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God and the grounding of morality

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GOD AND THE GROUNDING OF MORALITY

by

David James Redmond

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Philosophy in the Graduate College of The University of Iowa

August 2018

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Gregory Landini
To Bethany
My wife and best friend
A faithful image of God and a tangible expression of his goodness
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I argue that, if God exists, moral facts ontologically depend on him. After

distinguishing a variety of ways in which moral facts might ontologically depend on God,
I focus my attention on the most prominent and most well-developed account of the

relationship between God and morality viz., the account developed by Robert Adams in
his *Finite and Infinite Goods*. Adams’ account consists of two parts—an account of
deontic moral properties and an account of axiological moral properties. Adams’ account

of deontic moral properties is a version of divine command theory according to which the

property of being morally right (obligatory) and the property of being morally wrong are

identical to the property of being commanded by God and the property of being forbidden

by God, respectively. I argue that although Adams’ divine command theory is not

vulnerable to many prominent objections that afflict other versions of divine command

theory, his view is, nevertheless, both unmotivated and implausible.

Next, I explain Adams’ account of axiological properties, which is a particular

version of what I call “theistic valuational particularism.” According to Adams’ theistic

valuational particularism, the property of being intrinsically good or excellent is identical
to the property of faithfully and holistically resembling God. I argue that because

Adams’ conception of excellence is so broad, there are some things that have the property

of being excellent but fail to resemble God. I argue that the same problem afflicts other,

modified versions of theistic valuational particularism, including one that is defended by
Scott Hill and another that is championed by Mark Murphy. Nevertheless, I argue that

this problem does not afflict what I call “theistic moral valuational particularism,” the
view that moral goodness is identical to the property of resembling God in certain, specified ways. Furthermore, I argue that if God exists, theistic moral valuational particularism is not only well motivated theologically, but it can withstand the two most prominent objections that have been lodged against it, viz., the arbitrariness objection and the divine ascription problem.
I argue that, if God exists, morality depends on him. After distinguishing a variety of ways in which morality might depend on God, I focus my attention on the most prominent and most well-developed account of the relationship between God and morality viz., the account developed by Robert Adams in his *Finite and Infinite Goods*. Adams’ account consists of two parts. The first is Adams’ divine command theory of moral obligation, according to which the properties of being morally right (obligatory) and wrong are identified with the properties of being commanded and forbidden by God, respectively. I argue that although his divine command theory can stave off many prominent objections that afflict other versions of divine command theory, Adams’ account of moral obligation is, nevertheless, ultimately both unmotivated and implausible.

The second part is Adams’ account of goodness or “excellence.” According to Adams, the property of being excellent is identical to the property of resembling God. I argue, however, that because Adams’ conception of excellence is so broad, there are some things that are excellent but fail to resemble God. Nevertheless, I argue that this problem does not arise for the view that moral excellence is identical to the property of resembling God. I conclude by explaining why the two most prominent objections that have been lodged against accounts like mine fail and why those who believe in God might find a view of this sort attractive.
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CHAPTER 1: MOTIVATIONS FOR AND SOME VARIETIES OF THEISTIC METAETHICS

It is fairly common for people to think that important aspects of morality depend on God in some way or another.\textsuperscript{1} For example, some claim that God provides the best explanation of how we come to know what it is that morality requires of us. Others claim that belief in God is necessary to adequately motivate people to act in accordance with what morality requires. My focus concerns yet another way in which morality might depend on God. In particular, I am concerned with whether moral facts in some way ontologically depend on God. One famous expression of the ontological dependence of morality on God is the claim—often attributed Ivan Karamazov, a character in Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s novel, The Brothers Karamazov—that “If there is no God, all things are permitted.”\textsuperscript{2} Some of those who make such dependence claims have thought that the various ways in which morality allegedly depends on God provide the basis for so-called “moral arguments” for the existence of God.\textsuperscript{3} Others have disavowed attempts to infer the existence of God from facts about morality while, nevertheless, maintaining that theists have theological reasons to believe that morality depends on God. That is, rather

\textsuperscript{1} Russ Shafer-Landau briefly discusses each of the following three ways in his The Fundamentals of Ethics (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 63-75.

\textsuperscript{2} Matthew Carey Jordan points out that this quote, though widely attributed to the character, Ivan Karamazov, is actually nowhere to be found in Dostoyevsky. The quote and the misattribution to Dostoyevsky made its way into philosophical parlance due to Sartre. See Jordan’s, “Theistic Ethics: Not as Bad as You Think,” Sophia 12.1 (2009): note 6.

than examining the moral landscape and seeing that morality has certain features that are best accounted for in theistic terms, they instead begin by examining the nature of God and infer from it that moral facts, if they exist, must somehow depend on God.\textsuperscript{4}

Whether either of these arguments succeeds is controversial. Nevertheless, it does seem prima facie plausible to me that given the existence of God, moral facts, if they exist, do indeed depend on him. In this chapter, I explain why. Moreover, because it is natural to account for the dependency of morality on God by giving theistic metaethical accounts of the nature of moral properties, after explaining what I mean by “theistic metaethical accounts” and explaining why some theists are attracted to accounts of this kind, I begin by identifying some possibilities for developing such accounts.

1.1 THEISTIC METAETHICS AND THEISTIC NORMATIVE ETHICS

The primary foci of my dissertation are a particular kind of motivation for and the viability of theistic metaethics. It is important, then, that before I get to issues of motivation and viability, I begin by briefly explaining what metaethics is and how it differs from normative ethics, and I highlight how theistic metaethical accounts, in particular, differ from theistic normative ethical accounts.

Unfortunately, it is surprisingly difficult to provide a precise and uncontroversial distinction between normative ethics and metaethics. Fortunately, for my purposes, it is sufficient that I merely provide a rough and ready way of drawing the distinction. One

\textsuperscript{4} Of course, these two strategies are not mutually exclusive.
way of getting at the distinction between normative ethics and metaethics is by identifying some of the characteristic questions that each seeks to answer. For example, normative ethics seeks to answer such questions as these: Do all human beings matter morally speaking? Do only humans matter, or might animals or ecosystems count as well? In general, what kinds of beings are morally considerable? Is there a fundamental moral rule that explains all the other moral rules, or is there a plurality of equally fundamental moral rules? Is it ever permissible to break a moral rule? Answers to such questions constitute normative ethical judgments. Normative ethical judgments are first-order judgments about which moral statuses apply to which actions, character traits, or states of affairs. Such judgments can be either particular or general. William Frankena gives the following examples:

I. Particular
   a. I ought not to escape from prison now.
   b. You should become a missionary.
   c. What he did was wrong.
   d. My grandfather was a good man.
   e. He is responsible for what he did.
   f. Her character is admirable.
   g. Her motive was good.

II. General
   a. We ought to keep our agreements.
   b. Love is the fulfillment of the moral law.
   c. All men have a right to freedom.
   d. Benevolence is a virtue.
   e. Jealousy is an ignoble motive.
   f. The ideally good man does not drink or smoke.

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There are a number of questions one might have about the various statuses of these judgements themselves. For example, can we know that all men have a right to freedom? If so, how can we know? What does the word “right” mean in this context? Are ethical judgments the sorts of things that can be true or false? If so, are ethical judgments ever true? If ethical judgments are sometimes true, what makes them true? The attitude of the speaker? Society? God? Such *metaethical questions* are second-order questions about first-order ethical judgments and primarily concern the meaning and justification of and truth-makers for first-order ethical judgments.

Theistic moral theories come in both normative and metaethical varieties. What is common to all theistic moral theories is the claim that entities of some kind have at least some of their moral statuses in virtue of certain facts about God. For example, one might hold that there is only one supreme moral duty: the duty to obey God’s commands. On this view, every action that has the status of being morally right has that status in virtue of its being an instance of obedience to God’s commands. In particular, we have a duty to tell the truth because God commands us to tell the truth, we have a duty to refrain from harming others because God has commanded us to refrain from harming others, and so on. Because this view asserts that some ethical state of affairs obtains (viz., the state of affairs consisting in its being obligatory to obey God’s commands), it is a theistic *normative* ethical view.

Theistic *metaethical* views, by contrast, though they assert that all ethical statuses of a certain class that hold do so in virtue of facts about God, do not entail that any ethical status holds. Thus, one can adopt a theistic metaethical account of the property of moral obligation without thinking that the property of being morally obligatory is instantiated.
If, for example, God does not exist or if he does not issue commands, then on the account offered above, the property of being morally obligatory is not instantiated.

In general, while normative ethical accounts concern which moral statuses apply to which actions, character traits, or states of affairs, metaethical accounts—at least so far as I am interested in them—are accounts of moral concepts or properties. Theistic metaethical accounts in some way tie such moral concepts or properties to God. For example, one who adopts a theistic metaethical account might maintain that certain moral properties (e.g., the property of being morally obligatory or morally impermissible) are identical to certain theological properties (e.g., the property of being commanded or forbidden by God). But just as the correct account of the property of being a unicorn might involve reference to magic, the correct account of the property of moral obligation might involve reference of God. Neither account, however—even if true—implies that magic or God exists. At best, the unicorn analysis would imply that if a unicorn exists, then magic exists as well. Similarly, if the above-mentioned theistic metaethical account of the property of being morally obligatory is correct, it implies, at best, that if we have any moral obligations, then God exists and issues commands.  

My primary concern will be theistic accounts of moral properties. In particular, I will be considering whether moral properties ontologically depend in some way on facts about God. Of course, other metaethical concerns will be relevant for (and may constrain) accounts of the nature of moral properties. For example, we might have good reason to think that moral facts are knowable, or motivate, or provide reasons, etc., and

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6 See David Enoch’s unpublished manuscript, “How Principles Ground,” for a discussion of the distinction between normative grounding and metaphysical grounding, its relevance to whether and how principles ground, and how this is related to the distinction between normative and metaethics.
these facts may count for or against a given theistic account of moral properties. Still, my primary concern is to evaluate the motivations for and plausibility of the claim that moral facts depend in some way on God. In what follows, when I speak of theistic metaethics or theistic metaethical accounts, I have in mind accounts according to which moral facts ontologically depend in some way on facts about God. In the next section, I distinguish different reasons one might have for adopting some theistic metaethical account and argue that there is a prima facie case that one of the reasons has merit.

1.2 Motivating Theistic Metaethics

Mark Murphy distinguishes two types of approaches that one might take with regard to the relationship between God and morality. On the explanandum-driven approach, one begins by looking at features of morality, identifying some that call out for explanation, and arguing that the best explanation of those features in some way involves God. Assuming that the theist appeals to common facts of ethical experience, such an approach will have apologetic value to the extent that the theist can offer a more plausible explanation of the moral facts than can the non-theist. Matthew Carey Jordan’s approach provides one example of an explanandum-driven approach to God and morality. He argues that moral facts have various features, viz., they are objective, knowable, and constitute especially weighty categorical reasons for action—even in contexts when no

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7 Alternatively, one might argue that the best explanation of those features involves God’s non-existence.
one but the agent herself will be affected by the action, and he argues that the best explanation of these facts involves the attitudes of God.  

An *explanans-driven* approach to God and morality, by contrast, begins by looking at features of God and examining the implications that those features have with regard to morality. An explanans-driven theistic metaethical account concludes on the basis of some divine feature or features that moral facts, if they exist, depend on God. Murphy provides a helpful example that illustrates the difference between explanandum-driven and explanans-driven explanations. He imagines a situation in which you leave a bowl of water locked in a room, but when you return to the room a week later, the bowl is empty. There are two kinds of considerations to which you can appeal to explain this change. The first concerns the facts to be explained, *explanandum-driven* considerations. For example, we might inquire, abstractly, about what possible causes there might be that could explain the disappearance of the water. Given the salient facts (e.g., that the bowl is positioned by the window, that when you left for the week, you had a pet cat, etc.) you might think it equally likely that the water simply evaporated or that your cat drank the water. Given that both the sunlight and the cat are capable of explaining the disappearance of the water, if we merely rely on explanandum-driven considerations, we might have no reason to prefer the one explanation over the other. However, as Murphy points out:

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When we focus on the fact that *there is a cat still alive in the room*, we will settle on the cat as the explanation for the water’s disappearance: for had the cat not drunk the water, there would not still be a living cat in the room; we’d have an ex-cat. Cats are *explainers*: cats’ characteristic activities are to explain depletions of oxygen molecules and increase in carbon dioxide molecules, the addition to fur to the sofa-environment, the exchange of relatively pure water in one location with cat piss in another, and so forth. If something is not such as to characteristically explain these things, then it is not a cat. To be more explicit: a being that does not actually do enough such explaining, even if it was once a cat, will cease to be a cat—it will become a dead cat. But what we have here in this locked room is a *live* cat; and since live cats *have to* explain the exchange of relatively pure water in one location with cat piss in another, we know what the best explanation for the emptying of the bowl is: the cat drank it. The fixing on this explanation is *explanans*-driven: there is a feature of the situation that *must* explain, and so we incorporate it into our explanation.\(^9\)

Importantly, explanans-driven explanations are not merely explanandum-driven explanations in which the existence of one of the possible explanans is posited. The point, instead, is that the existence of one of the possible explanans is posited whose nature is such that it *must* do the required explanatory work. For example, even if we postulate the existence of both sunlight and a cat, both of which are capable of explaining the empty bowl, the cat explanation is superior because, while it is part of what it is to be a cat that one explain the disappearance of water, the same is not true of sunlight. The sunlight can exist without evaporating water, but the cat cannot exist without taking in water (at least not for long).

Though an explanans-driven approach to God and morality will clearly lack apologetic value, Murphy argues that, regardless of whether an explanandum-driven approach is successful, traditional theists ought to approach the relationship between God

and morality in an explanans-driven way.\textsuperscript{10} Doing so, he thinks, yields the interesting conclusion that moral facts depend on God.\textsuperscript{11} Because he thinks that it is divine sovereignty, in particular, that leads to a theistic moral theory, we can call his argument the “Sovereignty Argument.”\textsuperscript{12}

\textit{Sovereignty Argument:}

(i) God is the greatest possible being.
(ii) Sovereignty is a perfection.
(iii) Divine sovereignty implies that there is nothing explanation-eligible that is not explained by God.
(iv) Morality is explanation eligible.
(v) So, morality must be explained by God.

The motivation for premise i goes back at least as far as Anselm, who defined God as “That than which none greater can be conceived,” a definition which formed the basis for his now famous ontological argument for the existence of God.\textsuperscript{13} But regardless of whether or not one finds Anselm’s ontological argument persuasive, his conception of God as a maximally perfect being has been enormously influential in philosophical theology, generating the methodology of \textit{perfect being theology}.\textsuperscript{14} Perfect being theology

\textsuperscript{10} Again, this is not to say that one must \textit{exclusively} take an explanans-driven approach to the relationship between God and morality. As I indicated above, the approaches are not mutually exclusive. In fact, not only are both approaches compatible, but as Murphy himself recognizes, the explanandum-driven considerations are more central. See \textit{ibid.}, 3.

\textsuperscript{11} This is interesting because most contemporary moral philosophers assume that theism makes no essential difference to ethics, but if Murphy is right, most contemporary moral philosophers are wrong; God’s existence pushes us towards a theistic account of morality. See \textit{ibid.}, 5-6.

\textsuperscript{12} Baggett and Walls cite several examples of divine sovereignty motivating philosophical theories, including: “Augustine’s ‘divine ideas tradition’; Leibniz’s effort to root mathematical truth in God’s noetic activity; Aquinas’s insistence that anything that in any way is, is from God; Berkeley’s radical idealism; Descartes’ view of constant creation; and Jonathan Edwards’s...attempt at temporal parts theory—all of these were efforts motivated by the theological conviction that God is at the root of all that is.” Baggett and Walls, \textit{Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 87.


\textsuperscript{14} Thomas Morris was an early pioneer and has been perhaps the most prominent champion of this approach. See Thomas V. Morris, ed., \textit{The Concept of God}, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Thomas V. Morris, \textit{Anselmian Explorations} (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987). See also Yujin
is a method for arriving at necessary truths about God which are deduced from the concept of God as a perfect being (premise i above) combined with premises concerning what a perfect being must be like (premise ii above). And as Murphy points out,

“Practitioners of perfect being theology also tend to concern themselves with the further implications that we can draw from God’s having these perfections” (premise iii and iv above).^{15}

Premise i, then, is supposed to be true by definition. One could either take it as a stipulative definition, or one might take it as a substantive analysis of the concept of God. Alternatively, one might think that the fact that God is a maximally perfect being is either directly revealed in or inferred from the special revelation of God provided in, say, the Judeo-Christian scriptures.^{16} William Wainwright, for example, argues that the great monotheistic religions present God as an object worthy of total devotion, which he argues implies that God is maximally perfect.^{17} Because my concern is an internal debate between perfect being theologians concerning the relationship between morality and God,

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^{15} Mark Murphy, Op cit., 7.

