Morality and Spirituality in the Contemporary World

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Edited by

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PREFACE

Morality deals with what is right and wrong, good and bad and the standards or norms for understanding these for the sake of evaluating human conduct. Historically, morality has been closely tied to religion. For example, in the *Euthyphro*, Plato famously asked the question: is something holy because it is loved by the gods or do the gods love it because it is holy? Socrates opted for the second alternative without offering any explicit argument for it (though an argument could be implied). Still, this does not show that Plato was opposed to relating morality to religion. Later in the same dialogue he suggests that one who does good things serves the gods. In the *Theaetetus* he said that one should try to be as much like god as possible and in the *Symposium* that one becomes like god by developing one's best and immortal part. Aristotle held that for humans the highest state is happiness or blessedness for which the best activity is contemplation: One becomes like what one contemplates and one becomes like god by contemplating god and things that are unchanging. The Stoics held that the highest kind of life is that of the sage who follows nature or god in all efforts and detaches from anything that is not already provided by nature and, thus, becomes like god. In modern philosophy, Descartes opined that God's will is the source of the moral law. Finally, Kant said that his goal was to limit human knowledge to make room for faith: In order to make sense of morality one must believe in God, freedom and immortality as postulates of practical reason.

At the same time, in the contemporary world a sharp decline in membership of organized churches and other religious institutions and a significant rise in secularism (partly due to the fact that modern science offers increasingly convincing accounts of the world that leave out the supernatural creator in many traditional religions) have made the tie between morality and religion somewhat tenuous. For many, morality remains as central as ever but is better tied to a broader platform that can be provided by spirituality. Traditionally, religion and spirituality are closely connected with many overlaps; yet, there are some significant differences. Religion involves adherence to and acceptance of the doctrines and practices of a particular faith but not necessarily spirituality. A spiritual person may believe in God or afterlife but also may not. A

secular spiritualist may choose to focus on values like love, compassion, caring, fellowship, tolerance, respect for and willingness to understand and coexist with other traditions and religions, responsibility, apathy for mere material abundance and social harmony without commitment to a personal God or an impersonal Absolute. Similarly, a spiritualist may embark on the path of self-purification and search for the inner essence or the higher self through meditation and contemplation without embracing the traditional beliefs of a particular creed. In this way spirituality can be tied to morality without the following of a historical religion.

Without any doubt, morality or at least our understanding of what is right or wrong, good or bad, is often based on customs and habits, as the root meaning of the word ("moral" being derived from the Latin *mos* which means custom or habit) suggests. But for some there is a dimension of morality that is universal and does not vary even when customs or habits or social practices may vary. One aspect of such universal morality is compassion and caring for others and trying to relieve their suffering. In our contemporary world suffering is pervasive. Overpopulation, malnutrition, poor housing and lack of minimal health care for the vast majority of the people, sharp and accelerated degradation of the environment, staggering and growing wealth disparity between the rich and the poor (and between rich and poor nations), high levels of crime at the individual and the public level, and the unending spiral of violence, skirmishes and wars are some of the problems that must be addressed from such moral perspective. These are also problems that should be addressed by a spiritualist, either secular or religious. Spirituality often refers to awareness of a transcendental state of being and connectedness to a larger reality that provides the thread of essential identity and unity of all in one and one in all. This helps to make sense of what people learned long ago; that peace, order and cooperation within social groups such as families, business partners or nation states depend on guiding principles of social harmony and trust that in the long run are founded on the very essence of human nature.

I am most thankful to Professors Sandra Fairbanks and Joel Wilcox for editing this work and preparing it for publication. I hope that it will contribute to a better understanding of the moral and spiritual core of some of the most pressing problems and deepest concerns of our time.

INTRODUCTION

SANDRA JANE FAIRBANKS

Living well in the twenty-first Century can be greatly enhanced if we rely on the collective wisdom found in our ethical and spiritual traditions. The challenges of the contemporary world are immense and the solutions to them will require a renewed dedication to moral reflection and a commitment to social justice. The environment upon which all life depends is seriously threatened by climate change, rising sea levels, pollution, overpopulation, resource depletion and increased risks of droughts, forest fires, floods and other extreme weather events. If nothing is done there is little doubt that the consequences of the environmental crisis will be catastrophic for human beings as well as other animal species, plants and whole ecosystems.

There is also little doubt that the human activity of burning of fossil fuels creates a blanket of carbon dioxide that warms the earth's temperature. Carbon dioxide's greenhouse effect has been widely known since the 1990 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, so the anaemic world response to the problem of climate change cannot be explained by an appeal to ignorance. Obviously, the developed nations of the world, particularly the United States that contributes 30% of all emissions, should bear the lion's share of moral responsibility for climate change. There are many excuses for inaction including scientific uncertainty about the causes of climate change, the economic costs of action, and the faith that technology will save us. These excuses belie a lack of moral sensibility and fortitude. The consumer lifestyle of most developed countries promotes materialism, entertainment and hedonistic superficiality that ultimately lead to moral corruption. Philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and Kant recognized that the precedence of appetite over reason perverts the basis of sound moral judgment. Since appetites cannot think, a life dominated by the satisfaction of desire is misguided and unintelligent. It is obvious that confronting the problem of climate change and cutting greenhouse gas emissions to a safe level will demand great economic sacrifice as well as a significant transformation of moral values and lifestyles. In order to achieve success, we need citizens who

will put moral responsibility and the welfare of environment ahead of material comfort and economic growth.

