

Can we be good with God?

Baylor2

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In this talk I am going to defend a divine command theory of what is morally right. I actually prefer the term "divine call theory" to "divine command theory", but the traditional name for this kind of theory is "divine command theory", so I will stick with it. In this talk I am not arguing for the truth of theism in general, or Christianity in particular, but I am going to assume that picture and argue from within it. This talk is about what is the best view of moral obligation that comes out of this picture. You will see the structure of the talk in the eight sections I have listed on the handout.

(1) The first thing I want to point out is that this is a divine command theory of what is morally right, not of what is in more general terms morally good. I do not want to spend a long time on this distinction, because it would take us far afield into other branches of moral philosophy, but I will say a little. One place to see a detailed example of a divine command theory of the right as opposed to the good is in Bob Adams's book Finite and Infinite Goods. I do not agree with Bob Adams about the good. For he thinks the good is what imitates God, and I think the good is what attracts us to God, who is, so to speak, the magnetic centre of attraction. But I agree with him that the right is different from the good, and that God's commanding fits better with the first than with the second. Clustering around "right" is our moral obligation and duty; clustering around "good" is what we are drawn to and what we love. The obligation family of terms often involve a sense of constraint, or the granting of permission. Obligation can, it is true, tell us both what to do and what not to do, but it often operates in situations where there is a contrary attraction or inclination that has to be restrained.

For example, imagine Rosa, a teacher. I am going to use the example of Rosa throughout the talk. She is taking a nap after getting back from school, and she is faced with the obligation to get up and prepare for next day's class project. Or she is accused by her parents of not wanting to visit at Christmas, feels like telling a little fib about a prior commitment, and is faced with the obligation not to lie.

Obligations can come from roles we adopt (like the role of teacher) or roles we do not choose (like the role of someone's child) or just from being people, not in any particular role at all. In all these cases they can have the feel of burden and weight. This sense of burden comes from focussing on cases where duty and inclination have come apart. But the ideal case is where they coincide. The best kind of person likes doing what she is also under an obligation to do. The theological doctrine of sanctification gives an account of progress towards this happy condition, and there are non-theological accounts of moral development which do the same. Rather than thinking of obligation and duty in terms of burden, it is better to think of them as a screening procedure which gives permission for us to act or be a certain way. The notion of

permission is central here. I am not saying that "It is my duty" means "I am (morally) permitted". That would be false, for duty is required and not merely permitted. But the person with a healthy sense of duty is constantly checking for permission, as a good driver checks in the rear-view mirror.

The moral agent wants to check whether what she is doing fits the good of the whole, seen in terms of the equal and unique value of each person. If it fits, she may do it, and this kind of permission is an affirmation not a denial. In a similar way a composer checks each new phrase in his piece against his sense of the whole composition, and experiences this sense of the whole as liberating, since it gives him boundaries within which his creativity can flourish. It gives his piece a good shape to grow into. From the notion of permission we can derive the notion of what we are not permitted to do or be (we are prohibited) and the notion of what we are not permitted not to do or be (we are required). Rosa is prohibited from lying in order to preserve her freedom, and she is required to get up and prepare her materials for class. Since she is drawn towards truthfulness and towards teaching well, her inclination and her sense of permission will coincide here. But this does not mean that telling the truth and doing her work stop being her duty. It just means that she has a welcome sense of fit.

Putting the matter this way, we can see that attraction and constraint both play central roles in morality, but different roles. If we understand "right" roughly in terms of constraint and "good" in terms of attraction, there will be different kinds of priority between them. The right is not the source of the good (not prior in that sense). The good is like a magnet, with its own power of attraction. But the right has veto power, priority in this different sense. This is not an alien authority which it has over the good. Rather, the right is the fittingness of some particular good with the good of the whole, seen in terms of the equal and unique value of each person. And we can get a provisional sense of this fittingness, which philosophers sometimes call prima facie obligation, which means obligation at first appearance. We have a sense that some things are forbidden in the default mode. By this I mean something like the default mode on a computer, which gives me times new roman as my font unless I specifically tell it not to. The default mode can be overridden; but if it is not, it is operational. So Rosa's duty to prepare her material for class is a prima facie duty. It can be overridden by a higher duty, if for example her daughter has to be rushed off to hospital with acute appendicitis. Some duties, however, cannot be overridden and are binding in the present circumstance in its full specificity.

The divine command theory is that God's commanding something is necessary and sufficient for that thing's being morally obligatory.