^{16} Now, one might think that the sovereignty argument, which quite explicitly relies on perfect being theology, is superfluous for the traditional theist who accepts the Judeo-Christian scriptures as divine revelations. After all, central to the Judeo-Christian scriptures (and consequently the religious traditions that accept such scriptures as divine revelations) is the conception of God as creator of the entire world. For a defense of this conception of God, see Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, Creation out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical, and Scientific Exploration (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004); William Lane Craig, God Over All: Divine Aseity and the Challenge of Platonism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). Others, by contrast, have argued that the God of the Bible and the God that Anselm describe are not identical. I think that such people are mistaken. For a defense that the God of the Bible is the God of Anselm, see William Wainwright, “Two (or Maybe One and a Half) Cheers for Perfect Being Theology,” Philo 12.2 (2009): 228-232; Brian Leftow, “Why Perfect Being Theology?” International Journal for Philosophy of Religion 69 (2011): 103-118; Thomas V. Morris, “The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Anselm,” in Anselmian Explorations, 10-25; Thomas V. Morris, “Introduction,” in Thomas Morris, The Concept of God, 2-10; Thomas V. Morris, Our Idea of God (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2002), 27-45. See also Eleonore Stump, The God of the Bible and the God of the Philosophers (Milwaukee, WI, Marquette University Press, 2016).

^{17} William Wainwright, op. cit.
conceived of as a perfect being, it doesn’t matter for my purposes whether the God of the Bible is the God of perfect being theology or whether the perfect being theologian’s definition of God is taken as stipulative or as a substantive analysis. So, in order to avoid getting bogged down in debates about the correct concept of God, we may, for my purposes, simply take the definition as stipulative. The crucial premises, then, are premises ii-iv.

In order to evaluate premise ii, we first need to get a clearer sense both of what a perfection is and what sovereignty consists in. According to Morris, the central claim of perfect being theology is the following:

\[(G) \text{ God is a being with the greatest possible array of compossible great-making properties.}\]  

A great-making property is any property that bestows its bearer with some degree of intrinsic value. An array of properties are compossible when it is metaphysically possible that they all be borne by the same individual at the same time. The task of the perfect being theologian, then, is to determine which properties are intrinsically good, can be exemplified together, and are such that their additive value is greater than any other possible array of properties. A perfection may be defined as any property that is among the greatest possible array of compossible great-making properties. Importantly, it does not follow from the fact that a property is a great-making property that it is a perfection. After all, a property might be intrinsically good to have but be incompatible with other properties that it is intrinsically good to have. Therefore, as Morris points out, “The question of whether a particular array of attributes can be constitutive of deity, or can be

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thought in any way to characterize God, will turn in part on a consideration of whether precise analyses of these attributes show them to be composable, or mutually consistent.”

Consequently, the justification for this premise will depend on the justification for thinking both that sovereignty is a great-making property and that it is compatible with other divine perfections. Let us begin by considering whether sovereignty is a great-making property.

To determine whether sovereignty is a great-making property, we need some account of what sovereignty is supposed to be. Murphy characterizes it as follows: “Sovereignty involves sourcehood and control: for some being to be sovereign over a domain is for things in that domain to be dependent on that being for their existence/actuality and to have their character be controlled by facts about that thing.”

Note that sovereignty, so construed, does not entail that God has discretion with respect to the existence or character of all the entities over which he is sovereign. Perfect being theologians typically agree that God does have some discretion with respect to some entities, but most deny that divine perfection entails that God has discretion over all the entities that depend on him. For example, God might have discretion with respect to whether or not he creates a physical universe and the nature and existence of the beings that occupy it, but there might be other entities (e.g., abstract objects) that—though they depend on God—God does not have any discretion with respect to their nature or

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20 The same is true, of course, for any purported divine perfection.
21 Murphy, op. cit., 10.
existence. Such entities, if they exist, exist necessarily; nevertheless, they depend on
God.  

The received view amongst perfect being theologians is that sovereignty, so
construed, is among the divine perfections. But why think so? Here, as Murphy points,
out, one might appeal to brute intuitions concerning sovereignty and perfection, argue
that sovereignty best captures particular judgments we make concerning creation, argue
that sovereignty explains other, less controversial divine perfections, or argue that
sovereignty is included within other, less controversial divine perfections. Both van
Inwagen and Morris, for example, take the last strategy. Both argue that omnipotence,
which—even if perfect being theologians disagree about the exact analysis of that
property—is among the least controversial perfections of God, entails that God is the
creator of all else that exists. Murphy, however, argues that the arguments of Morris
and van Inwagen fail. Instead, his defense of premise ii involves a thought experiment
in which a particle pops into existence uncaused out of nothing. He thinks that this
scenario is incompatible with the existence of a perfect being. It does not threaten
omnipotence or omniscience, however, since God may well have known that the particle
would have sprung into existence unless it was prevented from doing so, and God, being
omnipotent, has the power to prevent the particle from coming into existence. As he sees
it, the problem is that the renegade particle is incompatible with God’s being

22 For discussion on the notion of discretion and dependence, see William Wainwright, Religion and
Morality (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 94; C. Stephen Evans, God and Moral Obligation
23 For some difficulties with relying on our intuitions in such cases, see Wainwright, “Two (or Maybe One
and a Half) Cheers for Perfect Being Theology, 232-238.
24 Murphy, op. cit., 7, 11.
God of Abraham, Isaac, and Anselm,” 13.
26 See Murphy, op. cit., 9.
fundamentally initiative rather than reactive. Though God could prevent the particle from coming into existence, God is reactive. He is not the source of its coming into being. The intuition is that perfect beings are active; they are the source of everything that comes into being.\textsuperscript{27}

It seems to me that this does not constitute much of an argument. Instead, given Murphy’s definition of sovereignty, either it begs the question, or—perhaps more charitably—it merely expresses the intuition that sovereignty is a great-making property. Indeed, I suspect that most perfect being theologians base their belief that God is sovereign on the intuition that sovereignty is a great-making property. Plantinga explicitly identifies it as an intuition, which he calls the sovereignty-aseity intuition: the fundamental conviction that everything distinct from God must depend on God for its existence, and God must be such as not to depend on anything distinct from himself for his existence.\textsuperscript{28} Murphy notes that there is a dearth of arguments in favor of the idea that sovereignty is a divine perfection and hypothesizes that this may be due to the fact that it is obvious. Indeed, an entire book was recently devoted to the relationship between God and abstract objects in which the sovereignty-aseity intuition seems to be taken for granted and when formalized as the principle, AD, helps to generate one of the “inconsistent triad” that constitutes the central problem of the book.

\begin{center}
AD: (i) God does not depend on anything distinct from Himself for his existing, and (ii) everything distinct from God depends on God’s creative activity for its existing.\textsuperscript{29}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{27} See Murphy, \textit{op. cit.}, 9-10. Of course, one might doubt whether sovereignty truly is a great-making property. Nevertheless, that sovereignty is a great-making feature—indeed, that it is a divine perfection—is a belief that is widely held amongst perfect being theologians.

\textsuperscript{28} Alvin Plantinga, \textit{Does God have a Nature?} (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1980), 26-61.

\textsuperscript{29} The other two assumptions are that abstract objects exist and that if abstract objects exist, they are independent of God. See Paul M. Gould, “Introduction to the Problem of God and Abstract Objects,” in \textit{Beyond the Control of God?: Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects}, ed., Paul M. Gould
Perhaps Murphy’s thought experiment helps to elicit the sovereignty-aseity intuition, thereby providing some support for AD. Even Morris, who as we saw also offers an argument that sovereignty is a divine perfection, elsewhere claims that something like AD is “foundational,” which suggests that he too might be driven by the sovereignty-aseity intuition. In his chapter entitled, “Creation” in Our Idea of God, a book in which he follows the methodology of perfect being theology in order to explicate the nature of God, Morris almost immediately states AD and without offering an argument goes on to claim, “If God is the greatest possible being, a maximally perfect source of existence, then he is not just one more item in the inventory of reality. He is the hub of the wheel, the center and focus, the ultimate support, of all. The difference between theism and atheism is thus not just a disagreement over whether one entity or a certain description exists or not. It is a disagreement over the origin, and thus the ultimate nature, of everything.” So, even if Morris’, van Inwagen’s, and Murphy’s arguments fail as arguments, the received view amongst perfect being theologians remains that sovereignty, so construed, is among the divine perfections, a conviction that I have suggested is ultimately based on the sovereignty-aseity intuition.

The sovereignty-aseity intuition, however, does not directly support AD—much less the claim that sovereignty is a divine perfection. This is because divine perfections are those properties that are part of the greatest possible array of compossible great-

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(New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014). 1-19. Two remarks concerning AD are in order. 1) I think Gould intends God’s creative activity to be understood broadly to include not merely causal relations but other sorts of ontological dependence relations. 2) As Gould’s book makes clear, not all theists who lay claim to the title “traditional theist” do, in fact, endorse AD. I suspect that all contributors agree that God’s sovereignty extends to facts that are explanation-eligible but disagree about the substantive question concerning which facts are explanation-eligible. More on this below.

30 Morris, Our Idea of God, 155.
making properties, and we have not been given any reason yet to think that sovereignty is part of that array. But even one who shares the sovereignty-aseity intuition might be skeptical that we are—and perhaps could ever be—justified in believing that. One difficulty here concerns the fact that there might be great-making properties that are completely beyond our ken. If so, then it is hard to see how we could ever be confident that any given great-making property, X, is among the greatest possible array of great-making properties because there is no way to tell whether X is compatible with the great-making properties that do constitute perfections and of which we have no knowledge.31

This is a serious worry about the methodology of perfect being theology. In response, however, a perfect being theologian might claim that unless there is some positive reason to think that X is incompatible with some divine perfection, we are justified in taking X to be among the divine perfections. The justification, of course, is defeasible, but it is justification nonetheless. Unfortunately, this response is not entirely satisfying. Still, as I say above, for present purposes, I am concerned with an intramural debate among perfect being theologians, and as I see it, the challenge above is a challenge to the very viability of perfect being theology as a methodology.32 For present purposes, then, I suggest we bracket such extramural debates and push on to the final premise.

Premise iv states that morality is explanation-eligible. Unfortunately, it is not perfectly clear what Murphy has in mind when he speaks of explanation-eligibility.

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31 Another difficulty concerns whether there might be more than one greatest possible array of great-making properties.

32 Even if, for the reasons given above, we don’t or can’t know whether or not sovereignty is a perfection (as opposed to a mere great-making property), we might still want to see whether the attributes that perfect being theologians tend to regard as divine perfections are compatible with each other and with the way we otherwise believe the world to be.
Although he uses the expression on several occasions, as far as I can tell, he never explicitly defines or even characterizes what he means. We may attempt to get a sense, however, by unpacking Murphy’s target. Murphy’s goal is to provide a theistic explanation of moral facts. The kind of explanation he aims to provide is metaphysical; that is, he seeks to identify a dependence relationship between divine facts and moral facts. By “moral facts,” he means “obtaining states of affairs that we would typically characterize by saying ‘A is morally required to φ.”33 In short, then, Murphy is looking for a relationship between facts about God and facts about moral obligations and prohibitions that identifies how the latter depend on the former. I take it that this much is relatively clear. But what makes a fact explanation-eligible? Though he never explicitly answer this question, we may be able to infer what he has in mind from the following passage:

> It does not seem to be part of what it is to be pain that it is morally necessary not to inflict it without further reason to do so…, nor is it part of what it is to be a harmless child that it is morally necessary that one not aim at that child’s death or injury. So even if it is true that, in all possible worlds, it is morally necessary that everyone refrain from indiscriminate infliction of pain and it is morally necessary that everyone refrain from harming children, that is no basis to suppose that we need no explanation of these moral necessities’ holding. Moral Facts do not seem to be self-explanatory. Nor again do they seem to be brute…So we should expect that moral facts, all of them, are explanation-eligible.

Now, given that he infers that moral facts are explanation-eligible from the alleged fact that they are neither self-explanatory nor brute,34 one possibility is that by “explanation-eligible” Murphy simply means “has an explanation” or better “has an explanation in a

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33 Murphy, op cit., 46.
distinct obtaining state of affairs.” However, that strikes me as an odd definition of “explanation-eligible;” the concept of “eligibility” seems to be doing no work. However, if we understand brute facts to be facts that could not have an explanation (rather than facts that do not have an explanation), then the above quote from Murphy suggests that by “explanation-eligible” Murphy means something like “is such that it is metaphysically possible to have an explanation” (in a distinct obtaining state of affairs).

But why think that each moral fact is such that it is metaphysically possible that it be explained by some distinct obtaining (non-moral)\textsuperscript{35} state of affairs? The quote from Murphy provided above provides some reason for thinking that moral facts are not self-explanatory. So, assuming that being self-explanatory, brute, or explanation-eligible exhaust the options, we need some reason to suppose that moral facts are not brute. In the quote above, Murphy claims that they do not seem to be brute. Perhaps there is not much more that can be said by way of argument. Murphy, however, already takes himself to have offered an argument that moral facts are not brute. In the first chapter of his book he argues that every moral fact is explained by a moral law. If that argument is sound, then no moral facts are brute. Unfortunately, it seems to me that Murphy’s argument that every moral fact is explained by a moral law presupposes that moral facts are not brute. In a summary of the argument that he provides in chapter one, Murphy states that the proof that every fact is explained by a moral law is that no moral facts are mere “danglers.”\textsuperscript{36} He cites Sidgwick approvingly when Sidgwick writes:

\textsuperscript{35} Murphy entertains the idea that some moral facts might be explained by other moral facts, but he argues that such explanations presuppose that the moral facts in the explanans are law-regulated. See, \textit{op. cit.}, 51-60.

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Ibid.}, 50.
There seems…to be this difference between our conceptions of ethical and physical objectivity respectively: that we commonly refuse to admit in the case of the former—what experience compels us to admit as regards the latter—variations for which we can discover no rational explanation. In the variety of coexistent physical facts we find an accidental or arbitrary element in which we have to acquiesce…But within the range of our cognitions of right and wrong, it will be generally agreed that we cannot admit a similar unexplained variation.\(^{37}\)

If one wishes to call this an argument, it clearly begs the question as it amounts to no more than a brute intuition or seeming that there is something unsatisfactory about brute moral facts.

Fortunately, Murphy offers an additional argument that may succeed to at least some degree. He assumes that moral properties supervene on non-moral properties and claims that the supervenience relation should be understood to be asymmetric. He writes, “It is not merely necessary that if an action exhibits these nonmoral properties then it will exhibit this moral property; it is that by exhibiting these nonmoral properties, an action thereby will exhibit this moral property.”\(^{38}\) But granting his preferred view of the moral law according to which a moral law consists in natural properties morally necessitating certain kinds of responses (e.g., actions), we can see that the asymmetric supervenience relationship that holds between moral properties and nonmoral properties, is precisely what it is involved in moral laws.

It is not clear whether this argument works, however. I suspect that—like the previous argument—it begs the question. Given that Murphy assumes both that moral properties supervene on non-moral properties and that the supervenience relation is

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\(^{38}\) Murphy, *op. cit.*, 51
asymmetric, it seems he has not provided an argument that moral laws explain moral facts if, as he explicitly claims, the supervenience relation “is just what is involved in a moral law.” Nevertheless, if Murphy is right that the supervenience relation that holds between the moral and the non-moral “is just what is involved in a moral law,” then premise iv of the sovereignty argument seems to be in good standing. For as Murphy recognizes, the supervenience of the moral on the non-moral is a datum in ethical theorizing. In the context of an argument like the sovereignty argument, it is a premise that is safe to take for granted. It seems to me, then, that each of the premises of the sovereignty argument is plausible. Morality is explained by God.