Our insensitive and destructive attitude towards nature is not isolated, or unrelated to other problems of social justice. The environmental crisis reflects human structures of domination that include political and economic exploitation, racism, sexism and ageism. According to Benjamin Barber, the contemporary world is dividing into two political movements: Jihad and McWorld.[1] On the one hand, Jihad is motivated by parochial hatreds that pit tribe against tribe, culture against culture and religion against religion. Jihad disapproves of any sort of interdependence or artificial social cooperation, and advocates violence in order to maintain its ideological purity. On the other hand, McWorld represents an economic globalization that transcends national boundaries and gives rise to transnational corporations, international banks and world news services. It presses national economies towards integration and homogeneity in order to create a global network dominated by such corporations as Macintosh, McDonald's, MTV and Disney. Neither of these two world forces is hospitable to liberal democracy. Jihad's authoritarian leadership does not tolerate individual human rights, particularly for women, and is not open to diverse political, cultural or religious perspectives. McWorld's power structure erodes national sovereignty, cultural diversity, and economic equality. Both systems result in lost liberty and human exploitation.

Globalization has certainly created greater class divisions. The income gap between the global North and South has increased unacceptably. In 1973, the income ratio between the richest and poorest countries was forty-four to one. By 1998 it had climbed to seventy-four to one.[2] Three billion people in the South live on less than two dollars per day.[3] The United States has the highest economic mal-distribution ratio of all industrial countries. The American CEO makes 350 to 400 times what the average employee makes.[4] The wealth of the top one percent of American households exceeds the combined wealth of the bottom ninety-five percent.[5] While capitalism has increased overall, global wealth and the profits from world trade, are not fairly distributed within or among countries. Economic domination and exploitation are a consequence of globalization.

Corporate profits are maximized when labour and production costs can be kept low. The neoliberal policies of international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization are designed to keep labour and production costs low. They also produce economic inequality, economic exploitation and environmental destruction. Neoliberal policies include:

(1) Privatization of public enterprises
(2) Deregulation of the economy
(3) Liberalization of trade and industry
(4) Massive tax cuts
(5) Monetarist measures to keep inflation down
(6) Strict control of organized labour
(7) The reduction of public expenditures, especially social spending
(8) The downsizing of government
(9) The expansion of international markets
(10) The removal of controls on global financial flows.[6]

In order to secure a loan, the IMF and the World Bank require that developing countries adopt these policies. Many of these loans go to authoritarian political leaders or to local businesses and the transnational corporations they serve. Unfortunately, neoliberal policies lead to budgetary cuts that impoverish social programs and educational systems, provide little or no enforcement of environmental standards, encourage overpopulation (because without a safety net, women have more children) and cause greater poverty for the majority of citizens. It is obvious that neoliberal policies help guarantee a cheap labour market combined with cheap production costs and little liability for environmental damage, with the sole intention of increasing profits for transnational corporations. If we are to ever achieve social justice for the economically and politically exploited, this neoliberal structure of McWorld must be abandoned. This certainly is a daunting challenge for the contemporary world.

The forces of globalization also promote environmental degradation in a number of ways. Neoliberal policies make it cheaper for environmentally unfriendly industries to operate. They also promote disposal of toxic wastes in poor countries, where regulations are lax and the costs of liability for injury or death as a result of an environmental accident or pollution are much lower than in developed countries. As stated above, women in poor countries have more children in order to provide some security in old age. This leads to overpopulation, which threatens the environment in a variety of ways. Pressure from expanding populations makes land and species preservation much more difficult. The increased demand for food production results in the overuse of fertilizers and pesticides. The spread of the Western meat-based diet calls for more land for grazing animals resulting in a loss of wild habitat. Globalization also spreads a consumer culture that accelerates the depletion of already scarce natural resources and climate change.

In short, political and economic problems are linked to environmental problems. An example of how economic exploitation can lead to environmental

destruction can be seen in the case of Brazil. There is gross economic inequality evidenced by the ratio between personal income from the top twenty percent of people to bottom twenty percent, which is twenty-six to one, and one percent of Brazilians control forty-five percent of the agricultural land.[7] In order to pay off massive international debt, Brazil has converted prime agricultural land used for growing food to grow coffee as an export crop. As a result, large numbers of farm workers were forced off the land and settled in the Amazon basin, which is not suitable for agriculture. These settlers live in poverty while the integrity of the Amazon ecosystem is damaged. Since this example is one of many, solving the environmental crisis requires attacking the social injustices of inequality and exploitation we witness around the world.

The contemporary world needs a moral renaissance in order to confront the interrelated moral challenges of social injustice and environmental degradation. While this book discusses such topics as human rights, environmental protection, global food justice, gender equality and ageism, it also provides a plurality of moral and spiritual perspectives from Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism and Christianity.

Although this book explores the various ways in which ethical theories and spiritual traditions might provide solutions to some of the serious problems facing the contemporary world, it does not urge the view that morality rests upon religion. This is not to say that there is not compatibility or overlap between ethical theories and the teachings of the spiritual traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, Judaism, Islam and Christianity. But, as argued by Joel Wilcox in Chapter One, "Morality and Religion," the view that morality is based upon religion is not only mistaken, but actually dangerous. Of course, religions recommend moral norms, but the very existence of these norms does not depend upon the existence of God.

Wilcox considers two theories that claim that morality is dependent upon God's will, the Divine Command theory and Natural Law theory and argues that both are fallacious. Using Socrates' famous criticism of voluntarism from the *Euthyphro,* Wilcox argues that both theories are susceptible to a form of this same criticism. Socrates asks whether pious actions are pious because all the gods love them or whether all the gods love them because they are pious. The view that the love of the gods is what causes pious actions to be pious is absurd. Clearly, the pious nature of the actions is what causes the gods to love them. Consequently, the nature of piety is independent of the gods. This Socratic argument can be applied to the Divine Command theory. One can ask whether morally right actions are morally right because they are commanded by God or whether

God commands them because they are right. The latter is the more promising option because there is something about rightness that makes it what it is, independent of God's will. He then considers some objections to his view and demonstrates that they too admit the Socratic criticism.

