obligation is in response to a moral law. To establish this, religionists have appealed to: (i) the common experience of quarrelling, (ii) moral criticism, (iii) conflicts in moral judgment, and (iv) moral progress and regress.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>For examples of those who have used this approach see C. S. Lewis Mere Christianity (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1968), pp. 17-19, 31, 24-25; Von Hildebrand,

Thus, if we are going to use the language of moral obligation, we should recognize that such usage implies a law conception of ethics which, itself, has theological implications. This is the kind of argument Anscombe suggests,<sup>39</sup> though she takes, for her starting point, the language of moral obligation as an historical/linguistic phenomenon and I take, for a starting point, the phenomenon of conscience. These two approaches may be blended by claiming that the implications of moral obligation have their roots in the phenomenon of conscience but are fully expressed in the historical development of God's revelation to man. I intend to outline Anscombe's argument in the second part of this section of the study.

(b) In addition to the implication of a law conception of ethics, it could be argued that the feelings of moral obligation extend the mind out of and beyond itself to another reality--God. This is along the lines of Anscombe since she holds that the existence of God is presupposed by a law conception of ethics. However, the point here is that

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Ethics, pp. 109, 116; and David Lyons, "Ethical Relativism and the Problem of Incoherence," Ethics 86 (January 1976): 108-11.

<sup>39</sup>G. E. M. Anscomb, "Modern Moral Philosophy," Philosophy 33 (January 1958): 1-19; reprinted in The Is/Ought Question, ed. by W. D. Hudson. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1969), pp. 175-95. Future references are from the latter.

the move to God's existence is claimed to be based on the feelings of moral obligation.<sup>40</sup>

(c) It might be argued further that an implication of the conscience concerns the bearing the conscience has on one's affections and emotions. There is an intimate connection between affections and emotions on the one hand and persons on the other. The affections and emotions imply that man is a person related not merely to things but to another person (God).<sup>41</sup>

(2) A theologian might suggest some historical/linguistic implications of one's sense of moral obligation. The historical/linguistic implications of moral obligation strengthen my prior claim that a law conception of ethics has theological implications.

For the development of this point, one might look to G. E. M. Anscombe. According to her, a major difficulty of modern moral philosophy is that its fundamental moral conceptions are not used intelligibly. She claims:

. . . the concepts of obligation, and duty--moral obligation and moral duty, that is to say--and of what is morally right and wrong, and of the moral sense of "ought" . . . are survivals, or derivatives from

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<sup>40</sup>For some further insights on this see John Henry Newman's An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1887), p. 103. Also, see Newman's Oxford University Sermons (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1896), p. 18.

<sup>41</sup>For more on this see Newman, An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent, pp. 105-6.

survivals, from an earlier conception of ethics which no longer generally survives . . . .<sup>42</sup>

Later she claims that "if such a conception is dominant for many centuries, and then is given up, it is a natural result that the concepts of 'obligation' . . . should remain though they had lost their root . . . ."<sup>43</sup> She holds further that what we are witnessing today is "the survival of a concept outside the framework of thought that made it a really intelligible one."<sup>44</sup> The use of moral obligation terms and statements have no reasonable sense outside a divine law conception of ethics which presupposes belief in God as a divine lawgiver. She says:

To have a law conception of ethics is to hold that what is needed for conformity with the virtues failure in which is the mark of being bad qua man . . . is required by divine law. Naturally it is not possible to have such a conception unless you believe in God as a law-giver; like Jews, Stoics, and Christians.<sup>45</sup>

Two features of Anscombe's argument could be developed. (a) Anscombe's argument takes the form of the historical or genetic dependence thesis which says that only some ethical principles owe their origin and/or development

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<sup>42</sup>Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," p. 175. For some interesting remarks concerning the formulation of this argument see Graber's "Anscombe on the Relation Between Morality and Religion," Southern Journal of Philosophy 12 (Summer, 1974): 185-89; Graber gives a fuller treatment in his "Morality and Religion," pp. 164-72.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 180.

to religion. Her claim is that only one sphere of morality (moral obligation terms) arose out of religion. Thus, her view on this point is consistent with the theological defnitionist analysis I outlined earlier in this study. (b) Her argument takes the form of the linguistic dependence thesis when she maintains a connection between the law-conception of ethics embodied in moral obligation terms and the belief that God exists and is the divine law-giver.

For this sketch of the directions my future research might take to be complete, a number of objections against my claims would have to be considered. It is not within the scope of this chapter to even begin unfolding the course these objections might take. At this point, we shall have to be content with the brief survey of what I intend to do regarding secular value theory, secular ethical theory, and Christian ethics.

#### Some Final Remarks

At the beginning of this chapter, I reviewed the general course this study has taken, and I shall not repeat these particular points in my final remarks. The general scope of this study has centered around the present debate between religious and secular ethics concerning the foundations of our most fundamental moral conceptions. It would be difficult to imagine a more important topic of investigation since the very survival of the institution of morality may be weighing in the balances. If we are going

to be morally serious, we must face up to the obligation to investigate, in a fair and impartial way, the issues involved in the foundations of morality. I have tried to have this attitude throughout this study and have also attempted to maintain the perspective of faith seeking understanding. For my own part, I am convinced now, more than ever, that there is an inseparable connection between religion and morality and that a theological definist analysis makes the strongest possible connection between the two. I confess that I have an apologetic purpose in mind by holding to this position. This position supports the cut-flowers thesis introduced in Chapter I. If morality really is tied to religion, then, if morality is going to continue to have its significance, it must be continually embellished by religion; and, this means that religion itself must be sustained.

The arguments I have suggested for a theological definist analysis are not claimed to be knock-down arguments. However, they are meant as arguments and they state my reasons for holding to religious ethics and for finding inadequate the challenges against my position. They should be viewed as invitations for others to consider whether such arguments are as convincing to them. Thus, I do not claim the kind of victory for religion that many religionists might hope for. I know a lot of the language throughout this study has been along the lines of "it seems," "it

appears," "perhaps," and the like. I make no apology for this since in many cases, this is the best that could be offered on this complex and thorny issue. I have, in the tradition of Socrates, tried to follow the conclusions to their end. I hope that religionists and secularists alike will accept the challenge to do more study in this important area of philosophical investigation and commit themselves to arriving at better and stronger conclusions concerning the debate between them. If I have said anything in this study that might encourage someone to do more investigation and come closer to truth, then this study has been worthwhile and performs a useful service.

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