1.3 Varieties of Theistic Metaethics

Murphy thinks that it is arguments like the sovereignty argument that perpetually lead many theists to adopt some version of theological voluntarism because theological voluntarism—unlike other metaethical accounts—gives God a central role in morality, where God properly belongs. Theological voluntarism is a family of views concerning the relationship between God and some moral statuses (e.g., being morally good, being morally right, etc.) of some class of entities (e.g., actions, character traits, or states of affairs). More specifically, a theological voluntarist with respect to a given moral status of some class of entities holds that it is something about the divine will that determines the moral status of the members in that class of entities. For example, a theological

39 Ibid.
voluntarist with respect to moral goodness of actions holds that some aspect or manifestation of God’s will determines the moral goodness of actions.

As Quinn helpfully notes, any version of theological voluntarism will need to fill out the following schema:

Schema: Ethical status E bears dependency relation D to divine feature F.\(^{40}\)

However, Murphy and many others (myself included) think that theological voluntarism is deeply problematic, subject to powerful explanandum-driven objections. Although something like the sovereignty argument may motivate some to defend some version of theological voluntarism, it is important to notice that neither the sovereignty argument nor Quinn’s schema requires that God’s will (or some aspect or expression thereof) determine or explain the moral status of any class of entities; feature F may be some aspect or expression of the divine will, but it may, instead, refer to some non-voluntaristic aspect of the divine nature itself. So, although Quinn is right that all theological voluntarists will need to fill out the above schema, the same is true for anyone who thinks that Murphy’s Sovereignty Argument (as cited above or some suitably modified version thereof) is sound. That is, anyone who thinks that morality depends on or is explained by God must fill in the schema. In the remainder of the chapter, I will identify and explain some of the ways in which one might fill in Quinn’s schema. I begin by identifying the various moral statuses that allegedly depend in some way on some divine feature or other.

1.3.1 Moral Statuses

Historically, many defenders and critics of theological voluntarism have not carefully distinguished between the different kinds of moral properties in the context of developing, defending, or criticizing theological voluntarism. It was widely assumed that theological voluntarists are committed to the dependence of all moral properties on some aspect of God’s will. For example, A. C. Ewing seems to assume that the theological voluntarist purports to explain both deontic as well as evaluative properties when he writes, “If ‘right’ and ‘good’ are themselves defined in terms of the commands of God, God cannot command anything because it is right or good, since this would only mean that He commanded it because he commanded it, and therefore there is no reason whatever for His commands, which become purely arbitrary.”41 However, with the publication of his article, “A Modified Divine Command Conception of Ethical Wrongness” in 1973, Adams began to carefully distinguish deontic moral properties from evaluative moral properties and stressed that he intends his version of theological voluntarism to account only for the former.42 Since then, most theological voluntarists have followed Adams in restricting the scope of moral properties that are accounted for in theological voluntarist terms to deontic (or even a proper subset of the deontic) moral properties. That is, they claim that only properties belonging to the obligation family, i.e., rightness, wrongness, and permissibility, depend on some aspect or expression of

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42 Adams cites John Locke, Richard Cumberland, Samuel Pufendorf, and Francisco Suarez as predecessors of his restricted theological voluntarist account.
God’s will. Given that I will be examining the relationship between God and morality in an explanans-driven way—driven, in particular, by the sovereignty of God—it is important that God’s sovereignty extend to all moral properties that are explanation eligible. The simplest way to do that is to account for all such moral properties in terms of God’s will. Nevertheless, despite its ability to satisfy God’s sovereignty, I think it is best to follow Adams by focusing attention on restricted theological voluntarist accounts according to which only the moral properties from the obligation family are accounted for in terms of some aspect or expression of God’s will. Quinn provides a trio of statements that nicely capture the sort of view on which I will focus. I modify them slightly in order to remain neutral about the other two variables to be discussed in the sections immediately to follow.

(P1) For all actions A, (i) A is morally permissible if and only if God does not will (in the relevant sense) that A not be performed; and (ii) if A is morally permissible, what makes A morally permissible is it not being the case that God wills in the relevant sense that A not be performed.

(P2) For all actions A, (i) A is morally wrong if and only if God wills (in the relevant sense) that A not be performed; and (ii) if A is morally wrong, what makes A morally wrong is God’s willing (in the relevant sense) that A not be performed.

(P3) For all actions A, (i) A is morally obligatory if and only if God wills (in the relevant sense) that A be performed; and (ii) if A is morally obligatory, what makes A morally obligatory is God’s willing (in the relevant sense) that A be performed.

Nevertheless, as John Milliken points out, many contemporary critics of theological voluntarism continue to assume that theological voluntarists must (or, at least, do) offer voluntaristic accounts of all moral properties. He cites as examples, Erik Wielenberg, James, Rachels, Kai Neilson, and David Brink. See Milliken’s, “Euthyphro, the Good, and the Right,” *Philosophia Christi* 11.1 (2009): 150-1.

Quinn, “Theological Voluntarism,” 72-73.
As I will explain in chapter two, a version of theological voluntarism like the one codified in the above principles—because it accounts only for the properties belonging to the obligation family in terms of the relevant aspect of the divine will—allows the theological voluntarist to avoid two longstanding objections associated with the Euthyphro dilemma. In chapter three, I will consider objections that purport to spell trouble even for restricted versions of theological voluntarism.

1.3.2 Divine Features

The most familiar and most well developed theistic metaethical accounts have been versions of divine command theory (DCT). Divine command theorists take God’s commands to be the divine feature on which moral properties depend. However, other divine features have been suggested as the basis of moral properties. Indeed, in what is perhaps the most famous philosophical discussion of theistic ethics, Plato’s Euthyphro, it is not God’s commands that determine moral properties; it is, rather, God’s attitudes.\(^{45}\) According to Euthyphro, the pious is what all the gods love. Similarly, some contemporary defenders of theistic metaethics have thought that moral properties depend most fundamentally on God’s attitudes rather than his act of commanding. Views of this sort are typically classified as divine will theories (DWT). Different attitudes associated

\(^{45}\) In fact, it is not clear whether the Euthyphro is a dialogue about morality; as I go on to mention, the central topic of Euthyphro is the nature of piety. However, many philosophers have found in the Euthyphro a view that is suggestive of a theological voluntarist account of morality.
with the divine will have been proposed, including: divine desires,\textsuperscript{46} divine intentions,\textsuperscript{47} divine preferences,\textsuperscript{48} and divine attitudes of approval and disapproval.\textsuperscript{49} \textsuperscript{50}

Perhaps the initial \textit{distinctively theistic} reason for thinking that moral properties depend on God’s commands is the centrality within the great monotheistic religions of the theme of God as commander and the importance of obedience to his commands. However, similar reasons have been offered to prefer DWT over DCT, \textit{viz.}, the fact that within theistic traditions the idea of knowing and doing God’s will is paramount. Clearly, neither of these reasons is very deep. Fortunately, the still lively debate between these two species of theological voluntarism does not center on whether it is God’s will or his commands that are more central to the various theistic traditions. Instead, various explanandum-centered considerations come to the fore. I cannot here settle the issue decisively in favor of either view, nor will I determine which of the two views is more plausible.\textsuperscript{51} Instead, with respect to each of the remaining two variables in Quinn’s schema, I intend to proceed as follows: after getting some of the candidates on the table, I will simply identify what I take to be the most prominent theistic metaethical account as the initial target—noting as the dissertation progresses when other theistic accounts fare better with respect to the various objections that arise. However, though I do not here


\textsuperscript{48} Thomas L. Carson, \textit{Value and the Good Life} (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000).


\textsuperscript{50} For present purposes, I leave it open whether some of the above terms refer to the same mental states.

\textsuperscript{51} One reason I cannot do so is that too many variables are in play. As I mentioned above, a full theistic metaethical account will identify each of the variables in Quinn’s schema, and without fixing the other variables, \textit{viz.}, variables E (ethical status) and D (dependence relation), it is difficult to fully assess the merits of F (divine feature).
settle whether DCT or some version of DWT is preferable, it will prove fruitful to examine, however briefly, some of the considerations that are in play in the debate between them.

One potential reason to prefer DCT to DWT is this: not everything that is wrong is in every way contrary to God’s will. Theologians typically agree that, given God’s sovereignty, nothing could happen that is contrary to God’s will. But, of course, some things can and do happen that are morally wrong. So, contra DWT, obligations cannot depend on God’s will. Divine will theorists, however, have a ready response. Theologians typically distinguish between God’s antecedent will and his consequent will. Adams defines them as follows: “God’s antecedent will is God’s preference regarding a particular issue considered rather narrowly in itself, other things being equal. God’s consequent will is God’s preference regarding the matter, all things considered.” With this distinction in mind, then, the divine will theorist should affirm that although nothing happens contrary to God’s consequent will, things can (and often do) happen contrary to God’s antecedent will. For example, though God might antecedently will that I refrain from harming my neighbor; nevertheless, because God might have overriding reasons for allowing me to freely choose to do other than what God antecedently wills that I do, God might consequentially will that I harm my neighbor. The divine will theorist, therefore, can avoid the above objection simply by specifying that it is God’s antecedent will on which the relevant moral status depends.

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Adams, however, still finds this view problematic because “we are sometimes morally obliged to make the best of a bad situation by doing something that a good God would not have preferred antecedently, other things being equal.” Murphy and Quinn respond by providing a more robust account of God’s antecedent will. Both think that God’s antecedent will involves both preferences and intentions, and both agree that obligations depend on God’s antecedent intentions. God’s antecedent intentions are what God prefers when he takes into account all the relevant circumstances other than the actual choice. So, while God may not antecedently prefer that I apologize for breaking my promise (since he doesn’t antecedently prefer that I break my promise, and he doesn’t antecedently prefer that I apologize when I committed no wrong), he does antecedently intend that I apologize since this is what God prefers when he takes into account all the relevant circumstances, including the fact that I have broken a promise and excluding my choice to apologize or refrain from apologizing.

Adams no longer thinks that the above reason favors DCT over DWT. He now thinks that the best way to establish the superiority of DCT over DWT is to consider our intuitions about cases in which they come apart, which they might do in one of two ways. Cases of the first sort are cases in which God commands that we perform some action, φ, but does not will that we φ. Cases of the second sort are cases in which God wills that we perform some action, φ but does not command us to φ. Wierenga thinks that God’s command to Abraham to kill his son, Isaac, is a case of the first sort, and he argues that such a case supports DWT because though God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac,

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53 Ibid.
God did not will that he do it. “Rather, God issued that command to reveal what He really wanted, or to induce Abraham to do what he really wanted, which was that Abraham, out of a desire to obey God, prepare to sacrifice Isaac.”55 This gives us the verdict that we want: Abraham was not obligated to sacrifice his son. Adams and Murphy, however, argue that cases of this first sort are impossible56 since they seem to involve God’s issuing commands insincerely.57 Therefore, Adams focuses his attention on cases of the second sort, and he offers three reasons for thinking that such cases (i.e., cases in which God wills that we φ, but does not command us to φ) favor DCT over DWT. Unfortunately, for Adams and other divine command theorists, each of his arguments are inconclusive.

The first reason Adams offers concerns supererogation. He recognizes that while it is controversial within theistic traditions whether God has left any actions supererogatory, Adams is convinced that some actions are indeed supererogatory. In any case, it seems to him a vice of a metaethical theory if it rules out the very possibility of supererogation. At one time Adams thought that DWT did rule out the very possibility of supererogation.58 He concedes now that they do not; nevertheless, the versions of DWT that are compatible with supererogation come with a cost. According to Adams, DWT can allow for supererogation if they take “the existence of the obligation, rather than the

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56 Adams, therefore, gives quite a different treatment of the story of Abraham and Isaac. See op. cit., 277-291.
doing of the deed, as the object of the divine volition that is to ground obligation.” This allows the divine will theorist to accommodate supererogation insofar as it makes room for God to antecedently prefer, e.g., that one donate half their income to charity while not antecedently preferring that it be obligatory that one donate half their income to charity. The cost with such a view, however, is that it is incongruous with a view that Adams finds independently plausible, viz., that there is a strong connection between obligation and the appropriateness of social pressure. Adams goes to great lengths to argue that obligations arise only when demands are actually made, a fact which he thinks is incompatible with DWT.

To begin, however, it is unclear whether something like Adams’ social account of obligations is correct. However, even if it is, it is not clear that views of that sort are incompatible with DWT. One might agree with Adams that obligations are generated only in social contexts while denying that they must be expressed as demands. Matthew Carey Jordan, for example, agrees with Adams that meaningful relationships often generate reasons—indeed, highly motivating reasons—for action, but he thinks that the reasons are often generated by something other than a command. He writes, “In a good marriage, for example, one does not act in ways known to be displeasing to one’s spouse and then expect to be excused merely on the basis that one was not commanded (or even

59 Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 261. For criticism of this sort of divine will account, see Murphy, “Divine Command, Divine Will, and Moral Obligation,” 10-16. Murphy and Quinn defend a different strategy that makes DWT consistent with supererogation; see Murphy, *ibid.*, 16-19; Quinn, *op. cit.* For yet another divine will account that allows for the possibility of supererogation, see Matthew Carey Jordan, “Divine Attitudes, Divine Commands, and the Modal Status of Moral Truths,” 46.

60 See Adams, *op. cit.*, 231-248.

61 I discuss Adams’ social account of obligations in chapter 2 and 3. For an explication and defense of a similar sort of social account of obligations, see Stephen Darwall, *The Second Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).
asked) to refrain from doing so. Meaningful relationships don’t work like that.”

Of course, Adams might agree that a reason is generated in the case that Jordan imagines—perhaps even a decisive reason. Nevertheless, presumably he would deny that an obligation is generated. In general, Adams denies that there is a tight connection between what you are morally obligated to do and what would be best for you to do. The point, however, is that, at least in the context of close relationships, it seems perfectly appropriate to hold others accountable for actions that they know are displeasing to you. For example, it seems a lame excuse to claim that because my wife did not command me to help her unload the dishwasher, it is inappropriate for her (and perhaps others) to blame me. If this is right, DWT is not incompatible with the essential elements of Adams’ social theory of obligations.

Perhaps the most powerful reason to prefer DCT over DWT involves a dilemma for DWT. Either God’s will must be expressed in order to generate an obligation, or it does not. If it does, then there is basically no difference between DWT and DCT because God’s commands just are expressions of his will. Furthermore, the other alternative—that God’s will need not be expressed in order to generate obligations—yields an unsavory and implausible view of divine-human relations. In particular, it yields a view in which God’s preferences impose obligations without even being communicated, much less issuing in a command. But, as Adams argues, “Games in which one party incurs

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guilt for failing to guess the unexpressed wishes of the other party are not nice games. They are no nicer if God is thought of as a party to them.”

Unfortunately for Adams, this objection is not persuasive either. First, what is driving Adams’ argument seems to be a concern that obligations must be understood in terms of what God *requires* of us. But as Adams points out, “Requiring is something people *do* in relation to each other. It essentially involves communicative *acts*.” But even if Adams is right about that, even if no obligation could arise without God’s preferences being revealed in some way, it does not follow that any expression of God’s preferences constitutes a command. Instead, God might simply communicate to us his desire, e.g., that we keep our promises without commanding us to do so. Adams might respond by claiming that, given the authority structure inherent in the divine-human relationship, God’s communicating his preferences to us would have the same force as a command. It is not clear, however, whether this helps Adams. Instead, it seems to me to concede the point to the divine will theorist. God’s preferences regarding human behavior—at least when they are communicated to humans—generate obligations for them.

But even if the above defense of DWT fails and moral obligations do depend on God’s commands, Murphy argues that this only proves that the expression of God’s will is at least a *validating condition* of moral obligation. The ultimate ground, however, could still be the divine will. Here Adams concedes, claiming, “What I mean to insist on

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64 Adams, *op. cit.*, 261.
66 This depends on what a command is. If, as seems plausible to me, commands must be expressed as imperatives, then I think that what I say here is correct. However, if Austin is right that a command is an expression of one’s will backed up with the force of punishment of some kind, then Adams may right.
is just that the divine will must be communicated in order to impose obligations. As long as that is true, I don’t see why we should not interpret obligation in terms of divine commands; I also don’t see why we should not regard the commands as at least part of the grounds of obligations.”67 Still, it seems to me that unless Adams has some good reason for thinking that God’s expression of his will necessarily involves his issuing a command, it is not at all clear why a theological voluntarist has any reason to think that God’s commands are required even in part to explain our moral obligations.

