

Can we be good without God?

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Here is the thesis of this paper. Morality as we are familiar with it in our culture originally made sense against the background of a set of beliefs and practices in traditional theism. In elite Western culture these beliefs and practices have now been widely abandoned. The result is that morality no longer makes sense within that culture the way it once did. There are two problem areas in particular that I will stress. The first is the gap between the moral demand on us and our natural capacities to meet it. This gap produces the question: Can we be morally good? The second problem area is the source of the authority of morality. This produces the question: Why should we be morally good? The traditional answer to these questions has been that God enables us to live in the way we should, and that we should live that way because God calls us to live that way. I will be looking at various kinds of incoherence that arise when these traditional answers are no longer available.

What I call "the moral gap" is the gap between the moral demand on us and our natural capacities to live by it. Morality, as I understand it, has two components: it contains a set of norms for social practice, and it organizes these under a central directive. Examples of moral norms are that we should keep our promises, we should not commit murder, we should be grateful to people who are kind to us, and we should not nurse grudges. Some of these norms tell us what to do, and some of them tell us what not to do. Some are norms for action, and some are for character or attitude. Some of them are also legal norms, but some of them are not. They are all, however, norms for social practice in the sense that they are taught within a society, and they are the glue that holds a society together. Parents try to teach morality to their children, and the members of a society maintain the norms by what they expect of each other. All these norms respond to values that we perceive, and that the norms exist to support or express. For example, the norm that tells us not to commit murder responds to the value of human life. The norm that tells us not to nurse grudges responds to the values of relationship and reconciliation. These norms, and the values behind them, can compete with each other, in the sense that we sometimes

have to choose between them. To help with these choices, morality has a second component: an organizing directive. It tells us to take the largest available perspective on the world and from this perspective to care about the well-being of everybody, and to respect the unique and equal value of each person.

One central feature of the moral demand is thus the requirement of impartial benevolence. This is not the whole of morality, but It will be the focus of this talk. I will give two formulations of this requirement. These formulations are taken from the philosopher Immanuel Kant. I start from him in order to have common ground with non-theists. His formulations are ones which many theists and non-theists can agree to. When a person proposes an action to herself, she does it with some account to herself of the reason why she should do it. The first formulation of the moral demand gives her a test: if her action is going to be morally permissible, she has to be willing to propose that anyone in her kind of situation should do that kind of action for that reason. That would turn her proposal into a universal law for what should be done in such circumstances. Let me give you an example to make this clearer. Suppose he is a college professor and he has a huge stack of student papers to grade. Suppose he hates grading papers, and the thought occurs to him that he could leave the papers and fly to the Bahamas for a few days and soak in the sun. Then when he gets home he can take the whole pile of papers up to the top of the stairs and throw them down, and any paper which gets on the bottom step gets an A, and on the next step an A- and on the next step a B+, and so on. He could save herself hours and hours of time and have a lovely weekend. Now the question is whether this action together with this motivation is morally permissible.

The moral answer is no, because he will find that he cannot will that anyone in such a situation should act like that. Suppose he is not the professor, but one of the students, perhaps one of the students whose admission to medical school is in the balance, depending on her cumulative average, and who has just put hours and hours into this paper as a result. Can he will for this sort of situation that the professor grade the papers in this haphazard way? He cannot. This test has the result that any reference to any particular person, including himself, is

eliminated. If he is willing the action for anyone in a certain kind of situation, he cannot preserve reference to himself or any other individual. So he has to will that the same action should be done if the particular people in his particular situation were to reverse their roles: if he were to become the student and the student were to become the professor. The principle is thus a version of the golden rule, that we should do to others only what we wish they should do to us. Or the principle that we should love the neighbour as the self. But this philosophical version has the additional feature that it connects with the nature of reason itself. For it is the nature of reason in all its employments to seek the universal. In science, for example, reason looks for universal law. It is not interested in whether this particular enormous podium would make a particular sound if a particular lecturer pushed it over. Rather, science wants to discover the universal law governing the sound made by objects of a certain mass falling with a certain velocity onto surfaces of a certain material. Reason is the same in moral life: it wants to discover the universal law governing situations of the kind we are in and what we should do in them.

