

“Who Are You to Judge Others?”

In Defense of Making Moral Judgments

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When Dan Quayle said that Murphy Brown’s giving birth to an illegitimate child wasn’t a good role model for America’s youth, he was ridiculed, called “judgmental,” and labeled arrogant. Who was he to pontificate about “family values”? Quayle wasn’t hit with the criticism rightly leveled against some—that they are hypocrites. He was accused of doing what no one has the right to do: telling others how to live.

It’s been said that the most frequently quoted Bible verse is no longer John 3:16 but Matthew 7:1: “Do not judge, or you too will be judged.” We cannot glibly quote this, though, without understanding what Jesus meant. When Jesus condemned judging, he wasn’t at all implying we should never make judgments about anyone. After all, a few verses later, Jesus himself calls certain people “pigs” and “dogs” (Matt. 7:6) and “wolves in sheep’s clothing” (7:15)! Any act of church discipline (1 Cor. 5:5) and rebuking false prophets (1 John 4:1) requires judgment. What Jesus condemns is a critical and judgmental spirit, an unholy sense of moral superiority. Jesus commanded us to examine ourselves first for the problems we so easily see in others. Only then can we help remove the speck in another’s eye—which, incidentally, assumes that a problem exists and must be confronted.¹ But let’s take a closer look at this charge that Christians are judgmental when we speak out on moral issues.

Are We Judgmental?

What is interesting in these charges of arrogance and judgmentalism is this: Besides failing to define what is meant by “judgmentalism,” the accusers often act just as “arrogantly” and “judgmentally” as the “judgmental” ones. If the Christian (or any exclusivist) is denounced for judgmentalism, he can respond that his accuser is judging him for being judgmental!

To be consistent, judgmentalism cannot mean “being in disagreement with someone” or “considering someone to be wrong.” It is undeniable that the relativist disagrees with the absolutist, which makes the relativist just as “judgmental” as the absolutist. If judgmentalism is to be understood correctly (in keeping with the context of Matthew 7:1), it should be defined as an inappropriate sense of moral superiority over another

because of that person's moral failures.² Judgmentalism, then, is that ugly refusal to acknowledge that "there but for the grace of God go I."

Furthermore, it is an act of theological blindness to cite the "judge not" passage while utterly ignoring Jesus' charge to make proper judgments: "Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment" (John 7:24).

The accusation is unwarranted that those who hold to absolute truth are absolutely arrogant. Think of Mother Teresa's speech at a Washington prayer breakfast in the winter of 1994, when she boldly spoke against abortion before the pro-abortion president and vice-president of the United States and their spouses. Although she spoke respectfully, she made powerful statements in defense of unborn human lives: "And if we accept that a mother can kill even her own child, how can we tell other people not to kill one another?" and "Any country that accepts abortion is not teaching its people to love, but to use any violence to get what they want."³ One could hardly accuse this nun of arrogance.

There simply is no automatic contradiction between holding firmly to one's convictions and treating with dignity and respect those who disagree. Living harmoniously with people who hold radically different views is a hallmark of maturity.⁴ Our society would benefit from the courageous words of qualified people who display both firmness of conviction and civility or respect,⁵ which is what Ephesians 4:15 refers to—"speaking the truth in love." Martin Marty, the noted observer of religion in America, states that the problem of modernity is that the people "who are good at being civil often lack the strong convictions and the people who have strong convictions often lack civility."⁶

Christians often seem to believe that firmness of conviction entitles them to belligerence, hostility, and closed-mindedness—not to mention a lack of intellectual responsibility. To the contrary, Paul exhorts Christians, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" (Rom. 12:18). They should live "peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness" (1 Tim. 2:2). On the other hand, behind the mask of an apparently sensitive and compassionate "open-mindedness," there often exists a moral gutlessness. Civility, then, is the remedy for arrogance, and conviction the corrective for spinelessness. But to achieve this uncommon balance, someone has suggested our interactions with others should concentrate on our own sinfulness and on the other's humanness—rather than the other way around.⁷ Moreover, the relativist, for all his bluster about his own "tolerance" and the exclusivist's arrogance, will still believe things that others don't believe or agree with—namely, he will not accept the views of the exclusivist. If the relativist is to remain consistent, he can't legitimately criticize another's point of view. Furthermore, the relativist is guilty of the morally superior attitude that signals judgmentalism. He really thinks that he possesses a virtue that others don't.⁸