Nevertheless, because of its historical ascendency and because the most developed theological voluntarist accounts are versions of DCT, I will initially focus on theistic accounts of morality that take feature F to be divine commands. As the dissertation progresses and objections are raised, however, I will return to accounts which take the pertinent divine feature to be a feature of the divine will or, more generally, the divine nature.

1.3.3 DEPENDENCE RELATIONS

All theistic metaethical accounts take at least some moral properties to depend on some feature or features of God. As explained in the previous two sections, my focus—at least initially—will be on a restricted version of DCT according to which only the deontic moral properties depend on God’s commands and prohibitions. But in what way do such deontic properties depend on God’s commands and prohibitions? A variety of

67 Ibid.
options has been proposed. According to what might be called the analysis view, “right” means “commanded by God,” “wrong” means “forbidden by God,” and “permissible” means “neither commanded nor forbidden by God.” G.E.M. Anscombe provided a qualified defense of this view in her famous article, “Modern Moral Philosophy.” 68 Adams defended a view of this kind in his “A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness.” Unlike Anscombe, however, Adams offered it as a theory not of what we all mean by “right” and “wrong” but as a theory of what those terms mean in Judeo-Christian religious ethical discourse. It was not long, however, before Adams abandoned this view, 69 and as far as I am aware, there are no longer any defenders of the analysis view. In contrast to the analysis view, which is a view about moral semantics, contemporary defenders of divine command theory offer accounts according to which moral properties ontologically depend on God’s commands. And this, as promised above, is my target.

Both John Hare and Quinn propose one such ontological view, which, following Murphy, we might call the supervenience view. 70 According to the supervenience view, moral facts depend on God’s commands insofar as they supervene on God’s commands. Of course, much more needs to be said about the supervenience relationship to make more perspicuous the sort of ontological dependence that is involved. The causal view, which was first proposed by Quinn 71 and later modified and defended by both Wierenga

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70 See John Hare, *God’s Call: Moral Realism, God’s Commands, and Human Autonomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); Quinn, “Theological Voluntarism,” 68-70.  
and Quinn,\textsuperscript{72} is more explicit about the ontological dependence relation. According to it, God’s commands cause actions to be obligatory, his prohibitions cause actions to be wrong, and his doing neither causes actions to be permissible. In his most recent defense of the causal view, Quinn, however, is careful to distinguish the causal relation that he has mind in which the relevant divine feature (which for him is the divine will) is the total, exclusive, active, and immediate necessitating cause of our obligations from those causal relations that are familiar from science and everyday life. Murphy, however, argues that the causal view faces three powerful objections, and that when one specifies the supervenience view so as to distinguish it from the competing views, it either faces the same three objections that he presses against the causal view, or else it is unmotivated.\textsuperscript{73}

As with the preceding two sections, what is currently the most popular, perhaps the most plausible, and, consequently, the view on which I will be focusing is the reductive property-identification view developed by Robert Adams.\textsuperscript{74} According to this view, just as it is a necessary \textit{a posteriori} truth that the property of being water is identical to the property of being H2O, it is a necessary \textit{a posteriori} truth that the property of being morally right (obligatory) is identical to the property of being commanded by God, and the property of being morally wrong is identical to the property of being forbidden by God. Adams’ defense of this claim is based on the view that “The nature of moral obligation is not given by the meanings of the words, such as ‘right’,

\textsuperscript{73} For criticism of both the causal and supervenience views, see Murphy, \textit{op. cit.}, section 2.4. I discuss this issue further in chapter 3, section 3.2.1.1.
\textsuperscript{74} See, Adams, \textit{op. cit.}, 252-258.
‘wrong’, ‘obligation’, and ‘ought’, that are used to express it. What we understand if we understand what those words mean in the relevant contexts is rather a complex role that moral obligation plays in a scheme of things.”75 What role? Here, as I indicated in the previous section, Adams thinks that the role is essentially social and, therefore, that moral rightness and wrongness are constituted by social relations of a certain sort.76

Adams identifies a number of features of moral obligations that we can know by conceptual analysis. For example, we can know that rightness and wrongness are properties of actions, that people are generally in favor of what they regard as right and opposed to what they regard as wrong, that rightness and wrongness constitute powerful reasons for action or refraining from action that are associated with the reactions of others, and that facts about rightness and wrongness are objective. We also know that certain types of actions, e.g., torture for the purpose of amusement, are wrong. And according to Adams, the properties of being commanded and forbidden by God best fills the role assigned by our concepts of rightness and wrongness.77 Furthermore, Adams thinks that DCT accounts for how moral facts play a causal role in our coming to know which actions are right and wrong. Because commands are by their very nature communicative acts, “A God who issues commands must act in such a way as to make it more likely that those to whom the commands are revealed will come to think right what is divinely commanded and wrong what is divinely forbidden,”78 a task which he thinks

76 For a defense of his social theory of obligations, see Adams, op. cit., 231-248.
77 See ibid., 252-258.
78 Ibid., 257.
God might do in any number of ways, including, creating our faculties, providentially governing human history, special acts of divine revelation, etc.

1.4 Conclusion

I have argued that it is *prima facie* plausible to think that theists of a certain sort—viz., those who think of God as the greatest conceivable being (which, as we saw, does include many theists working within the Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions, and perhaps *should* include all theists working within those traditions)—are committed to God’s being essentially sovereign in the sense that everything that exists that is explanation eligible depends on God. But it also seems that moral facts are among the explanation eligible facts. So, if God exists, then moral facts depend on him. So, because theists believe that the antecedent is true, they are committed to the dependence of morality on God and have the burden of explaining both how and why morality depends on God. Answering the “how” question involves filling out Quinn’s schema, and one very natural way of answering the “why” question involves providing a theistic account of moral properties. I have identified a variety of ways in which one might fill out Quinn’s schema and have indicated that the view on which I will primarily focus in the following chapters is a metaethical view about the nature of moral properties. In particular, it is the view that Robert Adams has developed according to which the properties of being right and wrong are identical with the properties of being commanded and forbidden by God. In the next two chapters, I consider whether this view (or one of the related views discussed above) is defensible.
CHAPTER 2: THE EUTHYPHRO DILEMMA

In chapter 1, I argued that if we accept the Anselmian conception of God as the greatest conceivable being, it is plausible to suppose that we must also think of God as being sovereign, i.e., as the source of all that exists. It follows, then, that if God and moral facts exist, moral facts depend on God. Next, I explained some of the ways in which one might account for the dependence of morality on God. Using Quinn’s schema, I identified three variables that any theistic metaethical account needs to identify. In general, any view that maintains that there is a dependence relation between two items must clearly identify the two relata as well as the nature of the dependence relation that holds between them. I indicated that my focus—at least initially—will be the version of divine command theory defended by Robert Adams according to which facts about moral obligation (the moral relata) are identical to (the dependence relation) facts about God’s commands and prohibitions (the theistic relata). In chapters two and three, I evaluate whether this account is defensible. In the present chapter, I consider whether it can withstand three of the most prominent objections pressed against DCT, viz., the arbitrariness problem (the charge that divine command theory entails that both God’s commands and the content of morality are arbitrary) and the divine ascription problem (the charge that DCT makes it impossible to offer a substantive account of God’s goodness), and the Karamazov Problem (the charge that DCT implies the absurdity that worlds in which God does not exist are worlds in which nothing is right or wrong). I argue that none of these objections succeeds against a DCT like Adams’.
2.1 The Euthyphro Dilemma

The so-called “Euthyphro dilemma” is without a doubt, the most famous expression of the arbitrariness objection to divine command theory. The objection is inspired by a question that Socrates asks in Euthyphro, a Platonic dialogue concerning the nature of piety. The dialogue begins when Euthyphro—being convinced that doing so is the pious thing to do—is heading to the Athenian courts to prosecute his father for murder. On his way to the courts, he meets Socrates and informs him of his intention to prosecute his father. Socrates is puzzled by Euthyphro’s actions, which prompts him to ask Euthyphro to explain what he means by the term piety. After going through a series of analyses, Euthyphro offers the following definition: the pious is what is loved by all the gods and the impious is what is hated by all the gods. In response to this definition, Socrates raises a dilemma for Euthyphro: Are pious things loved by the gods because they are pious, or are pious things pious because the gods love them? Euthyphro initially opts for the second disjunct, which Socrates goes on to argue is problematic. A question similar to the one that Socrates asked concerning the relation between piety and the god’s attitudes can be asked with respect to moral properties and God’s commands, and the divine command theorist, like Euthyphro, maintains that the order of explanation goes from the respective divine features to the respective properties. Furthermore, many think that Socrates’ objection to Euthyphro can be adapted and used to argue against divine command theory. The following argument, which I will refer to as “The Euthyphro
Dilemma,”79 approximates Socrates’s argument while casting it in terms of monotheism rather than polytheism, divine commands rather than divine love, and morality in general instead of the particular virtue of piety.80

1. If God's commands determine moral statuses, then morality is arbitrary, and if moral statuses determine God's commands, then, contrary to DCT, morality does not depend on God's commands.

2. God's commands determine moral statuses, or moral statuses determine God's commands.

3. So, either morality is arbitrary, or morality does not depend on God's commands.

4. Morality is not arbitrary.

5. So, morality does not depend on God's commands, and DCT is false.

At first blush, the argument appears quite powerful. Consider the first conjunct of premise 1. If the moral statuses of actions are completely determined by God's commands, then it is impossible for God to have any moral reasons for issuing the commands that he does. After all, according to DCT, it is in virtue of the fact that God commands humans not to rape others that rape is morally impermissible. But if the moral status of rape is determined by what God commands, then God can have no moral reasons for forbidding it. In particular, the basis of God forbidding rape cannot be—as

79 “The Euthyphro dilemma” is sometimes used to refer to some version of the question, “Is something right because God commands it, or does God command it because it is right?” I use it to refer to the argument provided below.

one would expect it to be—the fact that rape is wrong. So, his forbidding rape does, indeed, seem to be arbitrary from a moral point of view. And since what is true of the moral status of rape is true of the moral status of every action, the whole moral enterprise ends up being arbitrary on DCT. What about the second conjunct of premise 1? If actions have moral statuses independently of God's commands, then, contrary to DCT, God's commands do not determine the moral statuses of actions.81 Since both conjuncts seem right, so does the first premise.

Premise 2 also seems quite plausible. The moral statuses of actions either are or are not determined by God's commands. If they are determined by God's commands, then the first disjunct is true. But if actions have a moral status independently of God's commands as the second disjunct states, then God, being essentially omniscient and essentially good, must know the moral status of each action and act accordingly. In that case, God's knowledge and actions—in particular, his commanding and forbidding—would be dependent on and determined by the independent moral statuses of actions. Premise 3 follows from 1 and 2. So, morality is arbitrary, or morality does not depend on God's commands. However, because it seems wildly implausible to suppose that morality could be arbitrary in the way that DCT seems to imply, we should conclude that morality does not depend on God's commands; DCT is false.

But does DCT really commit one to the arbitrariness of morality? I think not. One complication concerns whether or not God must have moral reasons for issuing the commands he does. If God need not have moral reasons, then presumably God could have non-moral reasons for issuing one command rather than another, and the

81 We will see shortly that this move has been questioned.
arbitrariness worry would not get off the ground. Murray Macbeath, for example, argues that both disjuncts given in premise 2 might be false. Instead, he suggests that God’s commands and an action’s being morally right might both be explained in terms of some third item. For the sake of simplicity, he supposes that a simple version of utilitarianism is true and suggests that an action’s being right and its being commanded by God might both be explained by the fact that the action maximizes happiness. However, even if Macbeath is correct that this view is consistent with the dependence of rightness on God, the problem with this solution to the Euthyphro dilemma is that it is clearly not an option available to the divine command theorist. Macbeath explicitly claims that on his view, “Right actions are right in virtue of their being such as to maximize happiness, and their rightness does not depend on their performance’s being commanded.” However, given that my ultimate goal is not to defend DCT per se, but rather to determine whether any view about the relationship between God and morality is both plausible and consistent with God’s sovereignty, Macbeath’s attempted solution is still in play. Nevertheless, my current focus is on the defensibility of DCT, a view that manifestly is consistent with the sovereignty of God.

Although the specific way in which Macbeath works out his solution to the arbitrariness worry is inconsistent with DCT, his general insight may not be. It is open to the divine command theorist to maintain that rightness depends on the commands of God, while also maintaining that God has non-moral reasons for issuing the commands he does. By “non-moral” reason, I mean a reason that is not wholly or partially constituted by moral properties—even if such non-moral properties are intimately related to moral

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properties. What might such non-moral reasons look like in this context? What non-moral reasons might God have for issuing the command, say, to refrain from acts of torture? One rather obvious suggestion is that torture harms the victim and is manifestly unloving. These appear to be perfectly good reasons for God to command that we not perform acts of torture. If so, the arbitrariness worry fails to get off the ground.

But assuming for present purposes that a successful response to the arbitrariness worry requires that God have moral reasons for issuing commands, it is clear that if all moral properties depend on God’s commands, then God can have no moral reasons for issuing one command rather than another because, logically prior to God’s commands, there simply are no moral reasons. What the divine command theorist must do, then, is attempt to split the horns of the dilemma by discovering a way for God to have moral reasons for what he commands while simultaneously preserving the idea, essential to DCT, that morality depends in some important way on the commands or prohibitions of God. I will argue that this can be done. But before doing that, I should highlight a related problem that divine command theorists face—the problem of preserving a meaningful sense in which God is said to be good. This additional problem further constrains the way in which the Euthyphro dilemma might be avoided. So, keeping it in mind will be important if DCT is to be successfully defended.

To ascribe moral goodness to a fellow human being correctly, that person must, minimally, be one who satisfies (or, perhaps, attempts to satisfy) his or her moral duties.83

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Being morally good may also involve having various other virtues such as being forgiving, generous, kind, gracious, loving, and so on. It seems the same applies to God. To be good, God must, at least, be such that he satisfies (or intends to satisfy) his moral duties. Again, having various other virtues may be necessary as well. However, if God’s commands fully determine the moral status of every action, state of affairs, character trait, etc., then God will be morally good if and only if he acts in accordance with his own commands. But even if it is virtuous to practice what one preaches, this does not adequately capture the sense in which God is believed to be good. The fear, then, is that if DCT is true, there is no meaningful sense in which God is morally good. Leibniz famously expressed this worry by claiming that theistic accounts of morality “Deprive God of the designation good: for what cause could one have to praise him for what he does, if in doing something quite different he would have done equally well.” Bertrand Russell puts the point as follows:

I am not for the moment concerned with whether there is a difference between right and wrong, or whether there is not: that is another question. The point I am concerned with is that, if you are quite sure there is a difference between right and wrong, then you are in this situation: Is that difference due to God’s fiat or is it not? If it is due to God’s fiat, then for God himself there is no difference between right and wrong, and it is no longer a significant statement to say that God is good. If you are going to say, as theologians do, that God is good, you must then say that right and wrong have some meaning which is independent of God’s fiat, because God’s fiats are good and not bad independently of the mere fact that he made them. If you are going to say that, you will then have to say that it is not

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84 Cf. Matthew Carey Jordan’s description of the problem in his “Theism, Naturalism, and Meta-Ethics,” 374. He describes the problem in terms of redundancy or incoherence.

85 One might think that this depends on the content of what one preaches.

only through God that right and wrong came into being, but that they are in their essence logically anterior to God.\textsuperscript{87}

As Russell explains, if DCT is true, not only does morality appear arbitrary, but it appears impossible to retain a robust account of God’s goodness. The challenge for the divine command theorist, then, is to explain how morality in some way depends on God’s commands without making morality arbitrary and without making God’s goodness somehow vacuous or redundant.

\textbf{2.2 Splitting The Horns}

\textbf{2.2.1 Arbitrariness And The Divine Ascription Problem}

Fortunately, the problems of arbitrariness and God's goodness are closely related. A solution to the latter problem might go some distance towards avoiding the former. That is, if we can preserve God's moral goodness, then that very goodness might provide moral reasons for God to issue one command rather than another. But how can this be done if the moral status of every action, state of affairs, or character trait depends entirely on what God commands? Robert Adams and William Alston have attempted to address both worries by distinguishing between different kinds of moral properties and accounting for only some of them in terms of God’s commands. Most contemporary divine command theorists have followed suit in restricting the scope of the moral

properties that one accounts for in terms of God’s commands. Commenting on this move, Mark Murphy writes,

The strength of the objection from God's goodness is directly proportional to the size of the range of normative properties that one wishes to explain in theological voluntarist terms. If one wishes only to account for a proper subset of moral notions, such as obligation, with one's theological voluntarism, then the objection from God's goodness is very weak; if one wishes to provide a sweeping account of normativity in theological voluntarist terms, then the objection is much stronger.  