While the application of Socrates' criticism to Divine Command theory is well known, what is novel about this chapter is how Wilcox applies the criticism to Natural Law theory. All Natural Law theories claim that certain features of the natural world convey moral norms to human beings. These natural features may be found in animal behaviour or in the human cognitive faculties involved with moral discernment. Wilcox examines both features of the natural world and then formulates a pair of Socratic questions for each feature. The questions clearly illustrate that morality is independent of God's will. He concludes by pointing out some of the dangers of holding the view that morality is grounded in religion.

However, there is much to learn about morality from religion. The next four chapters examine in different ways some of the parallels between Western ethical and political theories and Eastern spiritual traditions including Hinduism, Buddhism and Daoism. In Chapter Two, "The *Bhagavadgita* and Ethical Theory," Kisor Chakrabarti argues that the *Bhagavadgita* suggests a kind of ethical pluralism that encompasses many of the features found in the three prominent ethical theories in the Western tradition and yet avoids some of their obvious pitfalls. First, Kant's deontological theory claims that duty is determined by the categorical imperative that gives us universal, absolute truths of reason independent of empirical observations. An action is right if it conforms to the categorical imperative regardless of its consequences. Unfortunately, Kant's theory is subject to the well-known objection that there may be exceptions to such moral imperatives as that one should tell the truth even if doing so causes more harm than would be caused by lying. Second, the Utilitarian theory focuses on the consequences of our actions and requires us to maximize the greatest good, however this is defined, for the greatest number of people. The common objection to Utilitarianism is that it cannot protect minority rights, and hence does not give an adequate account of justice. Lastly, virtue ethics focuses not on right or wrong actions but on the agent's character. Virtue may be cultivated by following the example of the practically wise person and by doing virtuous actions repeatedly. For Aristotle, a virtuous choice is a rational choice of the golden mean that is relative to the agent and avoids the extremes of excess or deficiency. Chakrabarti argues that some choices that appear extreme may be morally right and that virtue theory may not be very helpful in deciding what to do in some cases.

The *Bhagavadgita* appeals to duty for duty's sake, the common good, and the development of virtuous character. This comprehensive view has influenced Hindu moral philosophers to advocate for ethical pluralism. According to Chakrabarti, the three main ethical theories are connected to three common character traits that are relevant to morality. Kant's deontological theory is connected to cognitivity, which refers to a person's desire to know and capacity to grasp not only particular features, but also universal and common features. Consequentialism is connected to dynamism, which refers to a person's active nature including desires to get things done and to achieve results. Lastly, virtue ethics is connected to affectivity, which refers to our relational, social nature and our desire to be emotionally attached to others in healthy relationships. These three traits are not mutually exclusive, but rather are all involved to some degree or another in moral action. For example, Chakrabarti shows how compassionate actions require all three. He argues that since an exclusivist approach to ethics cannot adequately account for every aspect of moral action and character, an inclusive, pluralistic approach is superior. Not only does Hindu ethical pluralism give credit to each of the three ethical theories, it can be used to address some of the difficulties found in the exclusivist approach.

Our contemporary world faces many problems including war, economic and political exploitation, violations of human rights, disease, starvation, poverty and the destruction of the environment upon which all life depends. One fundamental way to address these problems is to stress the importance of inculcating the virtue of compassion. In Chapter Three, "A Buddhist Ladder of Love," David Headman compares and contrasts Martha Nussbaum's work on compassion and its necessity for a well-functioning pluralistic liberal democracy with the Buddhist model of human psychology that cites compassion as a critical virtue. Headman's East/West comparison of the virtue of compassion adds to our understanding of its importance, the ways in which it can be inculcated and the social factors that inhibit its development.

Headman examines Nussbaum's "ladders of love," which represents a series of progressively more compelling responses to the partiality and ambiguity of erotic love, namely reciprocity, individuality and compassion. Nussbaum then uses these three criteria to evaluate the adequacy of different ethical systems. Reciprocity parallels Kant's respect for persons and Buber's I-Thou relationship. Individuality requires that ethically good love recognize the uniqueness of each person and the particularities of each person's life. Finally, compassion, like all emotions, is an "upheaval of thought" that has cognitive meaning because it involves an evaluation

that entails a judgment about the welfare of the self. Compassion requires the recognition that the suffering of another is serious, undeserved and relevant to one's own flourishing; the well being of others is wrapped up in one's own welfare.

Headman then examines Nussbaum's analysis of the impediments to the development of compassion. Compassionate persons recognize the suffering of others, but also realize that there is a possibility that they too may be subject to the same sort of suffering. A serious impediment to compassion is the rejection of this possibility. We typically reject our own weaknesses, frailty and mortality. In relation to this rejection, disgust represents our attempt to prevent ourselves from being contaminated by the weaknesses of others. We project unwanted characteristics onto others, sometimes to whole groups of people from fear of contamination. Disgust blocks compassion and legitimizes hatred and discrimination.

Headman goes on to apply the three criteria in his evaluation of Socially Engaged Buddhism. He describes the Four Noble Truths: suffering exists, suffering arises from attachment, suffering can be eliminated, and freedom from suffering can be achieved by following the Eight Fold Path. Finally, he examines the many parallels between Nussbaum and Socially Engaged Buddhism, as well as some of the tension between the two views.

Political corruption and treachery is not something new to the contemporary world, but it provides many examples, from powerful dictators who are willing to kill their own citizens in order to maintain power, to elected officials ready to line their pockets at the expense of the common good. Douglas Giles argues in Chapter Four, "Locke and the *Dao De Jing*," that the political theories of John Locke and of Daoism provide normative guidelines for how people can structure their society for the common good. In this unique comparison between Locke and Daoism, Giles maintains that both theories are anti-naturalist since they do not believe that government is a natural condition of humankind. Thus, in order to be justified, government should be constructed on the basis of transcendent ethical principles. A government so constructed will work within natural law and ensure human freedom, peace and security.