2) In the first talk I mentioned Duns Scotus. The version of divine command theory I

want to defend is essentially his version. I am going to start by repeating some of his views briefly, in particular his doctrine of the two affections. He takes from Anselm (and before him from Augustine) the idea that humans have in their will two basic affections (or intellectual appetites), what he calls the affection for advantage and the affection for justice. All acts of the will, on this view, stem from one affection or the other. The affection for advantage is a natural appetite, an inclination or tendency towards one's own proper perfection or happiness. The affection for justice is the inclination towards intrinsic goods for their own sake, without reference to the self, (since justice, in the classical conception, gives to each thing what is its due). This affection for justice has the power to subdue my concern with myself. I mentioned in the last paper the example of my delivery of these lectures. I might be focussed on the subject matter for its own sake, or I might be focussed psychologically on myself delivering the lectures to you and your response to me. Both affections are responses to the pull toward the good. But there is in every person a ranking of the two, and if the affection for advantage is ranked first it will become an improper regard for the self. The will of free creatures is, for Scotus, a self-determining power to choose in opposite directions, and this determines whether the free agent acts in accordance with the affection for advantage or the affection for justice. But it only has this freedom because it has the affection for justice. If a creature had only the affection for advantage, it would pursue this by nature but not in freedom. The two affections can have the same objects, even God. For union with God is indeed the proper perfection or happiness of a human agent, and so humans are naturally moved towards it. But this movement is not, Scotus says, a movement towards God for God's sake, but for the sake of the agent. Scotus is not condemning the affection for advantage. He thinks that we were created to have it. Unfortunately, however, we are born after the Fall with an inordinate affection for advantage. We are born with the inclination towards our own advantage above everything else. This ranking of the two affections is sinful, and has to be reversed. But this does not mean that the affection for advantage is eliminated.

Scotus examines the problem of how Lucifer could have chosen evil, when he was in the

open presence of so much good. The answer Scotus gives is that Lucifer first coveted happiness immoderately, and this came from an affection for advantage. Lucifer first sinned $\hat{\text{O}}$ by loving something excessively as his supreme delight $\tilde{\text{O}}$. Lucifer took something good by nature, his own perfection or happiness, and willed it wrongly (morally badly), with the wrong ranking of the two affections. But it is also possible for free beings to will natural goods rightly (morally well, as presumably the archangel Michael does). One way to do this is to will them without essential orientation towards the self, as for example when an agent wills some natural good for someone else for that other person $\tilde{\text{O}}$ s own sake. If we accept that God is the end or goal at which everything is headed, it is possible to love that end either as one $\tilde{\text{O}}$ s own end or as the end of all. There is an extreme way to put this difference between the two kinds of love. We can imagine that there was a choice, which in fact there never is, between God $\tilde{\text{O}}$ s good and ours. If we had only the love for God as our good, we could not say, with Luther, and with generations of Presbyterian ministers at their ordination, $\hat{\text{O}}$ I happily submit to damnation for the sake of the glory of God $\tilde{\text{O}}$. How could Luther say such a thing? He is commenting on Paul $\tilde{\text{O}}$ s exclamation in Romans 9: 3, $\hat{\text{O}}$ For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people. $\tilde{\text{O}}$ Moses says something very similar about being willing to be blotted out of the book of life (Exod 32: 32). Calvin interprets the passage as Luther does, though less exuberantly, but he recognizes that for Paul $\hat{\text{O}}$ it was that his mind being overwhelmed, he burst forth into this extreme wish. $\tilde{\text{O}}$ The point is not that this extreme choice is one we would ever have to face. But it makes the point vividly that we do frequently have to make the choice between putting first either ourselves or the glory of God.

The affection for justice is, Scotus holds, an inclination toward intrinsic goods for their own sake, centrally an inclination towards God. Even God has to love God. God is not required to create us. But if God does create us, God is also required to create us such that union with God is our final end. God is not required, however, to prescribe any particular route to this end. Here we have the distinction which Scotus sees between the first and second tables of the ten commandments. The first table tells us our duties towards God, and the second our duties

towards our neighbor. Scotus is inclined to say that the first table gives us the law of nature in the strict sense, since laws of nature possess necessary truth. So the commandments which tell us to love God have the kind of necessity required for natural law in the strict sense, but the commandments which tell us how to love our neighbor, the second table of the law, do not. They are extremely fitting, Scotus says, but still contingent. So they are not, strictly speaking, natural law.