As the above quote from Murphy suggests and as I indicated in the previous chapter, Alston and other recent divine command theorists have typically distinguished axiological properties from deontic properties and have offered divine command theories of deontic moral properties. The axiological properties are the morally-good-making properties that an action or person might have. The deontic properties are those that belong in the obligation family. They speak to whether the act is morally required, permitted, or prohibited.

The suggestion, then, is this: if the divine command theorist takes axiological facts to be independent of God's commands, then those facts can provide God with moral reasons for issuing the commands he does. And hence, God's commands can determine our duties without being arbitrary. Furthermore, the axiological facts, being what they are independently of God's commands, can provide a meaningful standard by which to measure God's goodness.

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88 Mark Murphy, “Theological Voluntarism.”
89 Of course, the axiological realm encompasses more than what is morally good or valuable; it also includes non-moral, e.g., aesthetic, goods. Nevertheless, the axiological realm I have in mind here is the moral axiological realm and concerns what is morally good and morally bad.
90 Jason Thibodeau has recently criticized this sort of response to the Euthyphro dilemma. See his forthcoming “God’s Love is Irrelevant to the Euthyphro Problem,” *Sophia*. From what I can tell, his
On this model, all the axiological facts hold independently of God's commands. For example, it is true independently of God's commands that it is morally good to love your neighbor, to feed hungry children, and to tell the truth. But by commanding these actions, God thereby makes these actions morally obligatory, which would otherwise be merely morally good. In fact, all morally good acts would be supererogatory were it not for the commands of God. And because the axiological facts hold independently of God's commands, so does God's moral goodness; ascribing goodness to God has a determinate content. God is good to the extent that his actions, including his commands, conform to the appropriate non-voluntaristic standard of goodness. Furthermore, this non-voluntaristic standard of goodness provides moral reasons that favor some actions over others, and so God’s commands need not be arbitrary. And since God, the greatest conceivable being, is essentially rational, he will base his decisions on the available reasons.

2.2.2 Abhorrent Commands

Furthermore, the common objection that DCT is false since it entails that God could have issued abhorrent commands (e.g., commands that we perform acts of rape, argument is reminiscent of Erik Wielenberg’s argument regarding God’s power in Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 38-67. I respond to Wielenberg below. For other responses, see Jordan’s “Theistic Ethics” and Milliken’s, “Euthyphro, the Good, and the Right.” 91 This will depend, in part, on how one understands the nature of the supererogatory. Perhaps God’s morally good acts would not be supererogatory. For example, if supererogation involves going beyond the call of duty and going beyond the call of duty requires that there be duties to begin with, then supererogatory actions would depend on God’s commands as well. For discussion, see Alfred Archer, “Divine Moral Goodness, Supererogation, and the Euthyphro Dilemma,” International Journal for Philosophy of Religion 79.2 (2016): 147-160.

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torture, and child-abuse) and, consequently, could have made abhorrent actions morally obligatory, does not arise since God’s essential moral goodness prevents him from issuing abhorrent commands.

Erik Wielenberg, however, suggests that the above response to the abhorrent commands worry is inadequate because even if God’s perfect goodness prevents him from issuing such abhorrent commands, DCT still implies a problematic conditional (PC):

\[ \text{PC: } \text{“If God commanded us to torture our neighbors, we would be morally obligated to torture our neighbors.”} \]

Many divine command theorists have responded to such a worry by claiming that even if PC is true, no problem arises for the divine command theorist since the proposition has an impossible antecedent and, therefore, according to the standard semantics for counterpossibles, is vacuously true.\(^{92}\) It will be true for the same reason that the following counterpossible conditional involving colors and shapes is true (C&S):

\[ \text{C&S: } \text{If some object were blue all over and green all over, then a circle would a square.}^{93} \]

viz., the fact that their respective antecedents are necessarily false.

For Wielenberg’s objection to succeed, then, he must be assuming a non-standard semantics for counterpossibles, which distinguishes between counterpossibles like C&S in which the antecedent and consequent seem to have nothing to do with each


other and counterpossibles like the following in which the antecedent and consequent do seem to stand in some sort of interesting relation (IR):

IR: If some object were blue all over and green all over, then some object would be blue all over.\textsuperscript{94}

It does seem that there is an important difference between C&S and IR which the standard semantics for counterfactuals fails to distinguish. One way to see this is to focus on counterpossibles that seem non-trivially false. Take, for example, the following seemingly false counterpossible (SFC):

SFC: If a square circle were to exist, then nothing would exist.

According to the standard semantics, SFC is trivially true because the antecedent is necessarily false. Intuitively, however, it seems that the standard semantics gives us the wrong verdict here. It seems to me obvious that SFC is false. Worlds in which the antecedent (square circles exist) is true are worlds in which the consequent (nothing exists) is false.

So far, then, Wielenberg seems to be in good shape; the divine command theorist does seem to be committed to the non-trivial truth of PC. John Milliken, however, disagrees. He agrees with Wielenberg that given God’s essential goodness, PC is a counterpossible, but on Milliken’s view, God is not only \textit{incapable} of making torture obligatory (given his essential goodness), he doesn’t even have the \textit{power} to make torture obligatory. And in this he disagrees with Wielenberg. That is, \textit{pace} Wielenberg, Milliken thinks that the divine command theorist is not committed to the non-trivial truth of PC.

\textsuperscript{94} This example also comes from Pruss, \textit{ibid.}
Indeed, Milliken argues that the divine command theorist is committed to the falsity of PC. Apparently, he thinks this follows from Adams’s social theory of obligations.

As Milliken rightly points out, Adams’s social theory of obligations is not like Hobbes’. For Hobbes, God can create obligations merely in virtue of his irresistible power. But for Adams, it is God’s moral qualities that are most relevant to his being the source of moral obligations. For both, moral obligations only make sense in the context of social relationships in which actual demands are made. For Adams, however, not just any demands—not even the demands of an omnipotent being—are sufficient to create moral obligations. Summarizing Adams’ attempt to generalize some features of relationships that tend to elevate social demands into moral obligations, Milliken writes, “The members of our society place many demands upon us; we will tend to treat them as imposing obligations to the extent that: (1) They arise from within a relationship that is itself good and so properly valued; (2) The personal characteristics of those who make the demands are praiseworthy; (3) The thing demanded is good.”

To illustrate the salience of the first point, Milliken invites us to compare a parent’s receiving a request for tuition money from her child with a similar request coming from an abusive boyfriend. To illustrate the second point, Milliken imagines a case in which two children, both of whom request tuition money, but one of the children is hard-working and respectful while the other is rebellious and lazy. Regarding the third point, Milliken contrasts a case in which one’s child requests money for college tuition and a case in which one’s child requests money to establish an assassins training camp.

96 John Milliken, “Euthyphro, the Good, and the Right,” 155. See also Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 231-248, especially 244-245.
Clearly, with regard to each point, it is the demands of the first person that is more likely to create a moral obligation. He cites Adams approvingly when Adams writes, “It is only a God who is supremely excellent in being, in commanding, and more generally in relating to us, whose commands can plausibly be regarded as constituting moral obligation.” Consequently, Milliken thinks that God does not have the power to make it obligatory for us to torture others. He writes, “If God’s character were quite different, such that he commanded gratuitous torture and other such things, he would no longer be the sort of being whose commands could give rise to obligations. To put it differently, they would no longer be a source of the right.”

But even if one agrees with Adams and Milliken regarding the three points above, it’s not clear to me that his desired conclusion follows. Milliken seems to assume that if—*per impossible*—God were to command torture, then either God or his commands or the relationship in which we stand to God would cease to be good, and as a result, God’s commands could not constitute our moral obligations. But it is not clear to me that this counterpossible is true. It depends on what we hold fixed when we move to the impossible world in which God commands us to torture, and it is unclear to me why we should not to hold fixed the goodness of God’s nature. After all, “God” is not a proper name; rather, it has descriptive content. According to perfect being theologians, God is by definition the greatest conceivable being. But then, if—as most perfect being theologians believe—being perfectly morally good is part of the greatest compossible array of great-making properties, then an impossible world in which God commands that we torture others is an impossible world in which a perfectly morally good being

98 Milliken, 156.
commands us to torture. Furthermore, even if what is commanded (torture) is itself morally bad, if the greatest conceivable being commanded it, he would presumably have sufficient reasons for doing so. If that is right, then Milliken’s argument that DCT entails the falsity of PC fails, and Wielenberg is correct that the divine command theorist is committed to the non-trivial truth of PC.

This does not mean that Wielenberg’s objection succeeds, however. The success of Wielenberg’s objection requires more than that the divine command theorist be committed to the non-trivial truth of PC; it also requires that it be the case that PC is, in fact, non-vacuously false! But it seems to me that, for reasons similar to those provided above in response to Milliken, PC is, in fact, non-trivially true! Wes Morriston, who at one time pressed an objection similar to Wielenberg’s, now concurs. He writes:

Many counterfactual conditionals with impossible antecedents–counterpossibles, as I shall call them–seem to me to be non-vacuously true or false, and the assignment of truth-values in such cases need not be arbitrary. To take just one example, it seems to me that if–per impossible–a completely truthful and omniscient being said that two-plus-two is five then two-plus-two would be five. What’s driving my intuition in this case is that the antecedent does not entail the consequent merely in virtue of being impossible. It also does so because of the way in which its content is logically related to the consequent. Whatever a completely truthful and omniscient being says must be true, and what we have here is a straightforward substitution instance of that pattern. So what if God commanded us to eat our children? Remember that for [the traditional theist] God is, necessarily, a perfect being. If that is understood, then it really doesn’t matter…whether it’s impossible for a perfect being to command such a thing. Why? Because if a perfect being commanded it, the being would have a morally sufficient reason for doing so; and if–per impossible, perhaps–a perfect being had a morally sufficient reason for commanding us to eat our children, we should do it. If I am right about this, divine command theory escapes refutation…because the alarming-sounding counterpossibles implied by it turn out to true!100

One of Morriston’s insights from the above quotation is worth emphasizing again, viz., that the divine command theorist with whom I am concerned conceives of God as the greatest conceivable being. Again, the term “God” is not merely a proper name. If it is a name at all, it is a name with descriptive content. More likely, it is a definite description. Substituting “the greatest conceivable being” for “God” in PC makes it—at minimum—much more difficult to regard PC as false. Like Morriston, I think that it makes it plausible that PC is, in fact, true.

But even if Morriston and I are wrong about this—even if PC strikes you as obviously false even after having substituted “God” with “the greatest conceivable being,” it is still doubtful that an argument of this sort carries any weight against DCT. For as Alexander Pruss argues, an argument that is structurally analogous to the argument Wielenberg offers can be pressed against any substantive metaethical theory. Pruss sees the dialectic between the divine command theorist and Wielenberg as follows:

Step 1: The critic of DCT claims that DCT implies PC. But PC is false. So, DCT is false.
Step 2: The defender of DCT says that the antecedent of PC is necessarily false. Consequently, (according to the standard semantics), PC is trivially true.
Step 3: The critic concedes that PC is a counterpossible but insists that DCT implies its non-trivial truth. But, in fact, PC is non-trivially false.

But, as Pruss argues, the same dialectic can be played out with any substantive metaethical theory (where a substantive metaethical theory is a theory that provides a non-circular account of obligations and does so without simply giving an infinite list of
all the obligatory and wrong actions.) I provide only one of Pruss’ examples, but it should be clear how the dialectic would play out with other metaethical accounts.\(^\text{101}\)

**Step 1:** The critic of Kant’s categorical imperative (CI) claims that CI implies PC\(^*\) (if torture were required by the CI, then torture would be obligatory). But PC\(^*\) is false. So, CI is false.

**Step 2:** The defender of CI says that the antecedent of PC\(^*\) is necessarily false. Consequently, (according to the standard semantics), PC\(^*\) is trivially true.

**Step 3:** The critic concedes that PC\(^*\) is a counterpossible but insists that CI implies its non-trivial truth. But, in fact, PC\(^*\) is non-trivially false.

The fact that this dialectic can be played out with any substantive metaethical theory indicates that something has gone wrong. And though the argument does not reveal where exactly the objector’s error lies in step 3, Pruss offers some plausible speculations. One option is that the objector is simply mistaken to claim that there are non-trivially true counterpossibles. “They are, after all, hard to make sense of, though valiant attempts have been made.”\(^\text{102}\) A more plausible explanation, I think, is that we simply reason poorly about bizarre counterfactuals—especially counterpossibles. Pruss surmises that “when we are very strongly sure that something is true and its truth is very important to us, we have a tendency to carry it over into counterfactual situations, even when doing so is inappropriate as it may be in [PC].”\(^\text{103}\) Someone with cynophobia (fear of dogs), for example, might recognize that her phobia is irrational, nevertheless, because her phobia is so strong, she might reason, “I am afraid of dogs, and I don’t want to lose my fear of

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\(^{101}\) Pruss gives several other examples, but he also notes that consequentialist metaethical accounts plausibly breakdown at after step one because the consequentialist cannot plausibly claim that the relevant antecedent (viz., even if torturing our neighbors were to have the best consequences) is necessarily false. There clearly are possible worlds in which torturing our neighbors will have the best consequences.

\(^{102}\) Pruss, *op. cit.*, 438.

\(^{103}\) Ibid.
dogs, because were I to lose my fear of dogs, I would no longer avoid them."\textsuperscript{104} In this situation, the person’s fear of dogs is so strong that the belief that dogs are dangerous is carried into the counterfactual situation in which that belief is expressly denied. I suspect Wielenberg is making this sort of mistake when he insists that PC is non-trivially false and that Milliken is making a similar sort of mistake when he argues that the divine command theorist is committed to denying the truth of PC. Wielenberg, Milliken, and others are so committed to the moral wrongness of torture that they carry it into counterpossible situations in which it is not wrong.

Nevertheless, despite defending DCT from this objection, Pruss admits that he still finds himself \textit{feeling} that claims like PC provide evidence that DCT is false in ways that it does not provide evidence that Kantianism is false. He surmises that this feeling might be best explained by his failure to grasp God’s essence and, therefore, he fails to see the impossibility of God’s issuing an abhorrent command.\textsuperscript{105} But as I indicated above, when you focus on God’s nature, I think we can see both that God could not issue abhorrent commands and that, as Morriston illustrated, PC is, in fact, non-trivially true. So, contrary to Wielenberg, the fact that DCT implies the non-trivial truth of PC does not constitute a problem for the divine command theorist. The divine command theorist can thus escape the charge of arbitrariness while retaining God’s goodness.\textsuperscript{106}

Even so, the divine command theorist who is both motivated by the sovereignty argument and who evades the arbitrariness and divine ascription problems by restricting

\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{105} See \textit{ibid.}, 438-9.
the scope of the moral properties which she accounts for in terms of God’s commands is not quite out of the woods. Such a divine command theorist still owes us an account of the relationship between God and the axiological facts, the prospects of which I discuss in chapter four. Furthermore, in addition to the objections considered above, numerous other objections to DCT apply even to restricted versions of DCT. In the next chapter, I explain and evaluate four such objections. There is one objection, however, that cuts to the very heart of the idea that any aspect of morality might ontologically depend on any aspect of God. As such, it applies not only to restricted and unrestricted versions of DCT, it applies to all versions of theological voluntarism—indeed, to all theistic metaethical accounts, including non-voluntaristic ones. Matthew Carey Jordan dubs the objection the “Karamazov Problem” because it is based on the claim I referenced in the previous chapter that is often attributed to Ivan Karamazov, a character in Dostoyevsky’s, *The Brothers Karamazov*. I devote the remainder of the chapter to explaining why I think it fails.