Giles begins with a discussion of Locke's political theory and the historical context in which it arose. The central theoretical issue of the time was whether or not earthly political authority flowed down from God to one ruler (Divine Right of Kings) or if it arose from the collective will of the people. The Doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings is a form of naturalism since it implies that government authority is absolute, *qua* part of the natural order as intended by God. It is therefore immoral for human beings to live without government. Locke rejected this view because it

denied human beings the right of natural freedom. He envisioned a state of nature where men were free, equal and through their own labour could acquire property. According to Locke, natural law, known through reason, conferred the natural rights of life, liberty and property. Government is not a given, but a rational response to conditions within the state of nature. The people create government to protect their rights to life, liberty and property, and to serve their interests; their consent legitimizes government authority. Finally, Giles argues that Locke is not a libertarian because freedom is not a lack of government regulation or doing whatever one pleases to do. We are always constrained by natural law, and when we create democratic government everyone is bound to consent to majority rule.

Giles then turns his attention to Daoist political theory. Many mistakenly interpret Daoism as a form of ascetic mysticism that is anti-world, anti-society escapism. Perhaps this is because Daoism is a philosophical system that believes every material thing is filled with an immanent spiritual reality—the Dao. However, Giles argues that Daoism is not escapism since it seeks balance, long life and happiness within the world and tries to balance the material with the mystical. In particular, Daoist political theory is a response to the corruption and decline of the Zhou Dynasty as well as a rejection of the Confucian approach to government that emphasizes social hierarchy, strict codes of behaviour and rigid ritual ceremonies.

Daoism advocates a return to naturalism by living in harmony with the Dao that requires two things of citizens, especially of rulers. First, rulers should stop thinking in terms of binary opposition as is typical in Western philosophy. In the West, opposites are viewed as independent and mutually exclusive. Daoism holds that opposites are co-dependent and intertwined. Therefore, the sage ruler sees past the binary opposition and harmonizes the forces in the kingdom. Second, the ruler should practice *wu wei*. *Wu wei* is often described as "action by inaction" or being "in the zone" or "effortlessness." Since Dao is present in all things, *wu wei* requires the attunement to the primordial connections to all thing and living in response to the natural flow of things. When applied to the art of ruling, the ruler should allow the people to be true to their own natures and not try to manipulate and control through force. The sage ruler does not live for themself or seek praise or honour, but rather serves the common good—the environment that allows the people to best express and fulfil their natures. Once Giles gives a thorough characterization of the sage ruler, he draws a number of comparisons between Daoist and Lockean political theory.

We continue our comparison of Daoism and Western philosophy in Chapter Five, "Socrates and *Wu Wei*." Tom Morris makes the provocative claim that Socrates' approach to living a good life closely parallels the Daoist practice of *wu wei*, that is following one's natural instincts. Morris finds three common themes in the philosophies of Socrates and Daoism:

> (1) We must overcome our desire to prove ourselves worthy in the eyes of others
> (2) When we follow our natural instincts the divine works through us, and
> (3) The divine ensures that when we act naturally, with no regard for our future well-being, our needs will still be met.

Wu wei refers to letting all things come and go effortlessly and without desire. In other words, the person does not try to put direction into things, nor do they care about the consequences of the action. To act out of desire or to achieve a particular outcome actually prevents the possibility of acting from a natural response from one's whole being. According to Daoism, the practice of *wu wei* allows the practitioner to connect with the divine.

Once Morris characterizes *wu wei*, he argues that Socrates adopted a similar approach to living a good life. While Socrates claims to be good, neither he nor anyone can tell people how to be good. Analogous to the poets, who cannot explain their own poetry and yet the words just come to them naturally, Socrates acts virtuously by following his natural instincts. He is attuned to the present and does not concern himself with future consequences. In order to live a good life, Socrates believes he must overcome the impediments to his natural responsiveness. One impediment that *Socrates* describes in the *Apology* is vanity or the preoccupation with one's own status and reputation in the community. Finally, Morris traces the theme in Socratic, Platonic and Daoist philosophies that the divine works through us when we follow our natural instincts. Morris argues that Socrates feels connected to the gods and does not care about his own well-being because he believes that the gods will provide what he needs.

In Chapter Six, "Ecojustice Ethics and the Spirit of Globalization," Mark Wood gives an overview of the problems created by economic globalization. He argues that globalization has transformed every aspect of economic, political, social and cultural life. The competition for maximum profits has led manufacturers to outsource jobs to countries with low or no taxes, cheap labour, no social safety net, poor educational systems, no rights for workers and few or no regulations pertaining to health, safety and the environment. The neoliberal policies associated with globalization do not promote general welfare. Instead, globalization increases inequality,

poverty, illiteracy, homelessness and disease, resulting in social conditions that are insecure and chaotic. In addition, globalization promotes the destruction of the environment by employing production methods that pollute the soil, air and water, destroy natural habitats and foster a consumer lifestyle predicated on burning fossil fuels responsible for climate change.

Neoliberal policies have not only worsened conditions in developing countries but also have produced deleterious effects on developed counties including the United States. Jobs with increasing wages, benefits and pensions have largely disappeared and are unlikely to return. American politics is dominated by a call for lower taxes especially for the rich, cuts in educational and healthcare revenues, and a dismantling of supposed entitlement programs including welfare, Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. With diminished purchasing capacity, more credit is extended, resulting in crushing debts and massive foreclosure and bankruptcy rates. More than forty-six million Americans now live in poverty. As the economic conditions worsen, the social and moral fabric of society begins to crumble. Families are fragmented; there is more illness, obesity, depression and drug use.