So this is the first formulation of the moral demand. The second formulation is that we should treat humanity, whether in ourselves or anyone else, always at the same time as an end and never merely as a means. To treat another person as an end in herself is to share her goals and purposes as far as the moral law allows. This does not mean that I am forbidden to use another person for my purposes, as you are using me for your enlightenment or at least your entertainment by coming to listen to me talk. But morality says that I am forbidden to use another person merely for my purposes. For example, you are at a restaurant and the waitress brings you your food. Do you think of her merely as a conveyer belt on legs, to get the food from the kitchen to your table? Or do you consider that she too is a person, with goals and purposes of her own. Perhaps you are tired and have had a long day. But you consider that she too may be tired and she may have had a long day facing grouchy people like you. To treat her as an end is to share her purposes, that is, to make her purposes your purposes, as far as the moral law allows. She wants a friendly face, though not too friendly. Is there something morally wrong about this? No, then you should want to give it to her. Note that you have to

treat humanity this way also in your own person. Morality does not say that you treat yourself as a doormat, a mere means to supply other people's preferences. You have to respect also yourself, as having the same worth (but morally no greater worth) than any other human being's.

To show why these two formulations of the supreme principle of morality are so demanding, I will describe two cases. First, you are considering going to a movie for \$7.25 on 28th street, and it occurs to you that seven dollars could keep someone alive for a week in, say, Zambia. You may doubt this, but there are actually a billion people in the world who live on less than a dollar a day. I myself lived in India for about a year, teaching, and my salary was the equivalent of about a dollar a day, slightly less. My daughter Catherine worked in Zambia, where the per capita income is \$380 a year. Moreover the rate of HIV infection is about 30% and the country is full of orphans whose extended family cannot feed their own children, let alone take in extra. Now is the purpose of staying alive for a week morally permissible? Yes. So you should share that person's purpose. But then which is more important, the movie or the life? If you did not know which role you were going to play in this situation, the starving child or the filmgoer, which would you choose? In Christian terms, we could put it this way. Christ says, about feeding the hungry, "in as far as you do it to the least of these my brethren, you do it unto me." So which is more important to Christ, the movie or the life?

The second case is that morality, in the shape I have described it, requires that we love our enemies. Every human whom we affect by our actions counts as worth the same, and we have to make their ends our ends as far as we can. We do not have to share their immoral ends, for example their purpose to do us harm. But their purposes to continue living themselves, to have their dignity respected, to have flourishing communities and personal relations, to have worthwhile achievements and lives full of beauty and truth, all these aspirations of theirs count morally just as much as our own. If we have to frustrate these purposes of theirs, perhaps even to cause their deaths, this should cause us not rejoicing but grief. Jesus wept over Jerusalem, even though the city was full of people who were going to seek his death and who were then

going to be destroyed themselves. He tells us that we have to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, so that we may be children of our Father in heaven. "If your enemy is hungry, feed him," says Paul in Romans 12, "if he is thirsty, give him something to drink." Now how natural is this kind of love? When I think back over the last six months, I have a much more vivid sense of who my enemies are. I have seen in many people what started from a sense of justice outraged, but slipped almost immediately into hatred, revenge or even blood-lust. And this is perfectly natural. The common sense on this matter is what Socrates first encountered in Athens when he asked "What is Justice?" in the Republic. The answer was, justice is doing good to your friends and harm to your enemies. This is natural, given our fallen nature, but it is not what love requires.