### 2.3 The Karamazov Problem

The Karamazov problem is essentially this: DCT implies that if God does not exist, nothing is right or wrong. But that just seems absurd. Surely, it is wrong to torture children for fun regardless of whether or not God exists or forbids such cruelty. These sorts of moral commitments are simply non-negotiable ethical starting points. In short, it is simply implausible to suppose that moral facts, in general, and moral obligations, in particular, depend on God.
Several things may be said in response to this objection. Jordan, for example, claims that the divine command theorist should remind her interlocutor that DCT is consistent with the view that though the wrongness of the cruelty described above is contingent on God’s commands, its moral badness is not. After all, theological voluntarists like Jordan and Adams are offering accounts of only the deontic moral properties—not axiological moral properties. Restricted theological voluntarists of this sort presuppose some independent account of axiological properties (i.e., an account not given in terms of God’s commands or volitions).

Unfortunately, this sort of response does nothing to help the divine command theorist with whom I am concerned, i.e., those whose adherence to divine command theory is motivated by AD. This is because anyone who accepts AD will think that axiological as well as deontic facts depend on God; she will think that if God did not exist, neither would goodness or badness. Consequently, such a divine command theorist cannot maintain that her interlocutor is simply confusing deontic moral properties with axiological moral properties or that the Karamazov is not overly problematic because DCT is compatible with the existence of axiological facts in worlds in which God does not exist. Consequently, this aspect of Jordan’s response does nothing to offset the Karamazov problem for those divine command theorists who are motivated by AD.

But while reminding one’s interlocutor that the restricted version of DCT under discussion accounts for only the deontic moral properties in terms of God’s commands does nothing to save those divine command theorists who are motivated by AD from the challenge posed by the Karamazov problem, the fact that DCT is an ontological thesis concerning the nature of moral properties (as opposed to an epistemological account of
how we come to know moral truths) does. As Jordan argues, “It is not as though the
theist is arguing that we must first establish the truth of theism in order to be justified in
believing that one morally ought not torture babies…for the sake of amusement.”

Consequently, we can take for granted that the cruelty described above is wrong in the
actual world even if one is unsure whether the actual world includes God. Indeed, one
might even know with certainty that the actual world does not include God while
maintaining that such actions are wrong. Of course, DCT would be false in this imagined
scenario, but that does not imply that the Karamazov problem succeeds against the divine
command theorist. It merely establishes the conditional: DCT is false if both some
actions are wrong and God does not exist. But, of course, the divine command theorist
agrees with that conditional claim. The divine command theorist will simply deny the
antecedent—insisting either that nothing is right or wrong or that God does exist. So, if
we assume that torture is wrong, the Karamazov problem succeeds against DCT only if
one already knows that atheism is true. But anyone who knows that atheism is true will
not be at all tempted to adopt DCT on the basis of God’s sovereignty. Consequently, the
theist who is motivated by God’s sovereignty to adopt a theistic account of morality
should not find the Karamazov problem at all worrisome.

Furthermore, many theists believe that if God exists, he exists necessarily.

Consequently, a divine command theorist who agrees that God exists necessarily need
not worry that torturous actions might be permissible in some possible worlds—perhaps
even the actual world—since it is open to the divine command theorist to maintain that
the divine commands and prohibitions on which our moral obligations depend are issued

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in every possible world. Thus, such a divine command theorist can insist that the cruelty described above is impermissible in all metaphysically possible worlds.\textsuperscript{108}

The objector, however, might insist that these responses miss the point. She might agree that if God exists, his existence is metaphysically necessary. She might even believe that the antecedent of that conditional is true (i.e., that God exists). Nevertheless, her objection might be best understood as the claim that DCT implies an implausible counterfactual—indeed, a counterpossible, if God’s existence is metaphysically necessary. That is, the objection might be best understood along the following lines:

1) If DCT is true, then if—per impossible—God did not exist, no actions would be right or wrong.
2) But if—per impossible—God did not exist, some actions would still be right and wrong.
3) So, DCT is false.

Of course, as I explained in the previous section, the counterpossibles expressed in premise 2 and the consequent of premise 1 are trivially true according to the standard semantics for counterfactuals. For the objection to go through, then, the objector must be assuming some non-standard semantics for counterpossibles according to which the counterpossibles in both premise 1 and 2 of the above argument are non-trivially true. More importantly for my purposes, she must be assuming that the counterpossible expressed in the consequent of 1 is, in fact, false (and that the contradictory counterpossible expressed in 2 is true). But is it?

\textsuperscript{108} A question related to this point concerns whether God has any discretion in issuing commands. For discussion, see Evans, \textit{God and Moral Obligations}, 32-7. See also Mark Murphy, \textit{An Essay on Divine Authority}, 82-92. See also Matthew Carey Jordan’s, “Divine Attitudes, Divine Commands, and the Modal Status of Moral Truths” and his “Divine Commands or Divine Attitudes.” This issue will be discussed in the following chapter.
I think not. In fact, I think this objection begs the question against the divine command theorist who is motivated by the sovereignty of God. To see this, recall that the word “God” as it appears in the above argument is shorthand for “the greatest conceivable being.” And in chapter one, I argued that the concept of the greatest conceivable being includes the concept of sovereignty. The concept of God is the concept of a supremely sovereign being, a being on whom everything else depends. Consequently, the counterpossible is more perspicuous if we replace “God” with “the being on whom everything else depends.” But once we do this, the alarming sounding counterpossible turns out to be true. If—per impossible—the being on whom everything else depends were not to exist, then torture would not be wrong. As a result, the Karamazov Problem fails because—like the Abhorrent Commands Objection discussed in the previous section—the surprising sounding counterfactuals implied by DCT turn out to be true.

In summary: the Karamazov Problem can be understood in one of two ways. The first involves a conditional stated in the indicative mood; the second involves a conditional stated in the subjunctive mood. The first way of understanding the objection is as follows:

1) If God does not exist, then (because some actions are right and some are wrong) morality does not depend on God’s commands.
2) God does not exist.
3) So, morality does not depend on God’s commands.

The divine command theorist who is motivated by the sovereignty argument, will presumably agree with the conditional stated in premise 1. Because the conditional is stated in the indicative mood, it is problematic for the divine command theorist only if
premise 2 is true. The theist, however, will insist that since God does exist, the conditional expressed in premise 1 constitutes no problem for her. But even if premise 2 is, in fact, true, the lesson is that the Karamazov Problem—when understood in this way—is far more controversial that it might first appear. In fact, as I suggested above, this suggests that we may have misunderstood the objection. The best way to understand the Karamazov Problem, I think, involves the claim that DCT implies an implausible counterfactual subjunctive conditional:

1) If DCT is true, then if God did not exist, nothing would be right or wrong.
2) If God did not exist, some things would be right or wrong.
3) So, DCT is false.

But the Sovereignty Argument that I defended in chapter 1 and which should be acceptable to the theist and atheist alike, is inconsistent with the truth of premise 2. At best, then, the Karamazov problem is part of a much larger and controversial critique of DCT. If the Karamazov Problem is to have any force against DCT, then, the objector must either establish that the Sovereignty Argument that I defended in chapter 1 is unsound or else argue that God does not exist. But since I am assuming the truth of theism and have already defended the soundness of the Sovereignty Argument, the Karamazov Problem can, I think, be safely ignored.

109 This is not to say that establishing the non-existence of God is sufficient for establishing the falsity of DCT since DCT is compatible with atheism. Atheists who agree that (or are at least sympathetic to) the idea that morality depends on God include Nietzsche, Sartre, and Mackie. Determining whether atheists should adopt DCT will involve weighing various explanandum-driven considerations, including the alleged fact that some actions are morally wrong.
2.4 Conclusion

If the arguments of this chapter are sound, then the Karamazov Problem does not give us any reason to doubt that at least some aspects of morality ontologically depend in some important way on some feature or features of God. Furthermore, restricted versions of DCT, in particular, have the resources to avoid both the arbitrariness charge associated with the Euthyphro dilemma as well as the charge that DCT makes God's goodness vacuous. According to the model laid out above, God's commands determine only some of the moral facts—namely the deontic ones; the axiological facts hold independently of God's commands. What, then, does the Euthyphro dilemma establish with regard to DCT? At this point in the dialectic, it is not easy to say. What we can conclude, I think, is that if the Euthyphro dilemma is to play a role in a successful argument against DCT, it will need to be accompanied by further argument. One cannot simply dismiss DCT by mentioning a passing reference to the Euthyphro dilemma since, as we have seen, there is a way through the horns of that dilemma. Opponents of DCT need to establish that the alternative crafted above cannot be plausibly sustained. Of course, this does not to imply that the divine command theorist is off the hook. Opponents of DCT have, in fact, raised numerous other objections to DCT. Of what I take to be the two most troublesome objections, one concerns the other horn of the Euthyphro dilemma; if God has reasons for issuing the commands that he does, then those reasons are sufficient to determine the deontic moral properties. If so, God’s commands are superfluous. The other concerns the divine command theorist’s treatment of divine duties. I explore these objections along with two others in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 3: OTHER OBJECTIONS TO DIVINE COMMAND THEORY

In the previous chapter, I argued that neither the Karamazov problem nor the arbitrariness problem nor the divine ascription problem constitute a serious objection to DCT. In this chapter, I explain and evaluate four other objections. I argue that while none of the objections decisively refutes DCT, DCT is, nevertheless, shown to be unmotivated—even from an explanans-driven perspective. While the Sovereignty Argument makes it prima facie plausible that moral facts depend on God, there is no good explanans-driven or explanandum-driven reason to suppose that moral obligations depend on God’s commands. Furthermore, I argue that there are some good reasons to think that obligations do not depend on God’s commands. One reason, in particular, to think that obligations do not depend on God’s commands is provided by the fact that God has moral obligations.

3.1 THE PRIOR OBLIGATIONS OBJECTION

Another objection to DCT, one that dates back at least as far as Cudworth, is what we may call the prior obligations objection. According to the prior obligations objection, DCT cannot account for all moral obligations. Rather, there must be some moral obligations that are not accounted for in terms of God’s commands, which explain why it is that we have a duty to do those things that God’s commands us to do. Nicholas Wolterstorff provides the most forceful presentation of this objection of which I am
Unfortunately, his argument importantly depends upon and is intertwined with a discussion of the nature and grounding of moral rights. Rather than attempt to untangle Wolterstorff’s presentation of the objection from his concerns about the relationship between moral rights and moral obligations, I here present Mark Schroeder’s more straightforward statement of the objection. Schroeder writes:

According to [DCT], every time that you ought to do something, it is because God has commanded it. But why ought you to do what God commands? According to the theory, this would have to be because God has commanded it. But that is surely incoherent. God could not make it the case that you ought to do what He commands simply by commanding it – if it were not already the case that you ought to do what He commands, then such a command would make no difference, and if it were already the case that you ought to do what He commands, then it would be beside the point. So it follows that voluntarism is incoherent.”

I think that this objection fundamentally obscures the distinction between the normative and metaethical levels concerning what it is that we have a duty to do and what

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it is to have a duty. Nevertheless, I will state the objection in the objector’s terms and then identify where her error lies. As Schroeder states the objection, it relies on two assumptions:

(A): One morally ought to do what God commands, and

(B): If (A) is true, the divine command theorist’s explanation of this fact is the fact that God has commanded that we obey his commands.

Before assessing the truth of these statements, two brief clarifications are in order. First, the claim that one ought to do what God commands is ambiguous. It can be given either a de re or a de dicto reading. Read de re, the question asks whether I have an obligation to, e.g., keep my promises, give to the needy, remain faithful to my spouse, etc., and surely the divine command theorist is likely—at least if she is a theist—to answer that question affirmatively. However, an affirmative answer in no way constitutes a problem for the divine command theorist. The divine command theorist presumably will agree that I ought to keep my promises, give to the needy, and remain faithful to my spouse, and her explanation for these facts is that God has commanded that I do those things. Read de dicto, however, the question asks whether “obey God” is somewhere on my list of obligations. Clearly, the de dicto reading is the reading that the objector intends. The question, then, is whether (A) and (B)—when given a de dicto reading—are true and, if so, whether their truth spells trouble for DCT.

Second, it is worth bearing in mind that the objector intends for the obligation referred to in (A) and (B) to be a moral obligation; this should be obvious from the fact that DCT is a theory of moral obligations. Given these clarifications, it is obvious that (B) is true. For if, as the divine command theorist alleges, the property of being morally
obligatory is identical with the property of being commanded by God, then for any action-type, B, B has the property of being morally obligatory iff and because B has the property of being commanded by God. Consequently, the action-type, *obeying God*, has the property of being morally obligatory iff and because *obeying God* has the property of being commanded by God. So, if DCT is true, one has a moral obligation to obey God iff and because God has commanded that one obey him.

So, the divine command theorist is committed to the truth of (B). The crucial question, then, is whether (A)—read *de dicto*—is true. Does DCT imply that one has a moral obligation to obey God’s commands? Schroeder argues that one’s justification for believing this depends in part on one’s theory of how normative explanations work. In particular, he argues that it depends on what he calls the “standard model theory.”

According to the standard model theory, all normative explanations must follow the standard model:

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Standard Model: The explanation that X ought to do A because P follows the Standard Model just in case it works because there is (1) some further action B such that X ought to do B and (2) not just because P and (3) P explains why doing A is a way for X to do B.  
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To illustrate, the explanation that *Jan ought to be at Lucky’s Diner at 5 PM because she promised Anne that she would meet her there at 5 PM* follows the standard model just in case there is some further action B that Jan ought to do, e.g., keep her promises, (and not just because she promised Anne that she would meet her there at 5 PM), and meeting Anne at Lucky’s at 5 PM is a way for Jan to B (keep her promises).

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If the standard model theory is true, then every moral obligation that can be explained is explained by showing how fulfilling that obligation is a way of fulfilling a more fundamental obligation. For example, the divine command theorists will presumably agree that Jan has an obligation to be at Lucky’s Diner at 5 PM and that this obligation is explained by the fact that being at Lucky’s at 5 PM is a way for her to fulfill a more fundamental obligation, viz., the obligation she has to keep her promises. But if the standard model theory is true, then if Jan’s obligation to keep her promises can be explained, then the explanation will involve showing how keeping her promises is a way of doing something else that Jan has an obligation to do. But, of course, the divine command theorist purports to explain all of our moral obligations in terms of God’s commands. So, ultimately, if the standard model theory is correct, then the divine command theorist’s explanation of Jan’s moral obligation to be at Lucky’s at 5 PM will involve explaining how Jan’s being at Lucky’s at 5 PM is a way for her to do something else that she has an obligation to do, viz., obey God’s commands. Therefore, when DCT is conjoined to the standard model theory, it follows that Jan has an obligation to obey God’s commands. However, because DCT purports to explain all moral obligations in terms of God’s commands, the divine command theorist is committed to explaining one’s moral obligation to obey God’s commands in terms of God’s commands. According to the objection, however, this is impossible because, as Schroeder put it, “If it were not already the case that you ought to do what He commands, then such a command would make no difference, and if it were already the case that you ought to do what He commands, then it would be beside the point. So it follows that voluntarism is incoherent.”
Clearly, this explanation for why it is impossible to explain one’s moral obligation to obey God’s commands assumes the standard model theory; it assumes that the only way for God’s commands to explain why you have a moral obligation to obey God’s commands is by showing how obeying God’s commands is a way of doing something else that one has prior moral obligation to do. So, contrary to the aspirations of DCT, it cannot explain all of our moral obligations. In particular, it cannot explain one’s moral obligation to obey God’s commands. We can summarize the objection as follows:

1) If the Standard Model Theory is true, then every moral obligation that can be explained is explained by showing how fulfilling that obligation is a way of fulfilling a more fundamental obligation.
2) The Standard Model Theory is true.
3) So, every moral obligation that can be explained is explained by showing how fulfilling that obligation is a way of fulfilling a more fundamental obligation.
4) But if every moral obligation that can be explained is explained by showing how fulfilling that obligation is a way of fulfilling a more fundamental obligation, then either we have an infinite regress of explanations or some moral obligations cannot be explained.
5) So, we have an infinite regress of explanations, or some obligations cannot be explained.
6) If DCT is true, then every moral obligation is explained by God’s commands.
7) So, if DCT is true, then every moral obligation can be explained.
8) So, if DCT is true, then we have infinite regress of explanations.
9) It is impossible to have an infinite regress of explanations.
10) So, DCT is false.

Because premises 3, 5, 7, and 8 follow from previous premises, the crucial premises are 1, 2, 4, 6, and 9. I take it that 1, 4, 6, and 9 are conceptual truths. So, the divine command theorist must rebut premise 2 or else concede defeat. Because the divine command theorist purports to explain all of our moral obligations in terms of
God’s commands, and since that is not possible if the standard model theory is true, it is clear that the divine command theorist must reject the standard model theory.