(3) Scotus has a kind of natural law theory here, but there is a different kind of natural law theory, which I want to reject. Actually there are many different kinds. The kind I want to reject presents what I will call a "deduction picture" of ethics. The deduction picture is that we can start from some view about what human nature is like and deduce from it how humans ought to live, or their moral obligations. This deduction picture has an important apparent advantage over divine command theory. The advantage is that divine command theory seems to make our moral obligations arbitrary, since God can command whatever God wants. The deduction picture, on the other hand, bases moral obligation on a deduction from human nature, and this seems to give it a more secure foundation. I mentioned this possibility in the first talk, and said I was going to come back to it. I am going to try to defend divine command theory against this objection of arbitrariness. Then I will go onto another objection, that divine command theory makes morality infantile, since it puts us in the position not of autonomous adults but obedient children. That second objection will come up in section seven of the paper. I think these are the most important objections to divine command theory, and if it can survive these two, it is well on the way to prevailing. The following four sections are about the first objection, the objection from arbitrariness.

The deduction picture takes its inspiration from Aristotle, and in order to explain it, I need to say something about Aristotle's view of form and matter. I wrote my dissertation, many years ago, on this topic, and I am not going to be able to do a full job here. But I want to say just enough to make the deduction picture plausible, before I reject it.

Aristotle thinks of forms as being in substances. He thinks of substance as the fundamental kind of being on which all other kinds of being depend. Rosa is a substance. When she gets a tan on her summer holiday, the existence of her tan depends on the existence of Rosa, and Rosa's existence does not depend on the existence of her tan. Aristotle's account stresses the role of substance as the cause which underlies and explains change, and he describes two fundamental kinds of causation, matter and form. Form is the internal organizing activity of a thing, which gives that thing unity through change. Matter is what form organizes. This account

does not, however, split a substance into two different things, in the way Plato splits up animals into body and soul, which can be separated at death. For Aristotle, a substance is not two different things joined together but an inseparable unity.

For Aristotle the form/matter analysis goes through a number of different levels. If we consider a living substance, say an armadillo, we can analyze it into its form and its matter. Its form is its characteristic armadillo-type activity, and Aristotle says its soul is its capacity for this activity. Its matter is the flesh and bones that are organized in this activity. We can then take, say, the bones, and see that each bone can be analyzed into bony stuff (the matter) and its organization for doing the kind of things a bone does (the form). And the bony stuff can in turn be analyzed into some more primitive stuff and its arrangement and activity. The process of development is the reverse of this process of analysis, and can best be understood as a direction toward form. The more primitive kinds of matter are changed from simple to compound, and from inorganic to organic, by the imposition of form at different stages, until we have something that is ready to be a mature armadillo. When this happens, the matter has been all used up, so to speak. There is nothing left for it to become in the direction of substance. There is still potential for change (the armadillo can roll up in the face of an enemy, such as a car). But the only remaining change in substance is regressive. The armadillo can decay, when it is killed, into flesh and bones, and the bones into bony stuff, and eventually into inorganic stuff, ready for the process to begin all over again.

Aristotle's point, as I understand it, is that only living things have the right kind of self-directed development to count as complex substances in this sense. A heap of sand is not a substance. If we take the various grains of sand that make up the heap, they can be in contact with each other. But they do not make up the kind of unity that persists through change in the way science is looking for. The same is true if we take the drops of water that make up a lake, or the clods of earth that make up a field. This is also true of human artifacts. A ball bearing and a baseball do not have the right kind of unity through change, because the principle of their persistence is not in themselves but in their makers who designed them for some purpose. Because the baseball has a different purpose from the ball bearing, it does not have to be so perfectly spherical. Its purpose and its shape are not given by an internal source of change and development but by the people who make it.

Aristotle's view of substance is essentially biological, and has been confirmed to a surprising degree by contemporary science. His view does not depend on his physics and chemistry, which are outdated. A current biologist, J. Z. Young, supports Aristotle's view as follows, "The essence of a living thing is that it consists of atoms of the ordinary chemical elements we have listed, caught up into the living system and made part of it for a while. The living activity takes them up and organizes them in its characteristic way. The life of a man

consists essentially in the activity he imposes upon that stuff.Õ

This account of substance does not reduce the importance of matter, in the style of PlatoÕs Timaeus which teaches that material things are defective copies of Forms in another world. On the other hand it does not reduce the importance of form, by teaching that everything is matter, and that we can in principle reduce psychology to biology, and biology to chemistry, and chemistry to physics. If we accept AristotleÕs account of substance, at least in outline, what implications does it have for our account of value? Life is, on the account I have outlined, a directional idea. To be alive is to be able to cause changes (both internal and external) in the direction that leads toward or fits a mature member of a biological species. If something is an armadillo, then it is already organizing changes in a good way, the way that fits the armadillo-type destination. This is why it makes sense to say, ÔBe who you areÕ. Nature sets a fitting direction for how we should live.