The moral demand is the first part of the structure of the moral gap. The second part is our natural capacities, those we were born with, and those capacities are not adequate to the demand. What I am presenting here is a version of the traditional doctrine of original sin, which is still to be found in Kant. His version goes back into the history of the pietist Lutheranism that he grew up in. It comes to Luther through Ockham and Scotus and behind Scotus, Anselm, and behind Anselm, Augustine. The way Duns Scotus puts it is that there are two basic affections of the will, if you like two pulls. There is the pull towards one's own advantage, and the pull towards what is good in itself, independently of our happiness. We humans are born with, and will always experience both pulls, even in heaven. But the key moral question is which we put first. For example, as I lecture here, I can be thinking first of the material and of you, my audience. Or I can be thinking first of myself, and my anxieties or satisfactions. I am in fact thinking of both, and there is nothing wrong with this; but the key question is the ranking. When I am doing public presentations like this, my prayer beforehand is always that I focus less on myself and more on my subject matter and my audience. Do we put the good in itself first, and do what will make us happy only if it is consistent with this? Or do we put happiness first, and do what is good in itself only to the extent that it will make us happy? To think this second way is to be under the evil principle, which subordinates duty to happiness. And we are all born this

way. This means we cannot be impartially benevolent, for we put ourselves first. And this also means that we cannot make ourselves impartial. For the evil principle is our root principle, and if the root is corrupt it cannot mend itself.

My experience in talking about this view to people is that some of them think it is too pessimistic. They think, for example, that we are born basically good, and we do such horrible things to each other mostly because we do not understand what we are doing. But people can know perfectly well how much they are hurting each other, and do it anyway. My wife used to volunteer at recess in an elementary school. She noticed that these children, who had been together for several years, had established a pecking order, like chickens in a coop; and those at the bottom of this hierarchy were bullied into a state of misery which, she thought, might leave serious psychological damage. My point is that the kids doing this damage knew precisely how to torment those beneath them. Or consider a dysfunctional marriage, in which the two partners have refined to an art-form the techniques of wounding each other. In a perverse way, it is their ability to torment each other that keeps them together.

Even if we discount what you might think are extreme cases, think again about the movie. There are some initial responses to this dilemma. Movies are an art form, and art has its own deep value. But suppose it is Rocky V? I am an interpreter of the culture, I may say, and I need to see the movie to do this job well. But perhaps Rocky I, II, III, and IV were enough? I need some relaxation, I might say, otherwise I will grow weary with well-doing, and burn out. But am I really on the verge of burnout when I go, and what about a walk in the woods? I need to spend time with my family, I may say, and indeed I think I can justify spending more resources on my own children. But is the movie really the best way to spend time with them? I think that after we have given all these sorts of reasons, we will realize that there is something unjust about the way we are spending our money. And this is not just the movie, but the CD player, the new couch, the down jacket. Impartial benevolence turns out to make a demand on us that we limit our standard of living. And I think the demand is too high for us by our natural capacities. I find myself switching off when the pictures of starving children come on, because I

just cannot face it. Moreover our culture is full of devices to weaken any inclination we originally had. The retailers in the Mall and the advertisers do not want us to think about justice while we are shopping. In West Michigan, the largest mall decided not to allow the Salvation Army to collect in their traditional way at Christmas time.

These two features of the gap-picture, namely the demand and our defective capacities, are present in Kant and have been repeated by most of the theorists of morality who followed Kant. A remarkable fact is that they have also repeated a third feature. They construct the picture of a person who is without our limitations of information and good will, and who tells us how to live. This imaginary being is given many different names and descriptions: an ideal observer, an archangel, a person behind the veil of ignorance. What is typical of all these imaginary beings, however, is that they are without the usual human limitations. This pattern needs explanation. Why should morality be presented as having this shape, rather than what we might otherwise have expected - a purely human institution, tied to our human conditions of limitation? I think the overwhelmingly plausible answer is that these imaginary beings are a remnant, a relic. They are the remains of a traditional view, according to which human beings are subordinate to a divine being, who is without our limitations and whose prescriptions about our lives we are supposed to obey.

I do not want to limit the picture of the moral gap to Christianity, or even to the three great monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. There is already in Aristotle the description of a gap-shaped morality. The best life, he tells us, would be superior to the human level, but we ought not to follow the proverb writers, and \hat{O} think human, since (we) are human, or think mortal, since (we) are mortal. \tilde{O} Rather, as far as we can, we ought to be immortal, i.e. like the immortal gods. The gap picture, I think, goes beyond Western culture. When I was teaching very briefly in China, I went to visit the monastery where Chu Hsi lived and taught, a neo-Confucian of the twelfth century. He held that for most of us our good nature \hat{O} is like a pearl lying in muddy water \tilde{O} , which means that we cannot see through to the right principles, whose source is heaven.