Fortunately for the divine command theorist, rejecting the standard model theory does not come at a great cost. To begin with, as Schroeder notes, the standard model theory is seldom explicitly formulated and defended. Rather, it is simply assumed. But even if many normative explanations follow the standard model, absent some good argument to think that all normative explanations must work that way, the divine command theorist should feel free to reject it. Indeed, although the standard model theory may have appeared at first blush to be a plausible—perhaps even obvious—theory about how normative explanations must work, surprisingly, it turns out that the theory has quite serious implications. In particular, the standard model theory implies that it is, in principle, impossible to explain all normative facts, and therefore, all metaethical theories which purport to offer a perfectly general and unified answer to the question, “Why ought I to φ?” must be false. Indeed, as Schroeder points out, a structurally analogous argument can be pressed against any view that takes the form of Theory.

Theory: For all agents x and action-types a, whenever x ought to do a, that is because x stands in relation R to a.114

In other words, the standard model theory is not only inconsistent with DCT, it is inconsistent with a host of other metaethical theories, including, for example, theories that attempt to explain all obligations in terms of self-interest, actual contracts, hypothetical contracts, what is in accordance with rules no one could reasonably reject, what would maximize utility, etc.

114 Schroeder, op. cit., 3.
Take metaethical utilitarianism, for example. Applied to metaethical utilitarianism, the objection could be stated as follows:

According to consequentialism, every time that you ought to do some action X, it is because doing X maximizes utility. But why ought you to maximize utility? According to the theory, this would have to be because doing so maximizes utility. But that is surely incoherent. You can’t explain your obligation to maximize utility in virtue of the fact that doing so maximizes utility. If it were not already the case that you ought to maximize utility, then the fact that maximizing utility maximizes utility would be irrelevant, and if it were already the case that you ought to maximize utility, then it would be beside the point. So it follows that consequentialism is incoherent.

To give a more concrete example, if the standard model theory is correct, then although the consequentialist can explain the fact that the doctor in Gilbert Harman’s famous surgeon case ought to harvest the organs of the one healthy patient by appealing to the fact that doing so maximizes utility, then, if the standard model theory is true, she is unable to explain why we should maximize utility. If the standard model theory is correct, the consequentialist protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, the principle of utility doesn’t explain all our moral duties.

Evans applies the argument to Kant’s categorical imperative. The Kantian explains all of our moral obligations by appealing to the categorical imperative. But one might object that there is at least one obligation that cannot be explained by appeal to the categorical imperative, viz., the obligation to follow the categorical imperative (treat others as ends in themselves).

Fortunately, the metaethical consequentialist, Kantian, and divine command theorists can freely deny that there is a prior obligation to maximize utility, respect others, or obey God. This is not to say that proponents of these theories must deny that
we have obligations to maximize utility, respect others, or obey God. The divine
command theorist, in particular, can affirm that we have an obligation to obey God but
explain the obligation in terms of the fact that God commanded us to obey him coupled
with the fact that for an action to be morally obligatory just is for that action to be
commanded by God. But she might, instead, simply deny that we have any moral
obligation to obey God’s commands. This view is consistent with DCT because,
according to DCT, the property of being morally obligatory is identical to the property of
being commanded by God. So, if DCT is true, then if God does not issue the command
that we obey him, the action type, *obeying God*, does not have the property of being
morally obligatory. That is, because DCT is a metaethical theory about the nature of
moral obligations, the truth of DCT does not entail the existence of any moral
obligations—including the obligation to obey God. So, regardless of whether the divine
command theorist affirms or denies that we have an obligation to obey God, she must
deny that there is a prior, unexplained obligation to obey God, which explains why we
have the other moral obligations that we have.

How, then, will these metaethical theories explain Jan’s obligation to be at
Lucky’s at 5 PM? It is open to each to admit that the explanation of the fact that Jan
ought to be at Lucky’s Diner at 5 PM does follow the standard model. That is, each
might maintain that the explanation that Jan ought to be at Lucky’s at 5 PM is the fact
that doing so is a way for her to do something that she ought to do, e.g., keep her
promises. At this point, however, the metaethical utilitarian, Kantian, and divine

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115 Presumably, the *act* consequentialist will want to explain every obligation directly in terms of the
action’s maximizing utility. However, a standard model explanation is certainly open to the *rule*
consequentialist.
command theorist’s explanations will likely diverge, although their strategy remains constant. The consequentialist will likely explain Jan’s obligation to keep her promises by citing the fact that promise-keeping maximizes utility and the fact that an action’s maximizing utility just is what it is for an action to be obligatory. Similarly, the Kantian will explain Jan’s obligation to keep her promises by citing the fact that promise-keeping treats rational beings as ends in themselves and the fact that treating rational beings as ends in themselves just is what it is for an action to be obligatory. The divine command theorist will follow the same strategy. She will explain Jan’s obligation to keep her promises by citing the fact that promise-keeping is commanded by God and the fact that an action’s being commanded by God just is what it is to for an action to be obligatory. These explanations are constitutive explanations. They explain why one has an obligation, for example, to keep one’s promises by telling us that the conditions obtain in which its being morally obligatory to keep one’s promises consists.\(^\text{116}\)

### 3.2 The Supervenience Objection

Perhaps the most outspoken critic of DCT in recent years is Mark Murphy. In fact, with the exception of the Argument from Divine Duties, Murphy has been the leading proponent of some version of each of the remaining objections to DCT that I consider below. The supervenience objection is an objection against property-identity versions of DCT, in particular. The objection is that property-identity versions of DCT

\(^\text{116}\) For a nice discussion of constitutive explanations, see Mark Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 41-83.
are subject to a trilemma: either God is not free with respect to the commands that he issues, or the moral does not supervene on the non-moral, or property-identity DCT is false. If property-identity DCT is true, and if God is free with respect to the commands that he issues, then there are two possible worlds that are indistinguishable in their non-moral properties but differ in their moral properties, i.e., the moral does not supervene on the nonmoral. Unfortunately, this is an unacceptable result. As Murphy emphasizes, the supervenience of the moral on the non-moral is a metaethical datum.

Moral properties supervene on non-moral properties. There is some confusion over why this is so, and what modal strength this supervenience is supposed to have, and what the ultimate philosophical significance of supervenience is, but there is no doubt whatever that it is a fixed constraint on any adequate accounts of the concept of the moral and of what properties are identified as moral properties that they recognize this truth.117

But, as we will see below, theists traditionally affirm that God is free (and that his freedom extends to at least some of his commands). Consequently, the best way for traditional theists to retain consistency is to reject property-identity versions of DCT.118

Before considering ways in which one might respond to this objection, it is worth pointing out that although Murphy states the objection in terms of divine freedom, he would have done better to state it in terms of divine discretion. This is because God might be free without having discretion. That is, it is an open question whether divine discretion is a necessary condition for divine freedom.119 By “discretion,” I mean “the

118 See Murphy, An Essay on Divine Authority, 87.
119 In section 3.5, I discuss this issue and its relation to the idea that God does not have moral duties. For discussion on divine freedom see William Rowe’s, "Divine Freedom", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/divine-freedom/>. For a defense of the compatibility of God’s libertarian freedom with God’s essential moral perfection, see Kevin Timpe, “The Best Thing in Life is Free: The Compatibility of God’s Freedom and His Essential Moral Perfection,” in Free Will and
ability to do otherwise—even given identical antecedent conditions. An agent has discretion, in my sense, if—given identical antecedent conditions—she has the ability to do B or not B. Now, if discretion is not a necessary condition for freedom, then there is not even a *prima facie* inconsistency between divine freedom, the supervenience of the moral on the non-moral, and property-identity DCT, and Murphy’s objection does not get off the ground. However, one can easily modify Murphy’s argument by claiming that if property-identity DCT is true, and God has *discretion* with respect to the commands that he issues, then the moral does not supervene on the nonmoral. If God has discretion with respect to the commands that he issues (even given the same non-moral facts), and property-identity DCT is true, then there are two possible worlds that are identical in their non-moral properties but differ in their moral properties. But since it is false that there are two possible worlds that are identical in their non-moral properties but differ in their moral properties, either God does not have discretion or property-identity DCT is false. Since God has discretion, property-identity DCT is false.

3.2.1 CONCESSIVE RESPONSES

3.2.1.1 Vary the Dependence Relation

A number of responses to this sort of objection are on offer. One concessive response is to admit that property-identity DCT is inconsistent with the conjunction of

divine discretion and the supervenience of the moral on the nonmoral. The proper response, however, is not to abandon DCT. Rather, one should merely reject property-identity versions of DCT in favor of causal or supervenience versions of DCT.

According to Murphy, however, causal and supervenience versions of DCT have problems of their own. In fact, the supervenience objection is part of Murphy’s larger critique of DCT in which he argues that all of the ontological dependence relationships between God and moral obligations that have been offered by divine command theorists face significant challenges. The supervenience objection is a problem for property-identity versions of DCT in particular.¹²⁰

The problem for causal versions of DCT (the view according to which God’s commands are the total, exclusive, active, and immediate necessitating cause of our obligations) is that they make the connection between nonmoral facts (in particular, facts about God’s commands) and moral facts (in particular, facts about moral obligations) unprecedented and mysterious. Murphy argues that in all other cases, nonmoral facts that serve as the subvenient base for the moral facts either constitute moral facts, are part of the enabling conditions for moral facts, or they are defeater-defeaters for the moral

¹²⁰ For an overview of Murphy’s criticism of causal and supervenience versions of DCT, see his “Theological Voluntarism.” For a fuller treatment, see his An Essay on Divine Authority, 70-92. For discussion of both the supervenience argument and Murphy’s broader critique of DCT, see Evans, God and Moral Obligation, 101-10.
Strangely, however, causal versions of DCT posit a purely *causal relationship* between subvening nonmoral facts and the supervenient moral facts.\(^{122}\)

Similarly, although supervenience versions of DCT (the view according to which moral obligations supervene on God’s commands) clearly meet the supervenience requirement, they too face the charge that the relationship between the moral facts and the nonmoral facts on which they supervene is unprecedented and mysterious. Here is why. In order to count as a metaethical version of DCT, supervenience versions of DCT must maintain not only that the relevant moral facts (facts about moral obligations) co-vary with the relevant nonmoral facts (facts about God’s commands), they must maintain that the moral obligations *ontologically depend* on God’s commands. So, supervenience versions of DCT must identify what sort of ontological dependence relationship holds between God’s commands and moral obligations. In order to avoid collapsing into causal versions of DCT, supervenience versions of DCT must deny that the relationship is merely causal, and to avoid collapsing into identity versions of DCT, supervenience accounts must maintain that moral obligations are distinct from God’s commands. So, supervenience versions of DCT are left with two options: God’s commands *partially constitute* moral obligations, or moral obligations depend on God’s commands without being partially or wholly constituted by God’s commands.

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\(^{121}\) Murphy explains, “A nonmoral fact can be part of what constitutes a reason to perform an action. (That you promised to φ can be cited in explaining why you have a reason to φ your promising to φ constitutes, at least in part, the reason that you have to φ.) It can be part of an enabling condition for that reason. (The existence of a social practice of promising can be cited in explaining why you have a reason to φ; the existence of that practice might explain why your promise has the reason-giving force that it has.) It can be cited as a defeater-defeater for a reason. (While the fact that the promisee told you that you need not fulfill your promise to φ typically releases you from your promise to φ, the fact that you threatened to beat up the promisee if he or she did not tell you that you need not fulfill your promise invalidates that release, and can be cited in explaining why you have a reason to φ.)” Murphy, “Theological Voluntarism,” Section 2.4.

\(^{122}\) See *ibid.*
Both options are problematic. The second option is problematic for two reasons: not only does it fail to identify any known ontological dependence relation, but, like the causal view, it too seems committed to the relationship between moral obligations and God’s commands being unprecedented and mysterious since it denies that the relationship between moral and nonmoral facts is constitutive, and, as Murphy points out, “No theological voluntarist worthy of the name will see God’s commands as merely enabling conditions or defeater-defeaters for obligations.” The problem with the first option, by contrast, is that it is underdeveloped. It fails to identify which other feature or features, together with God’s commands, fully constitute moral obligations. And as Murphy argues, identifying such a feature may not be easy since because it 1) must not involve facts about moral obligations on pain of circularity, and 2) must obtain if God’s commands obtain (to ensure that moral obligations supervene on God’s commands). It is an open question whether the would-be defender of supervenience DCT can identify such a feature or features. If she cannot, and if property-identity versions of DCT can successfully rebut the supervenience worry (as I will go on to argue they can), then it is hard to see what reason there might be to prevent one from adopting the property-identity version of DCT. On the other hand, if a plausible candidate is in the offing for the would-be defender of supervenience DCT, then the divine command theorist will have an embarrassment of riches with respect to plausible responses to the supervenience worry.

123 Ibid.
3.2.1.2 Deny Divine Discretion

Before addressing the supervenience objection head-on, two further concessive responses are also worth briefly mentioning. According to the first, one might simply deny that God has any discretion with respect to the commands that he issues while insisting that actions acquire a new moral status in virtue of being commanded by God.\textsuperscript{124} Evans distinguishes between what he calls the “discretion thesis” (the claim that God has some discretion with respect to the commands that he issues) and the “modal status thesis” (the claim that God’s commands provide a necessary condition for an act to be morally obligatory), and he argues that it is only the latter thesis that is essential to DCT. While Evans may be right to think that the discretion thesis is not essential to DCT, the more interesting question concerns whether the discretion thesis is true. Many prominent divine command theorists think it is.\textsuperscript{125} According to most theologians, God could have created a world that is different in some ways from the actual world, and according to many, he could have even refrained from creating anything at all! Furthermore, most believe that God has discretion with respect to many of his actions within worlds as well. Murphy explains some of the ways in which God’s commands, in particular, might have differed:

God has intervened miraculously in the world, but God could have failed to intervene miraculously, or could have intervened miraculously in different ways than God in fact did.

\textsuperscript{124} See \textit{God and Moral Obligations}, 32-37, 103.
Among God’s free acts are acts of commanding: at least some divine commands are free. [...] Even if the world were in relevant respects otherwise the same, God might have given slightly different commands: God could have given an at least slightly smaller or slightly larger number of commands, or could have given commands at least slightly different in content, or could have given commands to an at least slightly different group of people.  

Fortunately for the divine command theorist, it is by no means obviously true that God has this kind of discretion. It is at least epistemically possible that, as Leibniz argued, there is a unique best world and that, given God’s perfect wisdom and goodness, God necessarily acts for the best. In that case, God would have no discretion with respect to which commands to issue. So, this reply is concessive insofar as it concedes that divine discretion, moral supervenience, and property-identity DCT are incompatible. However, a proponent of this response maintains that we do not have good reason to accept that God has discretion with respect to the commands that he issues. However, insofar as it is also epistemically possible that God does have discretion, the defender of this sort of concessive reply commits herself to a contentious thesis, which I take to be a vice. So, if there were a response to the supervenience objection that did not commit one to a contentious claim, that response would—at least to that extent—be preferable.