After examining the ill effects of neoliberal policies associated with globalization, Wood turns his attention to how religion influences the way people interpret and respond to this reality. The extent to which we can humanize our relations to others and the earth largely depends on how religious ideas shape what people believe. Wood describes three religious responses to current conditions in the contemporary world. The Fundamentalist response is critical of secular capitalist society for its consumerism, ethical individualism and moral decay. Fundamentalists believe there is the one true religion as revealed in their sacred text and that the faithful should live by the prescribed moral code. Consequently, their solution to these problems is to establish some form of theocracy. The Neoliberal religious response supports the tenets of the neoliberal status quo including deregulation, low taxes, competition, individualism, consumerism and the global war on terrorism. However, it is silent on issues of social justice, inequality and militarism. The Moderate or Liberal religious response is to adjust core doctrines and rituals so that they fit secular liberal democracy. It supports social justice and obligations to the underprivileged but does not challenge existing political and economic institutions responsible for the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few.

Wood concludes that all three religious responses are inadequate to achieve social justice, environmental health and sustainability, although

the Liberal response does foster respect for peace, equality, human rights and human dignity. Liberal religions are sparking an evolution of religion towards a trans-religious or post-religious culture based on compassion. This fourth trans-religious response is described as an international movement for ecojustice that affirms compassion, knowledge, liberal democracy, human rights, equality and the earth as the fundamental ground of our existence and self-development. Wood discusses evidence of this growing ecojustice movement around the world and how such an ethic might transform the contemporary world for the better.

Although women have made great progress in securing individual rights and equal opportunity in the workplace, women around the world still face discrimination, violence, poverty and lack of opportunity. Michael McKeon, in Chapter Seven, "Equality and Gender Roles in the Family," examines gender inequality within the home. Many women, particularly in Western technological societies, have full-time careers outside the home but still perform the vast majority of unpaid domestic labour. Feminists have argued that the current division of labour is unjust for two reasons. First, women are coerced by gender-specific social constraints to perform domestic labour while there is no similar coercion of men. Second, men and institutions who benefit greatly from women's domestic labour do not recognize or reward women for it. The coercive nature of this asymmetry and the lack of any reward for domestic labour help perpetuate the view of women as subordinate. Furthermore, the patriarchal paradigm of the family is why we have a gendered division of labour in the first place.

According to McKeon, the one justification for this unfair division of labour is the idea that men and women have different essences and that men's essence is superior. He argues against this view by holding that two conditions must be met in order to justify any division of labour. First, the division must be reciprocally justified and agreed to by both parties. Second, all reciprocally agreed upon division of labour must also be in congruence with our current conceptual framework of the person. The view that men possess a superior essence is not congruent with our current framework of equality. Finally, McKeon offers some insightful comments about why both men and women still accept the unfair division of labour even when they claim to accept the equality of the genders. He distinguishes between rational comprehension and experiential comprehension. Men and women cannot fully consent to a division of labour without understanding and appreciating the value of the work through experience. For example, men have to learn the value of caring and nurturing children by performing this role in the home and women

have to understand that men are also fully capable of performing it.

In Chapter Eight, "Does Technology Make Old Age Obsolete?," Audrey L. Anton argues that America's technological culture, as well as other Western societies, have made the elderly obsolete. She outlines two ways in which something may become obsolete. The first sense is objective: the elderly no longer serve any useful purpose. The second sense is subjective: cultural norms change our common social perception of the usefulness of the elderly. Objectively, old age is not obsolete because we need elders to guide us with their wisdom. Of course, not all old persons are wise, but wisdom takes time because it requires a significant number and types of experiences before one can weed out misconceptions and acquire knowledge, good judgment, and problem solving skills, as well as virtuous character traits such as fairness, justice, courage and humility. Anton argues that the elderly are well suited, among other things, to provide educational services and political leadership that is oriented toward the common good.

Unfortunately, according to Anton, the elderly are obsolete in the second, subjective sense. American culture perceives the elderly as physically and mentally impaired, possessing outdated knowledge and lacking energy. In a youth-oriented culture like America's, social values reflect the younger stages of life, including strength, beauty, money, sex, instant gratification, and possessions, where life is "fast-paced" and "exciting." Americans care as much about entertainment as they do about knowledge. So one reason why Americans devalue the wisdom of old age is because they value money, possessions and entertainment more than knowledge. A second reason is that technology renders the wisdom of old age obsolete because we prefer to consult Google or Wikipedia to obtain useful information. Hence, possession of knowledge is overrated when information can be accessed in a ten-second web search. Technology has also enabled us to prolong youth through medical procedures that help us look and feel younger. One consequence of this technology induced cultural perception that the elderly are obsolete is the waste of a precious resource, that of elder wisdom.

Anton explores the philosophy of aging, including the nature of wisdom as described by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, as well as gerontological theories on the experience of aging. She condemns America's social attitudes toward old age and suggests how we might benefit from the elderly both as a society and as individuals.

The final three chapters of the book deal with environmental issues. In Chapter Nine, "Environmental Protection and Human Rights," Sandra Jane Fairbanks argues that certain doctrines accepted by environmentalists

have led to clashes with human rights advocates. Many environmental philosophies, particularly Deep Ecology and the Land Ethic, espouse some, if not all, of the following three doctrines: (1) the rejection of individualism in favour of environmental holism; (2) the rejection of anthropocentricism; and (3) biocentric equality. Environmentalists are attracted to holistic theories because they rest, in part, on the science of ecology, which recognizes the complex web of interrelationships that exist between organisms and their environment. According to holistic theories, moral consideration is not merely given to individual living organisms or to sentient beings, but rather to threatened populations of animals and plants, eco-systems, and even the entire biosphere. Therefore, it is sometimes necessary to sacrifice the good of an individual in order to preserve the whole. Environmentalists also typically reject anthropocentricism because they do not view nature as a proper object of human dominance and control; human beings are not above nature, but rather they are a part of it. Our role is not to conquer and exploit nature for the benefit of humankind. Consequently, when human interests clash with those of other members of the biotic community, humans being must not always win. Finally, biocentric equality entails that everything in nature has a right to flourish because everything in nature has intrinsic value. The human species is not superior, therefore human needs should not be given greater moral consideration than the rest of nature.