Now the description of life in this moral gap, without anything added to it, is incoherent. This is because of another feature of morality which can be expressed succinctly as the view that "ought" implies "can". The best way to put this is that the question whether you ought to do something does not arise unless you can do it. To see the appeal of this principle, consider this example. When I was working for the House Foreign Affairs Committee in Washington, I took my infant daughter with me to visit the congressman who was head of the committee. She was too young to control her bladder, and had an accident which left a mark on the congressman's blue carpet. Sometimes I think the only lasting mark I and my family made in Washington. Now if I blamed her for this, it would not merely be stupid; it would go against the whole point of blaming. It is a cardinal principle of child-rearing that you should only hold children accountable to standards that they are able to reach. And another way to put that is to say that "ought" implies "can". But then if our capacities are really inadequate to the moral demand, it is not the case that we ought to live by it. It is incoherent to put us under a demand we cannot reach. Yet surely we are under the moral demand. How are we to explain this paradox?

Christianity has a particular reading of the gap-picture of morality to help with this difficulty. The gap-picture has three components; first, the demand, second our capacities, and third the person without our limitations. What Christianity adds is that the third part of this picture (the person without our limitations, namely God) intervenes in human affairs so as to change the second part of this picture (namely our capacities) so that they become adequate to the first part of the picture (namely the moral demand). Just how God is supposed to do this is the topic of another lecture. But I want to return briefly to the two cases I mentioned before, feeding the hungry stranger and loving our enemies.

The parable of the Good Samaritan gives us a picture of someone who both meets the needs of a stranger and extends this care even to a traditional enemy of his race. One thing we can learn from this story is what I call "the principle of providential proximity". Providence put the Good Samaritan next to the person attacked by robbers and left wounded by the side of the road. The Greek word translated "neighbour" in that passage literally means "next to". One thing that makes the moral demand too much to bear is that it seems to load the endless and

anonymous need of the rest of the world onto our pitiful shoulders as individuals. But if we can believe in providence, we can believe that we have been placed in a community which puts us next to the people that we are supposed to help. If I belong to a community which extends itself outward to meet the needs of others, if for example it sends development specialists to some village in Zambia, then that village becomes by extension my village. Two next-door villages can have the same needs, but one of them becomes *my* village and the other does not. I know those relief workers, or know people who know them, and the friends they make become my *friends of friends*. The world's needs have in this way become less anonymous, because it is now these villages rather than those other ones that I am responsible for.

How do we know whom we are being put next to? Is it enough that we see a picture of a starving child in a newspaper or on the television in the evening news? Here I do not have a complete answer. For the Good Samaritan it was physical proximity. For us, the community we belong to (if we do belong to this kind of community) can be a significant help; it can make informed decisions about which villages to go to and which villages not. But for our community to play this role, it has to be of the right kind. It has to combine two features that are not easily combined; it has to be both close enough to form the initial bonds that tie us in, and it has to be outward-looking enough to identify its members with their global obligations. I know that this sort of community is no longer typical, and for many people will seem merely utopian. But one thing that helps is the doctrine of providence. Providence is one way God's assistance bridges the moral gap. God puts us in a community which works through a particular kind of love, the kind of love that Jesus had for the neighbour. To the extent that our communities are faithful to this kind of love, we can have some relief from the crushing burden of the world's need. I say some relief because community-membership does not solve the problem of our standard of living, and there is much more to be said about this.

The Good Samaritan also knows how to treat his enemy as a human being deserving his care. How does he do this? The story says he was *moved with compassion*, in the Greek esplanchnisthe, literally meaning he was stirred in his bowels. But how so? In the New Testament, John's first letter has the idea of a widening circle of fellowship, which starts between the Father and the Son, and then reaches out to us through the Son and the Spirit, and through us to others. This is the quality of the life into which we have been incorporated. And this new life has the power to enable us to forgive and love even those who have hurt us, and even where on our own we would not be able to do this. Or we can release them into God's forgiveness, as Jesus did when he said on the cross *Father, forgive them*.