The Hindu philosopher Swami Vivekananda came to Chicago in 1893 to address the World's Parliament of Religions. He told the delegates, "We [Hindus] accept all religions to be true," and "[it] is sin to call a man [a sinner]."9

The problem here is that the swami himself calls someone a sinner—because that person has called another a sinner. If the exclusivist is a sinner for calling all people sinners, then the Hindu is just as much a sinner for calling the exclusivist a sinner. Isn't the relativist being "arrogant" for disagreeing with the exclusivist?

Are We Intolerant?

Intolerance has been commonly associated with religion—and not without basis. For example, the passage "compel them to come in [compelle intrare]" in Luke 14:23 (KJV) was used by religious authorities to justify a "conquest theology" during and after the Middle Ages.10

The Crusades, the Inquisition, and other abuses of religion are certainly a blot on Christendom's history. However, what our society usually overlooks is both that a religious culture can foster genuine tolerance and that secularism—a "non-religious"11 outlook on life—may pose a far greater threat to tolerance.

Closely tied to the notion of "judgment" is "tolerance." Although many accuse absolutists of intolerance, these accusers most likely have an unclear and distorted notion of what tolerance really is. They often are unaware that the concept of tolerance implies a close relationship to truth. Contrary to popular definitions, true tolerance means "putting up with error"—not "being accepting of all views." We don't tolerate what we enjoy or approve of—like chocolate or Bach's music. By definition, what we tolerate is what we disapprove of or what we believe to be false and erroneous.12 Furthermore, tolerance presupposes an adequate grasp of what another person believes—as well as a knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of such belief. Actually, if disagreement didn't exist, then tolerance would be unnecessary. It is because real differences exist between people that tolerance becomes necessary and virtuous.

The contemporary definition of tolerance as acceptance is simply wrong-headed. It lands a person in massive inconsistencies. Take the matter of "comparative religions." The leveling approach of comparative religions ("when we talk with people from other religious groups, we should consider all religions equal") arbitrarily asserts without qualification the equal validity or relative nature of all religions. Dialogue, however, shouldn't begin by assuming the equality of all religions or truth claims (the erroneous definition of tolerance), but with regard for the equality of persons. Dialogue implies respect, not agreement.

A Christian can interact with and respect a Buddhist while still believing on rational grounds that he is mistaken. In fact, the belief that both views cannot be right is an impetus to engage in meaningful dialogue. Dialogue thus becomes an opportunity for

both sides to reexamine their presuppositions and clarify their positions.¹³ True tolerance grants people the right to dissent.

It is very important that a Christian criticized for intolerance asks his accuser what he means by “intolerance.” The accuser will probably say something like “not being accepting of another’s beliefs.” To this the Christian can gently respond, “But you are not being accepting of my position. You think I am wrong.” The relativist simply cannot be accepting of all positions as true without falling into severe contradictions.

The reality of God actually makes tolerance intelligible, because God is the source of truth and because God has made human beings in his likeness. Naturalistic secularism has no such foundation for tolerance. If tolerance is a value, it isn’t obvious from nature; so if there is no God and we are just hulks of protoplasmic gunk, how could tolerance be an objective value at all? Instead, if objective truth exists, as religion maintains, then we must seek and seriously discuss it despite our differing worldviews. But if objective truth doesn’t exist, as secularism generally maintains, then relativism obliterates genuine differences of perspective.

Right for You, But Not for Me?

Philosopher of science Michael Ruse claims that morality is just like hands, feet, and teeth—the “ephemeral product of the evolutionary process.”¹⁴ Morality, according to Ruse, isn’t objective: “Morality is just an aid to survival and reproduction, and has no being beyond this.”¹⁵ Ruse brings up the once-acceptable Indian practice of suttee—widows being burned alive on the funeral pyre of their deceased husbands. From our perspective, this is wrong: “Obviously, such a practice is totally alien to Western customs and morality. In fact, we think that widow sacrifice is totally immoral.”¹⁶ Ruse’s evolutionary naturalism leads to the belief that one culture’s virtue is another culture’s vice. But he finds no objective grounds to condemn a “vice” like widow-burning.