(4) The deduction picture is the view that we can start from some view about what human nature is like and deduce from it how humans ought to live. Despite what I just said, I think this picture is a mistake.

The first sentence of AristotleÕs Nicomachean Ethics is revealing here, since it gives a view in advance of the whole point of the book (as AristotleÕs first sentences often do). Last time I was at Baylor I gave a whole talk on this one sentence, and I am not going to do that here. But here is the sentence: ÔEvery craft and every system, and likewise every action and decision, seems to aim at some good; hence the good has been well described as that at which everything aims.Õ There is a problem here. Actions and decisions aim at an apparent good, in the sense that we pursue what seems good to us. I think our actions even aim at what could be actually good if we were in different circumstances. But not every action or decision aims at what is actually good for us and others in our actual circumstances. In fact, with a robust sense of human sinfulness, we will say that humans naturally aim toward the apparent but not the real good. Humans (unlike armadillos) have choice; the inclinations we are born with, on this robust view of sin, prompt us not toward our chief good but, though we do not know it, toward our own destruction. There is a momentum toward evil as well as a momentum toward good.

Earlier I described the basic conflict between putting the self first and putting first what is good in itself, and I claimed that we are born with the first ranking rather than the second. This wrongful ranking has momentum, in the sense that it gets progressively harder to break away from it. The self gets, as it were, more and more enclosed, and the habits of self-preference get more and more ingrained. Any signal from outside gets harder and harder to hear. We cannot therefore deduce a conclusion about how we ought to live from a premise about the inclinations we are born with, or those we naturally develop. One way to make this point is to draw a

distinction between created nature and fallen nature. Human substance as created nature sets a fitting direction for us, though not (I shall argue) a necessary one; but human substance as we experience it is divided against itself.

If we look carefully at what Aristotle thinks humans are headed toward, we get some confirmation of this rather dark picture. I do not mean that Aristotle thought it was dark, but that we can see that what he thought was virtue (and hence a component of the human good toward which we are headed) is actually sin (and hence a path to human destruction). In the Nicomachean Ethics Aristotle says that those who have power over others and use it well (for example the men who rule households and cities) have a more perfect kind of virtue than those who deliberate and act well only in what concerns themselves. In the Politics he says that only those who rule others need the full virtue of practical wisdom. The chief good of a human being, it thus turns out, requires having and exercising power over other human beings. This is an idea that can be found in many places in the Greek world, for example in Meno's summation in Plato's dialogue named after him, "Virtue must simply be the capacity to rule people, if you are looking for one quality to cover all the instances." That is fundamentally why Aristotle thinks slaves and women will never reach the chief human good. The same is true of manual workers, who are citizens but never have the resources for the kind of virtue Aristotle is talking about. Leisure, wealth, slaves, and social position are all necessary for what Aristotle sees as the chief component of the chief good, namely contemplation. He is not saying that ruling is the whole or even the centre of the chief good, but he is saying it is a necessary constituent.

Closely allied to power and riches is another requirement for excellence, as Aristotle sees it, namely prestige. Being well thought of is not, he says, the chief good. For it is possible to be well thought of by inferior people, and a person who aims merely at being well thought of will sink to their level. But Aristotle does think that prestige is necessary for the chief good. The magnanimous man thinks himself worthy of the greatest honor, and is worthy of it. The highborn, says Aristotle, and those who are powerful or wealthy, as long as they are not vicious, are esteemed worthy of honor; they are superior to their fellows, and superior excellence is always held in higher honor.

These goals of power and prestige are competitive. That is to say, if I am to have them, this requires that others do not (or at least have them less). But this "heading toward" power and prestige is inconsistent with the requirements of morality, as I understand them. They cannot be, because of their essential reference to the self, a proper object of the affection for justice. I do not mean to criticize Aristotle's claim that we are naturally headed toward those things, but I do mean to criticize his claim that because we are headed toward them, they are good for us to get. I think Aristotle is right about our natural inclinations. Though the particular forms they take are culturally specific, (for example Aristotle says the magnanimous man has

slow movements, a deep voice and calm speech), the underlying tendency is no doubt universal, or at least universal for males. (The qualification comes from Larry Arnhart, whose views I mentioned in the previous talk.) But it does not follow that it is good for us and others that we get these things we aim at, or that the prevailing cultural admiration for such things is right.