Fairbanks points out that the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes not only the right to life but also the right to reproduce, and the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being including food, clothing, housing, work and medical care. Human rights must be protected in order to secure human dignity, autonomy and happiness. While many environmentalists may agree with the spirit of the UN Declaration, they view human overpopulation and economic development as severe threats to the health and well-being of nature. Some have even argued that we should not feed starving people or provide medical care to people with diseases such as AIDS. These environmentalists have been accused of ecofacism. Fairbanks explores the tensions between environmentalism and human rights and explores some possible alterations to the three doctrines that create the conflict.

Michael Allen, in Chapter Ten, "Rationality and the Morality of Global Food Justice," argues that there is a fundamental human right to food security. Consequently, we are bound by the duty of justice to create cosmopolitan institutions that can ensure that everyone is fed. There are at least two main arguments against his position. Allen's chapter is devoted

to setting out the various nuances of these arguments and critically responding to them.

Both arguments claim that the right to food security is unenforceable and hence, irrational. The allegation of irrationality is based upon Hobbes' distinction between commitments *in foro interno* and *in foro externo*. Although the international community believes internally that there is a duty to feed everyone, the external commitment to act may be impossible given certain facts about the world. So, just because we should feed everyone does not imply that we can carry out this duty. If the duty is unenforceable, then it is also irrational. There is an inconsistency between internal belief and external commitment to act.

The first Malthusian argument against the right to food security simply denies the possibility of producing sufficient quantities of food to meet world demand. He describes the Malthusian logic of increasing the world's population by attempting to feed the needy and the subsequent "ratchet effect" which outstrips the planet's capacity to produce enough food. The problem is only compounded by climate change, shortages of natural resources and impending ecological catastrophe and resource wars. Individual nations will struggle to meet the security needs of their own citizens, let alone their international commitments. Therefore, "cannot" implies "should not." Since we cannot satisfy our duty to feed everyone then it is irrational to argue that we should do our duty. Allen's response is detailed, but essentially he argues that the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (UNFAO) reports that the Malthusian propositions are false; there is enough food to feed everyone. Food production and population are capable of sustainable parallel growth. The failure to satisfy the duty of justice is the result of a failure of political will to create the international institutions to feed everyone, not an agronomic impossibility.

The second argument against the right to food security is that it is unenforceable because it is impossible to create cosmopolitan political institutions to accomplish universal food security. Here again, institutional impossibility is predicated on future global ecological disaster and resource wars. Nations will focus on securing their own food supply by establishing a position of dominance in the world and will not be motivated to cooperate with competitor nations. However, Allen argues that acquiesce to disaster induced anarchy is not rational for two reasons. First, the ecological catastrophe and resource war has not yet occurred. Second, working to create cosmopolitan institutions is the best way to avert such a catastrophe. The lack of political will amounts to moral

hypocrisy because the international community recognizes the right to food security and because the planet is able feed everyone.

In Chapter Eleven, "Albert Schweitzer, Reverence for Life and World Religions," Marvin Meyer examines Schweitzer's life, his ethic of reverence for life, and its relationship to Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and Daoism. According to Meyer, reverence for life is more than just respect for life, but includes a spiritual sense of mystical awe and the conviction that all life is not only valuable but also sacred. Schweitzer believed that true ethics begins with an awareness of the will to live. He contrasts the will to live with Descartes' starting point of "I think, therefore I am," which he thinks leads to unnecessary abstraction and is therefore inadequate. According to Schweitzer, the will to live must be cherished everywhere in nature. He gives reverence to all expressions of life including the physical, mental, psychological, social, and spiritual. Of course, the application of reverence for life inevitably involves difficult decisions, but Schweitzer was reluctant to rank the relative values of various life forms, relying instead on reflection and sensitive conscience. He made practical decisions on the basis of ethical reflections in a manner similar to the Buddhist concept of mindfulness. He reflects on an experience of killing mosquitoes in Africa where there is the danger of mosquito-spread malaria. He did not like doing it and he would not have done so if in Europe. It is important to be aware that all life deserves consideration, to kill only when necessary and to regret doing so.

Once Meyers describes Schweitzer's ethic of reverence for life he compares it to certain teachings of world religions. The principle of reverence for life is based on reciprocity and universalization. He compares it to Jesus' advice of "act towards others the way you want others to act towards you," and to "love your neighbour as yourself." Schweitzer believed that love for God is love for all life. These same rules of reciprocity are also found in Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism and Daoism. He was deeply influenced by religious expressions from China and India, in particular the Jainist principle of *ahimsa*, advocating nonviolence or noninjury as practiced by Mahavira, a reformer of Hinduism. Jains believe that human lives are interconnected with all existence and that world is alive with suffering souls. To neglect or disregard any part of existence is to disregard one's own existence. To live right is to repudiate all violence and killing. Meyers explains the Jains' nonviolent philosophy and its contribution to Schweitzer's ethic of reverence for life. Schweitzer is one of first western philosophers to recognize the intrinsic value of nature and his message of reverence for life is highly relevant to the contemporary world.