Is morality relative, as Ruse seems to think? Is it nothing more than the by-product of evolutionary and social development? Is one culture’s virtue really another culture’s vice? While morality is considered relative by many in our culture, this view cannot be sustained—not only because it is illogical but also because it is simply unlivable.

When someone told the great British essayist Dr. Samuel Johnson that one of his dinner guests believed that morality was a sham, Dr. Johnson replied, “Why, sir, if he really believes there is no distinction between virtue and vice, let us count our spoons before he leaves.” In other words, how can the moral relativist really be trusted? Moral relativism leads to an inevitable breakdown of relationships and of society. It is existentially (or practically) unworkable. We simply can’t live without a belief—explicit or assumed—that moral standards exist. One Christian philosophy professor, for example, had an outspoken moral relativist in his ethics class. All semester the student contested the professor’s absolutist views about ethics. When the time came for the course final, the student, who had prepared well, took the exam and assumed that he had passed without a

problem. He was shocked and infuriated to find an F instead of an A at the top of his paper—and without any explanation. The relativist stormed into the professor’s office demanding an explanation at this unfairness. The professor asked, “Did you say ‘unfairness’? So you do believe in moral absolutes after all!” With that, the professor took the exam out of the student’s hand, crossed out the F and put an A at the top of it. The student silently walked out of the office, realizing his inconsistency.¹⁷

The person who is, say, the victim of torture, slave labor, child abuse, rape, or apartheid intuitively knows that justice is being violated. Are we really willing to concede that there is ultimately no significant moral difference between Hitler and Mother Teresa? Are we really willing to believe that genocide, rape, and murder are just “cultural” behaviors? The person who embraces moral relativism needs to be pressed: What if he were arrested and tortured for no reason? Why should he protest if you took a sledgehammer to his BMW? If he were a Jew in Nazi Germany, where the culture was horrifyingly anti-Semitic, why should his disagreement with the standards of the surrounding culture carry any weight at all? Why should his wishes be respected? After all, for someone who says, “Your values are true for you, but not for me,” there can be no objectively morally degrading actions. Moral relativism is utterly unlivable.¹⁸

Why Should I Be Moral?

Atheists can be morally upright. People do construct fine ethical systems without God. Even so, we can point out, questions linger: “Why ought I to be moral at all?” “Why should I do the right thing if it doesn’t pay off?” “Why do human beings have dignity and value?” At this point, we can argue that the God of theism offers solid grounding for moral obligation, accounting for a number of facts that naturalism can’t explain.

We start by saying: There is no good reason to deny the general reliability of our most basic moral instincts.¹⁹ Humans intuitively know that certain objective moral values exist. For example, we know that kindness is a virtue and not a vice, that torturing babies is immoral, that child abuse is wrong, that a person like Hitler or Stalin is morally repugnant. We know these things virtually without reflection, without thinking them through.²⁰ While reason confirms the basic rightness of these intuitions, we don’t seem to know this by means of reason.²¹ And we regularly rely on these intuitions to make practical, everyday moral judgments.²² To deny such beliefs flies in the face of basic human knowledge and instincts.

If someone doubts these moral basics—someone, for example, who sees no ultimate distinction between a Hitler and a Mother Teresa—we can’t really carry on a decent conversation about morality. Instead of trying to prove the evilness of evildoers, we should call into question that person’s mental health. Denying the objectivity of our moral intuitions is denying a deep part of our humanity. We can press the moral skeptic by making our point another way. We could say, “Most people would find themselves in confident disagreement with your attitude. Now, why is this? How would you explain it?”²³

Second, God's character explains the objective moral values that logically precede our having a moral sense. Although the non-theist may believe that objective moral values exist without reference to God, there is an ultimate question: What underlies those objective moral values?

Let's hear the opposing point made by atheist Kai Nielsen. He admits that objective moral obligation exists. Though he maintains that naturalism can't account for this, he won't concede that theism offers a better solution to the problem. He presents the following interesting argument.²⁴ Suppose a parent who believes in God "abandons" or "loses" his faith in God. Is that parent going to love his child less—or not at all—because his supposed "basis or objective morality" is apparently lost? Of course not, Nielsen asserts. A parent would still maintain that it is objectively right to love his child even if God doesn't exist.