It is tempting to compare human beings to human artifacts, like a car for example. You might think you could tell by looking at a car's wipers what they are for. A good set of wipers is a set which performs this function well. If a set of wipers is leaving smears on the windshield, we know they are not working properly. Here we get an Ought from an is. Can we tell what humans are for just by looking at what they aim at, and get an Ought from an is in the same way? But to get a proper analogy we should suppose that the wipers are not merely leaving smears, but regularly reach in and smash the windscreen. Or that the engine produces large mechanical arms, which reach into the car and crush the passengers to death. If the car behaved this way, could we tell, by looking at how it behaved, that it was headed toward good? Human artifacts are not this way, because we have designed them not to be, and we do not (because we cannot) give them freedom to disobey our instructions. But our designer has allowed the artifacts (us) their freedom, and we have used this freedom to betray the intentions of our designer. Our is is not yet heading toward our Ought; there is a gap to be bridged. Our nature is now fitted for evil as well as good. We have to make a decision between these two destinations, and we cannot (alas!) deduce from a description of our existing direction that the direction is good.

(5) Why does it matter that we cannot deduce the moral law from human nature? It matters partly because, if the deduction picture were right, we would have a source for the authority of morality: we should be moral in order to fulfill our natural inclinations. But also it matters because it affects how we see our relation to God. If the deduction worked, it would follow that once God had created humans with the nature they have, even God would be logically constrained to command that they follow the moral law. That is what deduction is like; it applies everywhere, even to God. The deduction picture claims that moral law is deducible from human nature. If it is, then even God cannot rightly command beings with human nature to do anything contrary to it. The only way to avoid this conclusion is to say that God can violate the laws of logic. Some philosophers have said this; but it is an extreme position and leads to all sorts of counter-intuitive consequences, such as that God can be both God and not God.

It is better to think that God does not have to give us a particular set of commands, and that the divine sovereignty is not limited in this way. Instead we can think of God as choosing the moral law as a route toward our final destination, which is to be united with God. We can be grateful to God not only for creating us, but for giving us this excellent route (which God did not

have to do).

Here is an analogy. Rosa constructs a treasure hunt for her daughter Lucy. The whole house and garden is transformed into a setting for the game, with each clue leading to the next in a pre-planned sequence. If Lucy gets stuck, she can always ask her mother for help. But Rosa tries to plan it so that her daughter can work out what the clues mean on her own. The clues should make sense to anyone who knows the layout of the house and garden. The final clue leads to where the treasure is hidden. Because Rosa and Lucy love each other, the point of the game is not really to find the treasure (though that is how the game is set up). The game has a higher end, which is that the two of them enjoy each other. Rosa enjoys each stage of Lucy's discovery, and Lucy enjoys not just following the clues but her mother's enjoyment of the whole process as well. After the game it is this mutual delight that has been the greatest good. It is true that if Lucy does not find the treasure, both of them will be frustrated; but that is just the mechanics of the game, not what gives the game value. One time Lucy's cousin Chad came for a visit, and took part in the same treasure hunt. But he did not share in the love between mother and daughter. For him the treasure was the main point, and a disappointingly small treasure ruined the whole thing.

God's arrangements for our good might be like Rosa's arrangements for Lucy. There is no necessary way Rosa has to set up the game, though the final end consisting in some form of union is necessary. Once the clues are set up, then the route to the treasure is set, and it is our task to discover it. The treasure, the internal end of the hunt, is like one kind of happiness. There is a kind of life that is reached by truth-telling and parent-honouring and loving our enemies, and we discover that when we live this way we make progress and the world makes moral sense to us. If we will to live this way, we are repeating in our wills God's will for our willing. We are endorsing in our inside centre what we take to be the objective requirements made on us from the external centre which holds our lives and the whole universe together. But we should not deceive ourselves that we have discovered something necessitating God's will for our willing; that God had to will this way given the creation of beings with human nature. Finally, it is possible, like the visiting cousin, to be inordinately attached to the treasure that is the internal end of the game. As Duns Scotus says of the Fall of Lucifer, it is possible to want the good to belong exclusively or preferentially to oneself.

There is another reason for preferring this picture, where the moral law is God's choice. Sometimes God is recorded in scripture as commanding what looks exactly like a violation of one of the Ten Commandments. Duns Scotus calls these 'dispensations'. For example, God commanded Abraham to kill his son Isaac. This is not an easy story to understand. An account in the New Testament ([Hebrews 11: 19](#)) suggests that Abraham believed that Isaac would come back to life, and that both he and Isaac would be returning down the mountain, as he told his

servants (Genesis 22: 5). But if we accept the deduction picture, then God could not have commanded Abraham to do any such thing, since it would have been a violation of the sixth commandment and thus necessarily wrong. Other such cases are the commendation of the Hebrew midwives (violating the ninth), the command to the Israelites to take gold from the Egyptians under the threat of the plagues (violating the eighth), and the command to Hosea to marry Gomer, the prostitute (violating the seventh). Moreover God is reported in the Hebrew Scriptures to have commanded things (for example wiping out the Canaanites) that are surely violations of the commands in the New Testament about how to treat our enemies. If human nature is fixed, and the moral law follows logically from it, how could God have commanded such things?