My point today is not to describe God's assistance, but to show the place for it in morality. This feature of Christianity about God's assistance has dropped out of the professional literature in moral theory. But this means that contemporary moral philosophy is faced with the threat of the incoherence I have just described, namely the incoherence of holding us accountable to a standard we are not able to meet. Contemporary moral philosophers have responded to this threat in essentially three ways.

First, there are philosophers who exaggerate our initial capacity so that it becomes adequate to the demand, which is held constant as impartial benevolence. Some theorists hold that if we were only vividly aware of the effects of our actions on other people, we would tend to do what morality requires. It is thus ignorance which holds us back, they say, not any radical evil of the will. But then how is it that people who know perfectly well how much they are harming the people they know nevertheless persist in the most horrifying contempt and cruelty? It is interesting to compare the end of the twentieth century with the end of the nineteenth. At the last turn of the century there was enormous confidence that the new century was going to be one of moral progress through education and technological advance. I have noticed some of the same rhetoric at the turn of the new century. But in between has come the bloodiest and most brutal century in human history. The Germans who killed the Jews and others in the camps of the second world war had their victims perform Bach's sacred music for them before putting them in the gas chambers. Education and technology made evil worse. The humanist manifesto published just before the second world war said, "Man is at last becoming aware that he alone is responsible for the realization of the world of his dreams, that he has within himself the power for its achievement". The question I am asking is whether this is true and whether it is supported by our experience of the world run by the people who believed it.

The second strategy for dealing with the moral gap without God is to hold our natural capacities constant as biased towards the self, and then adjust the demand downwards in order to meet them. Some moral theorists diminish the moral demand by saying that we are not, after all, required to be impartially benevolent, and our moral obligations are just to particular people,

who are embedded within the special relations we have to them as friends and family and members of our community. We do not, for example, have moral obligations to starving children in Africa, because they are not related to us in the right way. We do not even know their names. This makes the moral demand much closer to our natural tendency to restrict our care to those close to us. One example is that kind of evolutionary ethics which decides what humans generally desire by looking at their evolutionary history, most of which was hunting and gathering. Since these hunter-gatherer societies did not show signs of impartial benevolence, or of loving the enemy, this kind of evolutionary ethics dismisses these sorts of demands as utopian. We are not, so to speak, programmed for such a life. On this strategy, what is good is what fits our natural capacities, and our natural capacities are given us by evolution for the reproductive advantage of our genes.

The third strategy is to hold both the demand and our capacities constant, and then to try to find some substitute for divine assistance in bridging the resultant gap. One example here is a different type of evolutionary ethics, which makes evolution itself a substitute for God. Perhaps this is a tendentious way to describe what these thinkers want, since the people I have in mind are theologians; they think of themselves as giving an account of God's work not as proposing a substitute for it. But I will describe this position, and you can judge. They identify God as the way things really are, and since the way things really are evolves, they conclude that there is evolution in God. They see God's transcendence as omnipresence. In other words, God transcends any particular part of the universe and any particular time in the universe, but God does not transcend the universe itself in its spatial and temporal wholeness. Within this universe there is a direction of emergence, they say, which the Romantics in the nineteenth century called a life force. This force produces first life itself, then higher forms of life, and then finally culture and freedom. This view is consistent with the traditional view of the moral demand and our natural capacities. The moral demand is for self-emptying love, and our natural biological tendency is to prefer the self. But on this kind of view the gap between demand and capacity is bridged by the self-making emergence of higher consciousness.

This is one kind of substitution strategy. But there are other candidates. Perhaps, as for Rousseau, love of the country will change our capacities. Or perhaps, on the contrary, it is the withering away of the state and ownership by the working class of the means of production as Marx thought. To discuss this strategy carefully requires going through these alternatives one by one, and examining whether they work. My own conclusion is that they do not.