Nielsen offers other evidence to deny that God is necessary to explain the existence of objective morality. He says that when Christians, for example, make moral judgments about God's acts and commands or about the super ethic of Jesus Christ's Sermon on the Mount, that implies a standard of goodness independent of whether God exists. To make moral assessments about God's actions or Jesus' teachings presupposes the existence of an objective morality.

This apparently persuasive argument, however, is flawed. It rests on a confusion of being and knowing. The normal sane person certainly knows—or at least acts as though he knows—that objective morality exists. But here is the crucial question: How did we get to be that way—moral beings who recognize right and wrong? We have to be moral beings before we can know what is moral. An atheist might suggest that if all humans—both those who believe in God and those who don't—have correct, objective moral sensibilities, that fact implies moral intuition isn't somehow rooted in God.

Nielsen, as an atheist and materialist, seems hard-pressed to show how randomness and chance can make sense out of moral obligation or human dignity. Getting back to the parent-child relationship, we have to ask how we could show love and sacrifice when it conflicts with our natural self-interest. Why resist selfish interests for the sake of the children? As the philosopher George Mavrodes has argued, a solely materialistic universe might produce in us feelings and beliefs of obligation—like the protection of our children or survival of our species or subculture—but that's a different matter from actually having such obligations we ought to carry out. It truly seems odd that objective moral obligation could arise in such a world.²⁵

In the third place, the connection between objective moral values and God has to do with God's personhood and ours. Christians see an unbreakable connection between objective morality and God. If objective moral values exist, as even atheists like Kai Nielsen believe, it seems plausible to argue that a personal, transcendent, perfect God is the source of and ground for morality. We resemble God—created as valuable persons by a

personal Being, divinely endowed with conscience, with a capacity for morally significant relationships, and with certain objectively correct moral intuitions. We are moral beings because we have been created in the image of a moral God. Even those who don't believe in God possess an ingrained moral sense that corresponds in some measure to God's moral sense.

This explains how an atheist can know the content of morality without acknowledging God's existence. For instance, we read in Amos 1 and 2 that God threatens judgment upon the neighbors of Judah and Israel. Why? Because they have flagrantly violated an objective moral law that they knew and should have obeyed. Syria treated its enemies barbarously (1:3); Philistia, with utter inhumanity, sold whole communities into slavery (1:6); Tyre broke a pact and treated Edom treacherously (1:9). The citizens of such nations should have known better.

In Romans 2:14-15, we read,

Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law [of Moses], do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.

Scripture assumes that God has written this binding law on the hearts of people. Although the awareness of these objective standards is clouded by the Fall, a seared conscience, and social decline, this doesn't mean people can't form moral beliefs or act virtuously through God's common grace to all.²⁶

Another indication that God is the basis for morality is the problem of evil. One of the most common objections to a theist's belief in God is that evil exists—and that it exists in such vast measure. Why does God allow Bangladesh to get hit again and again with disastrous tropical storms? Why does he let child molesters carry on their vile activities? Why would he permit large-scale inhumanities to take place in an Auschwitz—or through the brutality of Soviet communism?²⁷ Although those who raise this objection seldom realize it, the existence of evil and our grasp of the awfulness of evil cries out for an explanation. Even in a relativistic world, people are still struck with horror at human atrocities like genocide or gang rape. They get the distinct impression that evil really exists. Although the problems raised by evil are frequently marshaled against belief in God, an often-overlooked presupposition in the discussion of evil is God's very existence.

What is evil? It isn't simply chaos or pain or feeling bad. Real, objective evil is the lack or absence of goodness. That is, the presence of evil presupposes the existence of an objective moral standard that is being violated. If real evil exists, then an objective standard of goodness by which something is deemed evil must also exist. It is hard to see, given a naturalistic view of things, where this standard of goodness could come from if we are simply cosmic accidents produced by purely physical forces.