To say that the moral law is God's choice is not to say that it is optional for us. Once God has prescribed it as the route, it is indeed binding on us, unless God tells us otherwise. The point is just that it is possible for God to do this. This is what happened with the Hebrew ceremonial and dietary law, according to Christian tradition; we are no longer required to keep the old laws about sacrifice and kosher food. The same thing could happen with the moral law. To go back to the eighth commandment, it is possible that in heaven there will be no private property. If so, this commandment will no longer apply. You can only steal what belongs to someone else. The eighth commandment will no longer be the route God prescribes. But we do not have to stop being human in order for this to happen. After Pentecost, the early church abandoned private property, and held all things common. Some American Indian tribes did not have the institution of private property. It may be that there was no private property before the Fall, but that does not mean that Adam and Eve were not human in the Garden of Eden. There will probably not be private property in heaven. God can give humans different commands, or prescribe a different route, for different stages of human life. But on the deduction picture, where the moral law is deduced from human nature, God could not do this.

(6) Nonetheless, although the moral law is not deducible from human nature, it fits the nature we are born with exceedingly well. We can tell from experience that we flourish when we keep the law, and we deteriorate when we do not. God's commands are what Scotus calls "appropriate" to our nature. Take the ninth of the ten commandments, which forbids bearing false witness. Because we are social and embodied animals, we communicate with each other by means of things like statements or pictures. And in order for this communication to work, we assume that we are saying to each other what we believe to be true. Imagine a mad professor who randomly said half the time things he believed true and half the time things he believed false. You would not learn anything from him, because you would never know what to put in your notes; every sentence could equally be something you should accept and something you

should reject. Lies are parasitic on the basic framework of truth-telling in two senses. First, they do not survive without this framework, just as a parasitic worm does not survive without its host. But second, they destroy the framework, again like the tapeworm killing its victim. As lies increase, communication becomes more difficult. Eventually, if people can no longer trust each other to say what they believe true rather than what they believe false, communication will stop. The ninth commandment therefore fits our nature as social beings extremely well, and lying damages it.

This point can be generalized to the other commandments God gives us, for example in the second table of the ten commandments and in the Sermon on the Mount. One way to see this is to think about the truth of what Aristotle says about monsters. A monster is an aberration from a species form, for example a two-headed pig. When we recognize something as a monster, Aristotle says, we show that we have a notion of how the species is supposed to be. The same is true with our recognition of moral failure. In recognizing something as a departure from how we are supposed to be, we show that we have a notion of something like an original design-plan. A person who uses a beautifully prepared meal merely to fill his stomach is like a person who uses a sharpened chisel to remove screws. In both cases something fine is wasted and abused. In the same way, we have the ability to communicate so that we can share with each other our thoughts and intentions, and people who are good at it share their inner lives to an astonishing degree, making possible a rich and nuanced community of purpose. If we use this ability merely to deceive, we are wasting it. The same is true if we use sex merely for physical pleasure, or use our parents merely as a source of funds or free lodging. The same is true if we use a proper hatred of evil as an excuse for hating our enemies. In general we can see that failing to live by the commandments of God gets in the way of the kind of life that fits the best we can be, and so fulfills us.

The commands God has given us fit our nature, but cannot be deduced from it. Even though it is hard for us to imagine a good human life that is not characterized by obedience to these particular laws, that is a defect in our imagination, not a requirement by which God is constrained. But it is in fact possible to imagine humans without private property, where there are enough resources for all of us to flourish without it. We can imagine human life without marriage, as we are told human life will be in heaven. And we can imagine that our thinking might be immediately transparent to each other, so that there would be no need to construct external forms like sentences or pictures to communicate. The command to tell the truth would lose its application since we would know straight away what others were thinking. We can certainly think of human life without enemies we have to love. The point is that we can form pictures of loving our neighbor in very different circumstances from those we now occupy, and so we cannot be sure that the requirements of the particular commands God has given us are

strictly inevitable for any fully excellent form of human life. We should be modest in our claims about what God has to tell us to do, even given our present circumstances. Maybe there are constraints on what God could tell us to do in these circumstances, but we should be hesitant about saying we know what those constraints are.