I need to go on to the second problem area I distinguished at the beginning of this talk. The first was the picture of the moral gap. The second is the source of the authority of morality. We can ask the question, "Why should I be moral?" This is not the question "What do I get out of being moral?", but the question "Why should I accept the moral demand as a demand upon me which is independent of my happiness?". Why shouldn't I go down to the Bahamas and neglect the grading? Why should I do my duty? I will call this question "the normative question". To put it another way, Why is morality trumps? I am going to look at various answers which contemporary moral philosophy has given to this question, none of which say that morality is binding on us because God has commanded it or called us to it. My sense is that none of these alternative answers is satisfactory, and I am going to mention a couple of problems with each of them. But what follows if none of these non-theist answers works? We should expect to find that if there is no generally accepted answer to the question "why should I be moral?", the perceived authority of morality in the culture will start to weaken. This is what Nietzsche already foresaw at the end of the nineteenth century. He foresaw what he called the death of God, and he foresaw and looked forward to the death of guilt along with the death of God. Guilt, considered subjectively, is what we feel when we violate the moral law. If we lose the sense of the authority of the moral law, then we will lose this kind of feeling of subjective guilt along with it.

Contemporary moral philosophy has tried various answers to the normative question without bringing God into it. One is that reason demands that I be moral. As I said earlier, Kant thought that it was the nature of reason to will universal law, and it demands this not only in

theoretical thinking about science (for example) but in practical thinking about what to do. Universal laws and universal terms are those which make no essential reference to any individual. But Kant thought he could base morality on this, and this is one place where I think his argument fails. I cannot go into all the details here. But I want to raise two objections. The first is that morality is not exclusively universal. There are particular moral obligations that we have to particular people, which are not just obligations that anyone would have to anyone else in this sort of situation. For example, there are duties we have to God which are not duties to anyone who was like God in the relevant respects, but just duties to God. I mentioned Duns Scotus before, and he has the view that each one of us has an individual essence. The biblical basis for this is the individual name on a white stone which God is going to give us, according to the book of Revelation. This is like Jesus giving the name Petros, meaning rock, to Simon. Peter was not yet a rock; this was before the flight and the denials. But nonetheless on this rock Jesus would build his church. Ancient names give nature; they are not merely arbitrary. Calvin tells us in his commentary on Genesis, that Adam gave names to the animals according to their kinds; and we lost those names in the Fall together with the knowledge of the essential natures of the animals. Orthodox Jews will not write the name of God, because of the connection of the name and the nature. So God has this individual name for us that he already knows, but we do not. I think he already calls us by this name, as it were calls us into this name. But an individual essence is something that reason cannot grasp, since reason is the grasp of universals that do not make essential reference to individuals. So, if there are moral obligations that we have to particular people because of their individual essences, reason has no access to these.

A second difficulty is that there are universal laws which eliminate reference to any individual, but which would be immoral to will. Consider the principle that all Jewish people should be killed. There is a true story about a fanatical Nazi who discovered that he had a Jewish grandmother, which was the degree of connection the regime had established as sufficient for deportation. True to his principles, the Nazi handed himself in. He did not make any special exemption for himself. But surely this is not enough to make his principle morally permissible.

Suppose a terrorist thinks that it is good to free the world of as many infidels as possible. He may be able to eliminate reference to any individuals in this principle, and thus pass the logical test of universality. But this does not make his principle morally permissible. So there are problems with making reason the source of the authority of morality.

Another answer we might propose is that the source of the moral obligation is the community we belong to. We might say that we have grown up in a community that respects the moral law, and our identity is at least in part formed by that community. Socrates says that Athens is like a parent; it has made him the person he is. Perhaps to be true to our social identity, therefore, we have to acknowledge the authority of the moral demand which our community instilled into us. I have said approving things about community, but if we make it the source of the authority of morality in this way, it becomes idolatrous. I want to mention again two problems. The first problem is that it is relativistic. I grew up in a community that was socially stratified by class. My nanny told me that gentlemen polished the backs of their shoes. Ordinary people polish the fronts, but only gentlemen the backs. I remember my so-called scout at college, who was the college servant who cleaned the students' rooms and made our beds in the morning. One day, when my room was more than usually messy, he said to me gravely, "Sir, I thought you were a gentleman." I remember at school being beaten by a prefect in the dormitory with a shoe by candlelight for having come down to breakfast with my hair unbrushed. He was trying to mold me into a gentleman. But I have become increasingly uneasy with this stratification of my fellow-citizens into gentleman and ladies and the rest. There were some good features of the code of being a gentleman, but they were tied up with inherited privilege in a way that I cannot now endorse. It does not follow from the fact that I grew up a certain way, that I am obliged to continue that way. The community does not have that sort of authority. If it did, then everyone would be obligated to the standards they grew up with, and that would be normative relativism.