Notes

[1] Benjamin Barber, "Jihad vs. McWorld," in *Globalization and the Challenges of a New Century*, ed. Patrick O"Meara *et al.* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 23–22.
[2] Manfred B. Steger, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 105.
[3] David Rothkopf, *Superclass: The Global Power Elite and the World They* Are *Making* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 15.
[4] Ibid., 15.
[5] Manfred B. Steger, *Globalization*, 42.
[6] Ibid., 41
[7] Holmes Rolston, III, "Feeding People versus Saving Nature," in *Environmental Ethics :An Anthology*, edited by Andrew Light and Holmes Rolston, III (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 454

CHAPTER ONE

RELIGION AND MORALITY

JOEL WILCOX

Introduction

The view that morality is based on religion is commonly taken for granted, at least among religious persons. I think that this popular view is both mistaken and potentially dangerous, and so in the following will attempt to provide arguments to that effect.[1] When it is claimed that morality is based on religion, one of two views is being asserted. One is known as the divine command theory, according to which what is right is the command of God (or possibly of gods). The other is known as Natural Law theory, according to which certain features of the natural world somehow convey or recommend moral norms to human beings.

My arguments will begin with criticisms of the divine command theory that began with Socrates and have been elaborated since. These criticisms are relatively well-known. I will continue with criticisms of natural law theory, where I hope to add something new to the discussion. Finally, as mentioned, I believe that the view that morality is based on religion is not only mistaken, but actually dangerous, and therefore the paper will conclude with an attempt to justify this view.

Before turning to the arguments, it will be helpful to have a relatively clear idea of what the claim that morality is based on religion actually means. I do not take this claim to assert that religion recommends moral norms; it obviously does—for example in the form of the ten commandments—but then my parents used to recommend moral norms to me, and that does not mean that morality is based on my parents. Rather, I take the claim to mean that somehow the very existence of moral value, and consequently of moral obligation, depend on the existence of God, or gods. In other words, according to this view, if God were not to exist, neither would there be any non-prudential reasons to deal with anyone or

anything fairly, benevolently, honestly, justly and so on. To quote Dostoyevsky, “if God were dead, then everything would be permitted.”[2]

Divine Command Theory

Turning to an examination of divine command theory, it seems to be simplicity itself. As mentioned, according to this theory, what is right is simply the command of God (or possibly of gods). Thus, for example, stealing is wrong because God forbids stealing. But in a Platonic dialogue known as the *Euthyphro*, Socrates shows that the simplicity of the theory can be maintained only at the expense of its plausibility.[3] In this dialogue, Socrates and a high-ranking priest named Euthyphro actually discuss the nature of piety rather than of morality per se, but Socrates' criticisms can easily be generalized so as to apply to any theory that makes the nature of any object of knowledge, whether fact or value, dependent on God's will.

In the dialogue Socrates asks Euthyphro for a definition of piety, and after some prompting Euthyphro offers the following: "Piety is what all the gods love."[4] Socrates then asks one of the best questions ever in the history of philosophy: Are pious actions pious because all the gods love them, or do all the gods love pious actions because they are pious? What he has done with this question is to show that the simplicity of the theory is only apparent; as stated by Euthyphro, it is ambiguous between the following two claims:

(a) The love of all the gods is what causes pious acts to be pious.
(b) There is something about pious acts that causes all the gods to love them.

Of these, interpretation (a) is absurd since, for example, even if all the gods happened to love peanut butter or child pornographers, peanut butter and child pornographers would not thereby become pious as a result of this love. However, option (b) is extremely plausible. Thus, the ambiguous version derives its initial plausibility from interpretation (b). This interpretation, however, actually denies that piety is based on religion, because it alleges that piety has an essence or character that makes the gods love it, and which they themselves could not have stipulated. The upshot is that the divine command seems to have whatever appeal it does due to the unrecognized conflation of the plausible but non-theistic interpretation (b) with the untenable but theistic interpretation (a). This is why I said that the simplicity of the theory can be maintained only at the expense of its plausibility. Once the nakedly voluntaristic nature of the

divine command theory is plainly expressed, as it is in interpretation (a), its plausibility falls to zero.

This is easily seen by transposing the talk above about "piety" into talk about "moral rightness." Doing so yields the following pair of statements, corresponding to the two possible answers to Socrates' question:

(1) Morally right acts are morally right because God commands them.
(2) God commands morally right acts because they are morally right.

Option (1) is plainly absurd. If there is nothing to morally right acts other than the circumstance that they are commanded by God; if, that is, they have no stable inner nature or objective characteristics of their own that do not change, then anything at all would be morally right (or wrong) if it were commanded (or forbidden) by God. For example, killing people for any number of seemingly undeserving infractions (such as wearing “mixed fabrics” or cursing one’s parents) seems to be obligatory according to the book of Leviticus. Of course the dutiful moral agent will require additional guidance concerning, say, what constitutes mixed fabrics, but that it is a detail. Similarly, beating children with freckles would become morally obligatory if God were to command this, so that anyone who refused to do this would be a bad person. Eating babies or torturing dogs or any other moral atrocity would become either a matter of duty, to be earnestly pursued by the righteous, or at least a morally permissible behavior.

Option (2) is more promising, to say the least. What this alleges is that there is something about goodness or moral rightness that makes it what it is, and not subject to divine tampering. On this option God surely commands what is morally right, but only because God is the kind of super-competent being who will not make a mistake, and not because God creates goodness or rightness. But in this case morality is not based on religion—i.e. on God’s will—but has independent validity.

It is worth noting that the above criticism may not be compelling to everyone, because it merely invokes outrageous counterexamples by way of arousing intuitions to the effect that the divine command theory must be wrong. But what if a person were simply to take the bull by the horns and insist, "yes, killing fabric mis-users and so on seems wrong, but who am I to judge God? If God says it's right, then it's right, and that is where analysis must stop." Such persons do exist. In the bible, Abraham's willingness to kill his son Isaac provides one example; and many current events featuring the most enthusiastic religious violence suggest that Abraham has legions of present-day followers. Hence my claim above, that the view that morality is based on religion is not only mistaken, but

actually dangerous; but more on that topic later.[5]

It is convenient at this point to state and answer an objection to the foregoing criticism of the divine command theory, since it leads directly to the second reason why the theory is absurd. This objection is given by persons who are sympathetic in principle to the theory, but who (unlike the one just mentioned) are not content to allow that anything goes, merely because God says so. The objection is that, since God's nature is good, there can be no possibility of God commanding moral atrocities, or moral wrongs of any sort, either as permissible or obligatory. On this view, God's own goodness provides a sort of check or constraint on the kinds of behaviours that God can command.