The nature we are born with, which is Aristotle's kind of form, does not yet tell us which capacities and inclinations to fulfil to lead a good human life. Substance does set a fitting direction for how we should live, but it is substance as created, not the substance we encounter in our own nature as we live in human society. My claim is that we do not have access without God's revelation to a map of the ways our created nature has survived, and the ways it has not. Imagine that we did not have the life of Christ as an example. Would we know simply from analyzing human nature that we should love our enemies, and forgive seventy times seven times, and take on the role of becoming each other's servants? I think on the contrary we would reach roughly Aristotle's conclusions from studying our natural inclinations to power and prestige. Aristotle lived almost two and a half millennia ago, and the society he knew was in many ways different from ours. But his account of the kind of life we naturally look for still fits "common sense" in many ways better than the life Christ patterned for us, which is a radical reversal of some of the values we still find attractive. Martin Luther King said we should seek to be people who are, by the world's standard, "maladjusted". We should seek to serve and not be served. We should seek to return injury with blessing. To someone like Aristotle, looking rationally at our natural inclinations, none of this makes sense. The widow who gives her last two small coins in the temple is not, for Aristotle, generous but stupid; she obviously cannot afford it. The Greek word for humility in the New Testament is used by Aristotle for the wretchedness that cannot even aspire to virtue.

When we reflect on all this, we can see that adjustment or fulfillment can be good or bad, depending on what we are adjusting to or what part of us we are fulfilling. We need something other than the human nature we are born with to tell us what fulfillment to seek, and what not to seek. We need something that transcends our nature to play this role, and in the Christian tradition this is God's selection of the route toward our final end and God's revealing this in the life of Christ. In this picture, reaching that end will indeed fulfil us. When we get there, we will feel completely ourselves, both in our common nature as humans and in our individual essence. But if I ask myself now, "What will make me feel most completely myself?", without appealing to revelation, I am going to get a divided answer. In this picture it is not mere fulfillment that gives the moral route its authority, but God's selection and revelation of what kind of fulfillment is best for us.

We can see, now, why the divine command theory fits better with the right than the good. We are attracted to a huge variety of good things, and our responsiveness to these good things is

not itself a sufficient source of moral authority. We need something like a screening procedure, to test whether the particular good we are attracted to fits the good of the whole. God gives us commands for this purpose. They can be commands of a general kind, for all human beings, or they can be commands to a particular person in a particular circumstance. But in both cases they give us a framework for endorsement, for deciding which of our initial responses to carry forward into action. There are hard questions here about how we know what God is commanding or calling us to; but this paper cannot do everything, and is probably trying to do too much already.

In the last four sections of this paper I have been replying to one objection to divine command theory, namely that it makes morality arbitrary. The objection is that if God's command is what makes something right, than just anything could be right. The reply is that we should obey the moral law both because it is the route that God has chosen and because it is a route to our final destination.

(7) I want to end with a reply to a second objection, namely that divine command theory makes our morality infantile. It deprives us of our autonomy as moral agents. 'Autonomy' is a word which combines two Greek words, autos which means 'self' and nomos which means 'law'. The basic idea, as Immanuel Kant expressed it, is that we ourselves make moral law. I am going to distinguish what I think is a helpful way of understanding this, which is Kant's own way, from an unhelpful way, which has been typical of many of Kant's successors. These successors have often (mistakenly, I think) read their view back into Kant. But I will not try to defend this claim here.

The helpful way to think of autonomy is to think of it as appropriation, as making the moral law our own. This implies that we do not invent or create the moral law, but we make it ours by bringing our wills in line with it. Kant says that we should recognize our duties as God's commands, and that we should believe that God exists and gives us these commands, even though God is beyond the limits of human understanding. The unhelpful way puts the challenge to believers in God like this: 'If we are going to be autonomous, to make moral law ourselves, we have to be independent of any external authority, whether that is external human authority or the external authority of God. Our freedom is to create ourselves, no longer under the tutelage of a deity from on high. We are no longer children, but adults. Religion, as a source of moral authority, may have been necessary before universal education and the birth of modern science. But we are now in a position to emancipate ourselves from superstitious fears and traditions, and find our own path toward a better life for all humankind.'

This second view of autonomy belongs together with a certain view of our intellectual history. J. B. Schneewind puts it this way, 'As God's supervision and activity lessen, man's

responsibility increases. He constructs a picture of something he calls "the Divine Corporation", which is rather like the corporation in which the cartoon character Dilbert finds himself employed. In this corporation ordinary employees understand very little about each other's jobs or the purposes of the company as a whole. They are paid for carrying out their duties strictly, "looking neither to left nor to right". If they foul up their little tasks, someone else will clear up the mess, and they do not feel responsible for the remedy themselves. This, says Schneewind, is the traditional Christian picture of the kingdom of God, with God as the head of the firm. Progress toward autonomy, he thinks, occurs in the history of ethics as these conditions weaken. We come to see that we are responsible for promoting human happiness, and we do this by cooperating with each other, understanding each other's contributions, and repairing our omissions when we can.