Also, if we make community the source of the authority of morality, we will get exclusivity. We will start to think of our obligations as limited to those we have special relations

with. We will put blinders on, and stop seeing or caring about the effects of our choices of lifestyle and public policy on the rest of the world. The contemporary world displays a curious mixture of increased globalization on the one hand and increasingly aggressive tribal loyalty on the other. In order to constrain the Tutsi in Rwanda or Burundi in his wrath against the Hutu, we need a sense of moral obligation that transcends the community, a sense of the dignity of a human being as such, even of an enemy.

A third possibility is that nature grounds the authority of morality. Some theorists think that you can deduce normative conclusions about how we ought to live from factual premises about what kind of people we are and what we are naturally inclined towards. I am going to talk more about this in the next talk, in relation to a version of Christian Ethics that relies on a deduction from human nature to natural law. All I will say now is that the commands that God gives us do indeed fit our nature most beautifully, so that we discover we flourish and thrive when we keep them and we wither and decay when we do not. But we do not have a deduction here, because of the consequences for our nature of the Fall.

Finally, we might say that it is simply self-evident that morality is authoritative, and so this authority does not need a ground at all, either in God or in anything else. Morality might be like sense-perception in this way. It is self-evident, when I see a goldfinch outside my window in good light, that I am justified in believing that there is a goldfinch there. This is not to say my perception is infallible. I might be the victim of a practical joke by a neighbour who knows that I am a philosopher who argues for the basic reliability of sense-perception, and who has constructed an elaborate deception to embarrass me, with a holograph projecting a picture of a goldfinch onto the tree outside my window. But in the absence of some such special condition, I should believe that my senses are giving me the truth. Perceptual beliefs like this are properly basic. If everything had to be justified, then it would turn out that nothing could be. We do have to start somewhere, and perception seems like one good place. But the problem is that the authority of moral sense seems different from the authority of sense perception in two ways. The first is that our moral sensors have been distorted more than our sense-perception by the Fall.

One way of putting this is that the moral sensors are closer to the will. Think of the different degrees to which we trust judgements from past writers about what they saw with their eyes compared with their judgements about right and wrong. An ancient Greek historian describes from his own experience a long retreat of the army to the sea. An ancient Greek philosopher describes the manly excellences. Which do we trust more? I am not saying that ancient historians are infallible when writing about troop movements they have observed, but I don't find myself with the same initial distrust I have of the philosopher.

The second difference between moral perception and sense perception is that I do not have the experience of waking up in the morning and just not trusting my senses. I can imagine having such an experience; suppose I am a habitual user of hallucinogens for example, or I am waking up after a general anaesthetic. But in the absence of such special conditions, I just go ahead and trust. I do, however, have the experience of moral apathy or listlessness, of simply not feeling the authority of the moral demand. I know my duty, but I turn over and go back to sleep. This is no doubt sign of a weak character, but it is not abnormal in the way it is abnormal to distrust the authority of the senses. The authority of moral perception is self-evident only when our wills are correctly ordered, and they are regularly disordered.

I have described the four main alternative secular answers to the normative question, 'Why should I be moral?' All of them need a supplement to tell us which demands of reason, which community, which nature, which moral perceptions we should trust. Christianity has an answer to the normative question which is different from any of the above. It says that I should be moral because God tells me to be so. This is the divine command theory of ethics. Calvin says, 'God's will is so much the highest rule of righteousness, that whatever he wills, by the very fact that he wills it, must be considered righteous.' Morality has authority because it is the route which God has chosen for me toward my ultimate end, which is union with God.