A response to this objection becomes obvious upon simply re-asking Socrates' question in this new context, so as to yield the following options:

(3) God's nature is good because it is God's nature; and
(4) God's nature is good because it satisfies an independent standard of goodness.

Of these options, the divine command theorist must choose (3), since to choose (4) is to give up the claim that God determines morality. This is so because, according to option (4), the content of God's commands must obey the dictates of a nature that is not His to determine. However, on option (3), the claim that "God is good" becomes vacuous. If God's nature were automatically good simply and solely because it is God's nature, then whatever nature God might happen to have would be good by definition, even one that leads God to find that beating up freckled children and so on is morally obligatory. Unlike the counterexample strategy employed in the first argument for the absurdity of the divine command theory, whose efficacy is contingent on the moral intuitions of its audience, the strategy here is to show that the theory is necessarily useless. This is so because saying that "God is good" becomes the same as saying that "God does whatever God does," or that "God is God." As Hume pointed out, tautologies (such as these), though true, are vacuous. Thus, since no adequate theory of any sort can be vacuous, the divine command theory is hopeless in principle.

Natural Law Theory

This brings us to the other theory according to which morality might be based on religion. This is Natural Law theory, the view that certain features of the natural world convey moral norms to human beings. This theory has its antecedents in Aristotle, for whom moral goodness is a

realization of characteristic—i.e., natural—human potentials both for self-development and for optimal social relations. It was developed at some length by Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century, and remains the accepted view of the nature of morality of the Catholic Church.[6]

There are many different types of natural law theory, but for present purposes it will be useful to review two fundamental kinds of "features of the natural world," at least one of which grounds every type of natural law theory. One feature of the natural world that is often taken to be morally instructive is animal behaviour.

Aristotle maintained that animals perform the essential functions of plants—namely, assimilating nutrients, growing and reproducing—while in other ways transcending them. Similarly, human beings perform the essential functions of animals—namely, moving around and perceiving—while transcending animals in virtue of our rationality and free will. Thus there is some continuity between humans and animals, which turns out to be useful for discerning moral norms. Since humans can make free choices, they can easily choose against their best interests, and so human behaviour is itself not a reliable indicator of moral norms. Animals, on the other hand, are driven by instinct, and so (conditions permitting) will always seek their own good. Thus, Thomas Aquinas reasoned, at least some animal behaviours will suggest moral norms. For example, human beings, since they are mammals, share some essential characteristics with mammals, or at least with higher mammals. It is obvious that higher mammals, for example non-human primates, educate their young in various ways. Therefore, adult human beings have a duty to educate their children.[7]

Natural law ethics is widely practiced in an intuitive, popular form that both draws heavily on animal behaviour, and illustrates the limitations of this approach. For example, a common criticism of homosexuality is that it is "unnatural," and therefore wrong. Such declarations reveal a potential weakness of "appeals to nature" in the form of animal behaviour, which is that non-human beings cannot necessarily be counted upon to display the sort of behaviour that one wishes to view as right, or to eschew the sort of behaviour that one wishes to view as wrong. For example, as it turns out, hundreds and perhaps thousands of animal species practice homosexuality.[8] A related problem for the popular form of natural law theory is that animals often display behaviour that we do not necessarily want to regard as morally obligatory, in which case the moral theorist must find a way to exclude the behaviour on the ground that it is "unnatural for humans." For example, various species of primates are xenocidal, meaning that they kill extra-tribal members of their own species that wander into their territory.

Against the problems just cited, more sophisticated versions of natural law appeal to human cognitive faculties involved with moral discernment, and this is the second "feature of the natural world" that is often taken to be morally instructive. We could object to the idea that human cognitive faculties are not exactly features of the natural world in the sense that, say, chimps and trees are. But since for a natural law theorist what is most real about the natural world are hidden essences which condition the behaviour of living beings possessing those essences, and since a capacity for moral discernment is part of the human essence, this is not the theoretical problem that it might seem to be. Thus, the Catholic Encyclopedia has it that "the natural law is the rule of conduct which is prescribed to us by the Creator in the constitution of the nature with which He has endowed us."[9] Here the Catholic Church plainly accepts that natural laws (i.e. moral norms) are to be discovered by an investigation of human nature, presumably by some method that would involve both comparisons and contrasts of human and non-human beings. Such an investigation will enable us to adjudicate *prima facie* conflicts between the apparent moral norms implicit in animal behaviour and the special requirements of our species.

Thus, in sum, while animal behaviour can provide a certain amount of guidance for human beings, for thoughtful adherents of natural law theory the final court of appeal with respect to right and wrong is a special faculty of moral cognition in human beings.

Grounded as it is in the concepts of essence and a human faculty of moral discernment, natural law theory sounds both much less naïve and much more plausible than divine command theory. It is surprising, then, that Socrates' question for the other theory turns to be useful in this new context as well. With reference to the first assumption of natural law ethical theory, that animal behaviours enable us to, for example, discern our duties to educate children, his bifurcation of divine will and moral objectivity yields the following options:

(5) Animal behaviours are morally instructive because God causes them.
(6) God causes animal behaviours because they are morally instructive.

By now the pattern is perhaps obvious. Option (5) is subject to egregious counterexamples; for example, God could have created non-human primates so as to have an uncontrollable urge to feast on their first-born offspring. But had he done so, this would not make such behaviour morally permissible in humans, let alone obligatory. That leaves option (6), according to which there is something independently good or bad, right or wrong, about possible instinctual inclinations, such that God