Schneewind then traces this progress in the history of European moral philosophy from the Middle Ages up to Immanuel Kant in the eighteenth century. I think he misreads Kant; but I do not want to deny that moral philosophers after Kant have taken some of the steps Schneewind describes. The question whether this was progress, however, still needs to be settled. This is a normative question and not merely a descriptive one. In other words the changes were only progress if they were changes for the better. Changes in philosophical fashion can be a mixture of progress and regress. That, at least, is what I am going to suggest has happened with our changing understanding of human freedom.

On the unhelpful view of autonomy, morally successful human lives will be ones which reach their own human goals, defined in their own human terms, and using their own human resources. We will have no need to appeal to divine assistance to help us reach a goal too high for us by our own resources. The doctrines I mentioned in the previous talk will be entirely unnecessary. But whether this view is progress or not depends on whether there is or isn't a God who makes the kind of call I have been talking about, and offers us the resources to follow it. If there is such a God, such a call and such assistance, and a person senses this but refuses to acknowledge it, then this person, and not the believer in God, is being childish.

Here is an analogy. Rosa's daughter Lucy is learning the piano. Her teacher has written marks above the notes on Lucy's new piece to indicate which fingers she should use to make the piece more expressive and easier to play; however, Lucy refuses to learn the fingering because she does not see the point. She insists on setting her own goals, defining them in her own terms, and using her own resources. In a word, she insists on autonomy. The result is that she never plays the piece as well as she could. She always stumbles over certain passages; and the more she practices them, the more the poor way of playing them gets programmed into her fingers so that it gets harder and harder to change it. Consequently neither Lucy nor anyone else gets the pleasure they could from her playing the piece, and in the end she gives it up. From her

teacher's point of view, this is not autonomy, but a sad waste of her abilities.

Our situation with God is different, because unlike the piano student with her teacher we do not literally see God. This is not because God is defective, but because God is spirit. The twentieth-century philosopher Bertrand Russell, who did not believe in God, imagined himself after his death facing the final judgement, and complaining to God that God had not given him enough evidence. But if the non-believer has a sense of this kind of call, higher than he can reach by his own devices, and if he has a sense of the possibility of this kind of assistance, the key will be what he does with that sense of possibility. Kierkegaard calls this "the dizziness of freedom". There is evidence from Russell's life that he did feel something like this periodically, and rejected it as an illusion. From the believer's point of view, the decisive evidence that assistance is available comes only when a person starts to follow the call. Unfortunately we do not get this kind of security in advance. We need, therefore, what I call "moral faith", the faith that despite the contrary evidence we can be transformed and that we can be happy without compromising the attempt to be morally good. We need not more evidence, but more courage - a virtue primarily of the will rather than the intellect.

Here is a final example. Rosa receives an invitation to apply for a job, and hears in this the call to end her present employment, leave her friends, and move to a strange place in a strange culture. But she has moral faith, and so this call does not seem arbitrary to her, even though she does not understand how it will lead to blessing for her family and her work. She has previously experienced blessing following this kind of obedience, when she understood afterward but not beforehand why God was telling her to do something. She also knows that she might be wrong about this call; it might be nothing more than itchy feet. She knows she needs to check it as best she can, using not only her own moral screening but also the advice of people she trusts, the Scriptures, and the interpretation of the Scriptures in her tradition. If she does take the call to move, she is being obedient but she is also being autonomous on the first view of autonomy which I distinguished. She is repeating in her own will what she believes to be God's will for her willing. She is autonomous because she is appropriating the call. Rosa is endorsing the call in her own will.

(8) Here is a very brief summary of the course that this paper has taken. I have been defending a divine command theory of the right. The version I have been defending is that of Duns Scotus. In this version we distinguish between the two tables of the law, or the two great commandments Jesus gives us. The first, we say, is necessary. God has to order us towards loving God. The second is contingent, and is the route God has chosen for us to reach our final destination, which is union with God. I have then replied to two objections to this view. First, there is the objection that divine command theory makes morality arbitrary. The reply is that the

route is not arbitrary because it does lead to our destination. The second objection is that divine command theory makes morality infantile. The reply is that if there is a God who knows what is good for all of creation, then it is not infantile to follow the commands of such a being, but excellent good sense.