I want to end by describing this view in a bit more detail, and linking it to the account of morality I gave at the beginning. Suppose we ask, 'Why did God create us?' According to the traditional Christian doctrine of creation, God did not have to create at all. God could have lived for eternity as the three persons of the Trinity in their mutual love for each other. There

was no necessity binding God to bring into existence anything different from God. So why did God create us? We do not have access to God's mind on this question, and we should be diffident when we try to answer it. Nonetheless certain answers have been proposed. I will mention a few others, and then give one of my own which relies on a distinction from Duns Scotus. Perhaps God created us just so as to be able to have other people to love. Or perhaps God created us in order to give expression to the divine love. Or perhaps God created us to increase the divine glory. Another response has been to say that God's love overflows all by itself into creation, without any "ulterior" motive at all. Love is, we might say, inherently creative. But this view seems to make the creation too automatic, as though loving were under some force like gravity, inevitably pulling the lover towards the introduction of new entities and people. We need to preserve the idea of the freedom of God in creation, and it is hard for us to imagine any kind of freedom that does not involve motivation or purpose.

So here is another answer to add to the others. God created for the sake of what God created. The phrase "for the sake of" gives the purpose. But the phrase can be used in various ways, and it is useful to distinguish these, as Scotus did. I can pursue one thing for the sake of another, where I see the first as a means to getting the second, like going to the dentist for the sake of future dental health. Or the first might be a constituent part of the second, like going to Timbuktoo for the sake of adventure. But what I have in mind for understanding the creation is something different from either of these. I can do something for the sake of somebody, where there is no self-reference involved. This is an important feature of the account of motivation I took from Scotus, that we can be moved by the good in itself (and, he says, the good for another person) independently of its effect on our own happiness. I think God can be moved to create by love for what God creates, even though there is nothing there to love "before" the creation. If this is right, we can see creation as a kind of self-limitation, just as we limit ourselves when we love something other than ourselves for the sake of that other. God becomes vulnerable to disappointment by the very beings that motivated the creation.

Now we can return to the account of morality I gave at the beginning of this talk. I described three features of the kind of screening that morality provides in what I called "the organizing directive". We try to look from the perspective of the whole. We try to put an equal value on all people, not privileging ourselves. And we try to respect their uniqueness. We can now see how in all of these features we try to image or repeat God's activity towards us in creation and providence. God's view is the view of the whole, to which we only approximate very imperfectly. God creates all humans equally in the image of God. We try to value other people equally, and this has, as its most difficult task, loving the neighbor as the self. Here we image God's activity of self-limitation, loving another person for the sake of that other person. Finally, the uniqueness of each person is that individual's essence, the name written each on its

own white stone as recorded in the book of Revelation. God's call to each person is to become that name. In honoring the uniqueness of others, we honor that call. So to sum this up, in morally screening proposals for how to act or how to live, we are trying to repeat in our wills God's willing. I need to add one more qualification, again from Scotus. The will we are trying to repeat is not exactly God's willing, because of the gap between us. Scotus's example is that God willed the death of Jesus, and the killers of Jesus willed this also, so they repeated God's will in their willing. But surely they willed wrongly? Scotus's solution is to say that they did not will the end that God willed for their willing, but rather the death of an innocent man. What we have to repeat in our will is God's will for our willing, and that is what we hear as God's call.

I will return to this account of morality in the next talk, and reply to some objections to it. I will now conclude this talk by summarizing what I hope to have accomplished so far. I have focussed on two questions, which an account of morality needs to answer. The first question is Can we be good?; and if the answer to this is yes, we can go on to the second question, which is Why should we be good?. My claim has been that morality does not make sense without answers to these questions, and that the main contemporary non-theist answers fail. I gave three types of non-theist answers to the first question, and four to the second. If I am right about these failures, this does not prove that the theist answers are correct, and it does not show that only theists can be morally good. For there are many forms of life which people can practice without being able to make sense of them. But having answers to these two questions is an advantage, and without answers I think morality will tend to decline. People who want to hold onto morality, but without God, will have to find a substitute to do the same work. And it is not going to be easy to find such a substitute.