Theism answers questions that are problems for the naturalist: Why should we deem human beings to be intrinsically valuable? Why should I sacrifice my brief life for another human being? Why should we take the moral point of view when it seriously conflicts with our own self-interest or does not satisfy us? Appealing to a social contract or pragmatic basis for acting morally doesn't work. It tells us only that doing the right thing is, practically speaking, a good idea, but this hardly shows why we're dutifully obligated to be moral.²⁸ Rather, we act morally for moral reasons, because it is morally right to do so—just as we should believe the true thing because it is true. No further reason is needed. Non-theists can agree about such basic moral truths, but what are the grounds for these truths and human dignity?

Theism provides adequate answers to the questions just raised. We ought to be moral because we have been made as moral beings in the likeness of God, to whom we are also personally responsible as his creatures. Furthermore, knowing this God personally is the highest end of humans. When we are in right relationship with God, all other goods—which have also been created by God—find their proper place.²⁹

When we carry out our moral duties we approximate the character of the Creator, the ultimate Good, and function according to God's design for us. We carry out the purposes for which we were made. We find self-sacrifice praiseworthy because it fits these purposes and assumes the intrinsic dignity of others. We experience guilt not simply because we have violated laws of society or of the universe but because we have violated the ultimate Source of moral values—a personal God. And just as human relationships serve as a motivation and basis for loyalty and obligation, so our having been created by God—and our relationship with him—serves as the source of ultimate obligation and the one real basis for a moral understanding of human relationships.³⁰

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NOTES

1 For a popular exposition of this passage, see D.A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 97ff.

2 See Caroline J. Simon, "Judgmentalism," *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (July 1989): 275-287.

3 Mother Teresa, "We must Give Until It Hurts," *World* (12 February, 1994): 22,24. See also her amicus brief concerning abortion ("Recalling America") in *First Things* (May 1994): 9-10.

4 Harold Netland, "Professor Hick on Religious Pluralism," *Religious Studies* 22 (1986): 76.

5 Richard Mouw, *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivilized World* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, 1992).

6 *Ibid.*, cited on 12.

7 *Ibid.*, 55.

8 See Alvin Plantinga, "Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism." Paper given at the American Philosophical Association meeting in Portland, Oregon, 26 March 1992. Later published in Thomas D. Senior, ed. *The Rationality of Belief & the Plurality of Faith* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1995). I refer to the former.

9 Taken from Swami Vivekananda booklet *Chicago Addresses* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1980).

10 Klaas Runia, "The Gospel and Religious Pluralism," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 14 (October 1990): 344.

11 Although I am aware of the slippery concept of "religion," I am here assuming that religion primarily refers to theistic belief systems—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

12 Maurice Cranston, "Toleration," in Paul Edwards, ed., *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 8 (New York: Macmillan/Free Press, 1967), 143. Cranston maintains that toleration "implies the existence of something believed to be disagreeable"; it "has an element of condemnation built into its meaning."

13 Alister McGrath, "The Christian Church's Response to Pluralism," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35 (December 1992): 490.

14 Michael Ruse, *The Darwinian Paradigm* (London: Routledge, 1989), 268.

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*, 232.

17 I came across a similar story in Mark Ashton's booklet, *Absolute Truth?* (Downer's Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, 1996), 9-10. In this account, Robert Wengert, a philosophy professor at the University of Illinois, would ask his ethics class if his students thought truth was relative. The majority of students typically raise their hands. Then he tells them that short students get A's while tall students fail. When his students protest that his grading system is not fair and that he ought not or should not grade in that fashion, Wengert points out to his class that when they use words like ought or should, they

betray a belief in an objective moral standard; they really don't believe that morality is relative.

18 As we saw above, moral relativists reveal their inconsistency when they ask, "Who are you to judge?" This question itself is a judgment about the person who is being judged. When we are accused of allegedly "playing God" for making a moral judgment about a person's wrong actions, our accusers are themselves "playing God" by making a moral judgment about us---which is either self-defeating or special pleading. Anyone who accuses another of making moral judgments is playing the part of an absolutist. For further discussion on judgmentalism, see Thomas L. Carson, "Who Are We to Judge?" *Teaching Philosophy* 11 (March 1988): 3-14. The glibly used paraphrase of Jesus' words "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone" (John 8:7), is often used to support the idea that morally imperfect people are not allowed to point out sin in others. Of course, Jesus had no intention of prohibiting all moral judgments, but merely hypocritical judgment. The Jews trying to frame Jesus were hardly interested in justice. Jesus refers to Deuteronomy 13:9 and 17:7, where those who are the first to throw stones must be witnesses of the crime and not participants in that crime itself (in this case, adultery)---even if they are not morally perfect (see D.A. Carson discussion, *The Gospel According to John* [Leicester, England/Grand Rapids: InterVarsity/Eerdmans, 1991], 333-337).

19 See William Sorley, *Moral Values and the Idea of God* (Cambridge University Press, 1918).

20 See Eleonore Stump, "The Mirror of Evil," in Thomas V. Morris, ed., *God and the Philosophers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 238. Some of the above thoughts on moral intuitions are taken from Stump's essay.

21 Arguing for the objectivity and correctness of our basic moral intuitions is not committing the naturalistic (or the is/ought) fallacy (which pertains to deriving obligation from natural states of affairs such as biological impulses or social contracts). Rather, these intuitions are evidence that objective, transcendentally given moral duties exist.

22 As James Q. Wilson writes in *The Moral Sense*, "When we think about it, we realize that the aversion we feel to baby torturing for fun not only springs from deeply held sentiments whose truth we find self-evident, it also has important practical value" (New York: Free Press, 1993), 240. Wilson discusses these sentiments in detail.

23 A surprising number of people deny the existence of any objective evil in the world. For example, Oxford zoologist Richard Dawkins asserts, "In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice." For a metaphysical naturalist like Dawkins, there can be "no evil and no good" in this universe---nothing but "blind, pitiless indifference." *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 133. Although we can't respond to the

views of naturalism here, it can probably be safely said that most people (even self-pronounced moral relativists) do believe that evil exists. For a fine theological defense of the problem of evil, see D.A. Carson, *How Long O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991). For a more philosophical defense of the problem of evil, see William Lane Craig's popular-level discussion on "Suffering and Evil" and "Hell" in *No Easy Answers* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), 73-116. For a more advanced-level exploration of the topic, see Peter Van Inwagen, "The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy," *Philosophical Topics* 16/2 (1988): 161-87.

24 Kai Nielsen in a debate with William Craig, 6 February 1991, at the University of Western Ontario.

25 George Mavrodes, "Religion and the Queerness of Morality," in Robert Audi and William Wainwright, eds., *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 219.

26 It would be an error, however, to state—as Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) did—that natural law is independent of God, that it would be valid and binding even if God did not exist. Rather, if God didn't exist, there would simply be no standard of goodness by which actions should be judged. The origin of morality, as we have already argued, is supernatural. Carl Henry, "Natural Law in a Nihilistic Culture," *First Things* 49 (January 1995): 54-60.

27 A well-documented example of the evils of Soviet collectivization is Roberts Conquest's *Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

28 Nicholas Rescher, *Moral Absolutes: An Essay on the Nature and Rationale of Morality*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 84-89.

29 Philip E. Devine, *Relativism, Nihilism, and God* (Notre Dame: University Press, 1989), 78.

30 Incidentally (though not unimportantly), we are not obligated to act morally simply because God commands certain things and not others (what is called the divine-command theory of ethics)--a view that notables like Martin Luther and René Descartes maintained (Robert M. Adams would be the noted contemporary proponent of this view). If this were the case, God could have commanded the exact opposite of what he does, and it would still be right because he commanded it. (In an episode of *M.A.S.H.*, Father Mulcahy was horrified to find that the new Bibles given to the *M.A.S.H.* unit contained a significant typographical error in Exodus 20:14: "Thou shalt commit adultery." But under the divine command theory, this command could have been permissible.) Such a view, however, leaves us with no way of distinguishing between God and Satan. The source of goodness, rather, springs from the very character of God; moral principles and commands are rooted in his nature.

God does not comply with or obey some independently existing moral law. God neither obeys nor creates the moral law, as C.S. Lewis said. He merely acts and it is good. And since we are created in God's image, God's will can never be in conflict with our best moral intuitions. For further reading on this subject, see Mark D. Linville, "On Goodness: Human and Divine," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (April 1990):1430-52; Thomas V. Morris, "Duty and Divine Goodness," in *Anselmian Explorations* (Notre Dame: University Press, 1987); William Alston, "Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists," in Michael D. Beaty, ed., *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy* (Notre Dame: University Press, 1990), 304-320.