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126 Murphy, *Essay on Divine Authority*, 83-84.
127 See, Leibniz, *op. cit.*
128 Now, as Wainwright points out (in personal conversation), if God necessarily exists and there is more than one possible world, then Leibniz’s best possible world hypothesis is false. Still, it could be that in each of those possible worlds there is only one set of moral rules that God could issue given the non-moral features of that world. That is, while God he has discretion over which world to create, once he fixes the non-moral features of a world, he doesn’t have discretion with respect to the moral properties that are instantiated in that world. This view is consistent with God’s having discretion over the moral facts, and one might think that discretion of this sort is sufficient to account for what we want to say about God’s discretion. Murphy, however, disputes this. See Murphy, *God and Moral Law*, 69-99.
129 For a nice discussion of the relevant issues, see Rowe, *op. cit.*; Senor, *op. cit.*
3.2.1.3 Vary the Divine Feature

Suppose, then, that one is justified in thinking that God has discretion with respect to the commands that he issues. And suppose one thinks that the most plausible versions of theological voluntarism are property-identity versions of theological voluntarism. That is, one holds that the best way to construe the dependence relation between God and morality is in terms of property-identity. One obvious way to avoid Murphy’s supervenience objection is to vary the divine feature with which one identifies the property of being morally obligatory. Matthew Carey Jordan thinks that this is one reason to reject Adams’ property-identity DCT in favor of something like Jordan’s property-identity divine attitude theory (which says, roughly, the properties of being morally right and morally wrong are identical to the properties of being pleasing and displeasing to God, respectively). In fact, Jordan’s view is not only consistent with (the conjunction of) God’s having discretion with respect to the commands that he issues and the supervenience of the moral on the nonmoral (since God might have discretion with respect to some of the commands that he issues, and what God finds pleasing might supervene on non-moral facts, including facts about what God has commanded), it is also consistent with the fundamental moral truths being necessarily true. For suppose that, given God’s nature, what it is that he finds pleasing and displeasing remains constant across possible worlds. In that case, if the properties of being morally right and wrong are identified with the properties of being pleasing or displeasing to God, respectively, then the fundamental moral truths concerning what is morally right and wrong do not
vary across worlds—even if God’s commands do vary across worlds. To the extent that one finds it plausible that all of the fundamental moral truths are necessary truths and to the extent that one finds it plausible that God has discretion with respect to the commands that he issues, Jordan’s property-identity divine attitude theory is an attractive alternative to DCT.

3.2.2 NON-CONCESSIVE RESPONSES

3.2.2.1 Evans’ Response

But even if there are theological voluntarist views that are immune to the supervenience objection, one might still wonder whether there are viable non-concessive replies available, i.e., replies that allow one to retain property-identity versions of DCT, divine discretion, as well as the supervenience thesis. Fortunately, several such replies are on offer. Evans, for example, argues that even if the property of being commanded by God is a moral property (as property-identity DCT maintains), it is plausible there will be certain non-moral supernatural properties on which deontic moral properties supervene. For example, it is plausible that actions that have the moral property of being commanded by God will necessarily also have the property of being pleasing to God. So, the property-identity divine command theorist can maintain that two worlds that are identical in all nonmoral respects will be identical in all moral respects. There is no

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difference in moral properties (being right/being commanded by God) without a
difference in non-moral properties (e.g., being pleasing to God).

Still, one might wonder whether this response restricts God’s freedom. Evans
denies that it does, claiming, “It surely is no limit on God’s freedom to say that God must
act to secure ends that please him or that his acts must reflect his preferences.”132
Unfortunately, this response from Evans—in particular, the above quotation regarding
God’s freedom—is not only contentious and in need of defense, it is beside the point. It
is contentious because many believe that a necessary condition for acting freely is that the
agent have the ability to do otherwise than she actually does given the same antecedent
conditions. Nevertheless, although Evans offers no argument that God’s actions are free
despite the fact that God must (to use Evans’ language) “act to secure ends that please
him,” I suspect that Evans is right that this does not entail that God’s choice to issue the
commands that he has in fact chosen to issue was not free. In any case, for present
purposes, we can grant this to him.

But even if Evans is right that God’s freedom is consistent with his being such
that he must act to secure ends that please him, it is beside the point. I argued above that
the supervenience objection is best understood in terms of divine discretion rather than
divine freedom. And unfortunately for Evans, even if his response preserves divine
freedom, it is not clear that it preserves divine discretion. The question to ask is whether
there are two possible worlds with the same non-moral facts (including facts about what
God finds pleasing or preferable) in which God issues a different set of commands. If

132 Evans, *op cit.*, 105.
there are, then God has discretion, but if we assume the truth of property-identity DCT, the supervenience of the moral on the non-moral goes out of the window. On the other hand, if God could not have issued different commands given the same non-moral facts (including facts about what God finds pleasing or preferable), then even if God retains his freedom, he lacks discretion.

3.2.2.2 McAllister’s ‘Nonmoral Features of Promulgation’ Response

Blake McAllister has recently offered two additional interesting arguments that Murphy’s supervenience objection fails. The first argument relies on the claim that the very existence of a divine command (and therefore, a moral obligation) requires that it be communicated. Furthermore, whichever way God chooses to communicate his commands will involve non-moral features that explain the differences of moral status in different possible worlds. McAllister illustrates:

Consider the story of Moses receiving the Ten Commandments. The promulgation of God’s will in this instance included certain sound waves being generated and certain symbols being inscribed on stone tablets. Now say that God had decided to issue slightly different commands (say that he swapped out “Thou shalt not covet” for “Thou shalt not love money”). The promulgation involved in this new command has different nonmoral features than the promulgation involved in the original commandment. Different sound waves are generated and different symbols are inscribed on the stone tablets. So, a world in which God commands A not to covet differs in nonmoral facts from a world in which God commands A not to love money given the promulgation involved in these commands.\(^\text{133}\)

On the surface, this seems like a promising response to Murphy’s supervenience objection. In particular, it seems to show that, if property-identity DCT is true, there is a necessary covariance between the moral facts and the nonmoral facts. McAllister has plausibly identified certain non-moral features (e.g., sound waves or inscriptions) that will necessarily vary in worlds in which God issues different commands (and, therefore, worlds in which there are different obligations). So, even if God has discretion with respect to the commands that he issues, the property-identity divine command theorist can maintain that there is no moral difference between two worlds unless there is a nonmoral difference between them.

However, I suspect that the covariance that McAllister highlights does not capture all that the supervenience principle is supposed to convey. Often times, the supervenience relation that holds between moral and nonmoral features is cashed out in explanatory terms. The nonmoral facts somehow explain or account for the moral facts. For example, suppose that sticking needles into one’s neighbor’s eye is permissible in some worlds, but the same action is morally wrong in our world. If the strong supervenience thesis is true, these two worlds must differ with respect to the nonmoral facts that obtain in those worlds. But there are many ways that these two worlds can vary nonmorally. For example, we can imagine that one of the worlds has an extra electron somewhere in the far reaches of outer space. Alternatively, we can imagine that in the first world (the world in which sticking pins in others’ eyes is permissible), sticking needles in a person’s eye causes them a significant amount of pleasure, but in our world it causes a significant amount of pain. It is precisely differences like those in the second case that incline us to think that the supervenience thesis is true in the first place. Worlds
that are nonmorally identical will be morally identical because the nonmoral features explain or determine the moral features. You cannot have a world that varies only with respect to the moral facts that obtain in those worlds because then there would be no nonmoral difference to explain the moral differences. And it seems to me that the nonmoral features that McAllister points to do not explain the difference in moral status that actions have in the worlds in which the nonmoral facts differ. How can the mere difference in sound waves explain the difference between a world in which coveting is permissible and a world in which it is not?

Fortunately for McAllister, it seems that there is an obvious reply to this worry. McAllister should point out that it is not merely the sound waves that explain the difference between the two worlds. Rather, it is that in one world, God’s generating those sound waves constitutes his issuing a command, for example, the command “Do not covet.” And unlike the mere difference in sound waves, God’s issuing the command not to covet does seem capable of explaining the moral difference between worlds in which God commands that we not covet and worlds in which he does not.

Unfortunately, it looks as if this reply that I have offered on behalf of McAllister is not open to the property-identity divine command theorist because the property-identity divine command theorist is committed to thinking that the moral obligation to refrain from coveting is identical with God’s commanding that we not covet.134 But it that case, although McAllister may have identified nonmoral features of the promulgation of God’s commands that necessarily covary with the moral facts, he has failed to

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134 I discuss this issue again in the section that immediately follows.
identified a nonmoral difference between the two worlds that is capable of explaining the moral differences.

3.2.2.3 McAllister’s ‘Commanding and Being Commanded’ Response

Fortunately, McAllister offers an additional response to the supervenience objection, which, it seems to me, does demonstrate the consistency of property-identity DCT, divine discretion, and the supervenience of the moral on the nonmoral. The response depends on the claim that God’s commanding someone to perform some action X is not identical with X’s being commanded by God. Proof that these states of affairs are distinct: the latter state of affairs obtains even after the former state of affairs no longer obtains. Consequently, he suggests that the property-identity divine command theorist should deny that action X’s having the property of being right is identical to God’s commanding X. After all, the former state of affairs continues to exist even after the latter state of affairs ceases to exist; so they could not be identical. Instead, the divine command theorist should maintain that the property of being right is identical to the property of being commanded by God. This allows the divine command theorist to say that God’s commanding people to X is a nonmoral fact, and it is precisely that nonmoral fact that explains the moral difference between worlds in which coveting is permissible and worlds in which it is not. In worlds in which coveting is permissible, God’s commanding people to X does not obtain, but in worlds in which coveting is

impermissible, *God’s commanding people to X* does obtain. But since *God’s commanding people to X* is a nonmoral fact, there is no moral difference between worlds without there also being a nonmoral difference between worlds. Furthermore, this nonmoral difference between worlds, intuitively, does seem capable of explaining why coveting is permissible in the one world but not the other. If so, Murphy’s trilemma fails. The three propositions that he alleges are inconsistent are, in fact, consistent.\(^{136}\)\(^{137}\)

### 3.3 The Divine Duties Objection

I argued in chapter 1 that there are explanans-driven considerations in favor of thinking that morality depends on God. After discussing different ways in which one might develop this claim, I decided to focus on what is, arguably, the most prominent theistic metaethical account, Adams’ restricted DCT. I argued that restricted versions of DCT can successfully rebut several prominent objections to DCT, including the arbitrariness objection, the abhorrent commands objection, the Karamazov problem, the prior obligations objection, and the supervenience objection. In the final two sections of this chapter, I consider objections that, by my lights, do cast some doubt on the truth of DCT. The first objection concerns DCT’s ability to account for God’s obligations.

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\(^{136}\) For further discussion, see McAllister, *op. cit.*, 73-7.

\(^{137}\) Although I criticized McAllister’s “Nonmoral Features of Promulgation” response in the previous subsection, it turns out that if his “Commanded and Being Commanded” response succeeds, so does his “Nonmoral features of Promulgation” response. Although McAllister appears to think that the responses are independent of each other, in fact, they are intimately related in that the success of the former depends on the success of the latter.
It is initially plausible that God has moral obligations.\textsuperscript{138} For example, it seems that God has a moral obligation to keep his promises and to refrain from torturing innocent people. But if DCT is true, then these duties depend on God’s commanding himself to keep his promises and to refrain from torturing innocent people. But it is implausible to suppose that God would ever issue such commands to himself.\textsuperscript{139} Such commands would serve no purpose—especially for a God who is not in any way disposed to break his promises or torture innocent people. So, DCT is implausible. It seems, then, that the divine command theorist must either deny that God has moral duties or else hold that God’s moral duties are what they are independently of his commands. But as the latter option conflicts with the version of DCT under discussion, it seems the divine command theorists should deny that God has any moral duties at all.\textsuperscript{140}

The view that God has no moral obligations has been defended by Duns Scotus, Thomas Morris, and William Alston among others.\textsuperscript{141} One way to argue for this claim is to argue that some version of DCT is true and that DCT implies that God has no moral obligations. Of course, the objector agrees that DCT implies that God has no duties, but insofar as it is initially plausible that God does have duties, if the divine command

\textsuperscript{138} For discussion of some of the issues, see Brian Leftow, “God’s Deontic Perfection,” \textit{Res Philosophica} 90.1 (2013): 69-95.
\textsuperscript{139} Linda Zagzebski claims that this is a reason to favor what she calls Divine Motivation Theory over DCT. See her, “Religion and Morality” in William J. Wainwright, ed., \textit{The Oxford Handbook for Philosophy of Religion} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 360ff. For brief discussion, see Wainwright, \textit{Religion and Morality}, 142-3. See also Leftow, \textit{op. cit.}
\textsuperscript{140} Another possibility is that God’s duty to keep his promises is a genuine duty, but it is not a moral duty. Cf. Adams’ and Evans’ discussion of the social nature of obligations.
theorist is to avoid to the force of the above objection, she must do one of two things: she must either 1) establish that it is independently plausible that God lacks duties or 2) establish that it is independently plausible that DCT is true.\textsuperscript{142} In this section, I consider whether it is independently plausible to suppose that God is not subject to moral obligations. I argue that two recent attempts to establish that he is not subject to moral obligations fail. In the next section, I consider whether DCT is adequately motivated on either explanans or explanandum-driven grounds, and I tentatively conclude that it is not.

3.4.1 \textsc{Morris' Argument}

According to Thomas Morris, God's being essentially morally perfect, together with the requisite conditions for moral responsibility, preclude God from having moral obligations.\textsuperscript{143} Morris argues that because God is essentially morally perfect, he cannot do evil. Given God's essential moral perfection, whatever actions God might perform, those actions must be good. The conditions necessary for moral responsibility, according to Morris, include God's being able to do morally otherwise (where the ability to do morally otherwise involves the ability to do the moral alternative of the action that one does in fact perform). That is, if one is to be morally responsible for performing an impermissible act, he or she must also be capable of performing a permissible act; if one

\textsuperscript{142} What about the sovereignty argument? Can one argue from the sovereignty argument to the conclusion that God does not have duties? I do not think so. If you could get DCT from the sovereignty argument, then I suppose you could. However, unrestricted DCT is subject to devastating criticism, and in section 3.4 I argue that you cannot get restricted DCT from the sovereignty argument.

is to be morally responsible for performing one’s moral obligation, then one must be capable of failing to fulfill one’s moral obligation. So, if God is to be free to perform his duties in a way that makes him morally responsible, he must be capable of doing what is impermissible. But, if we make the plausible assumption that all impermissible acts must be morally bad, it follows that if God is essentially good, he is unable to perform any impermissible act. So, according to Morris, God cannot have duties because it is impossible that he perform the relevant moral alternative, namely, an impermissible act.

I think the divine command theorist, at least one who accepts a broad outline of the DCT being developed here, must reject Morris's argument; it proves too much. If it were sound, we would be forced to conclude either that God is not essentially good or that God is not morally good at all. For if what is necessary for moral responsibility is being capable of doing morally otherwise, then God would not only be incapable of having obligations, he would also be incapable of performing any morally good acts for which he is morally responsible. For if God is essentially good, then he is incapable of doing evil. But since evil is the moral alternative to good, if Morris's argument were sound, then God could not perform morally good acts for which he is morally responsible. This is an unwelcomed result.

Morris's mistake, I think, is to assume that moral responsibility requires the ability to do morally otherwise. One might suggest, instead, that moral responsibility merely requires the ability to do otherwise—be it morally otherwise or not. If so, then if God is capable of performing any other action than the one he does, in fact, perform, his action

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144 Murphy thinks that God’s goodness is not best understood as “moral” goodness. See his “Perfect Goodness” and his God’s Own Ethics. See also Brian Davies, op. cit. For critical discussion of Davies, see Baggett and Walls, 54-58.
can be morally assessed. But according to most theists, God does have this sort of freedom, despite his essential goodness. Although God is incapable of doing evil, he is free to choose among the relevant good alternative actions open to him. Since some good actions are better than others, when God chooses to perform an action that is better than one that He might have chosen, God is morally praiseworthy for such an act of supererogation.

This suggestion is problematic as well, however. To begin, one might wonder whether, given God’s omniscience and omnipotence, he is capable of supererogatory actions. More importantly, even if the ability to do otherwise is required for freedom and, hence, for moral responsibility, one is still left with the question of whether God has multiple good options open to him from which he could choose. One might think that God necessarily chooses the very best option available to him (assuming, of course, that there is a unique best option). More fundamental than either of those questions, however, is the question of whether the ability to do otherwise really is a requirement of moral responsibility. It seems to me that it is not. Although freedom is a requirement of moral responsibility, the ability to do otherwise is not necessary for freedom. But even if one thinks that the ability to do otherwise is a requirement of human freedom, it is quite plausible to suppose that it is not a requirement of divine freedom. Although my being determined by causal factors that were in place before I was born may prevent me

145 For a nice discussion of the issue, see Alfred Archer, “Divine Moral Goodness, Supererogation and the Euthyphro Dilemma.”
146 For discussion on divine freedom, see Rowe, op. cit. For a recent defense of God’s freedom, see Senor, op. cit.
from being free and, therefore from having moral obligations which I am morally responsible to fulfill, I agree with William Alston that it is by no means obvious that we should reach the same verdict when the determination springs from one’s own nature. Although Alston concedes that the nature of each human being was determined to be what it is by factors that existed before any human being was born, he rightly points out that “God’s nature is not determined by anything other than Himself, much less anything that existed before He did. Hence, it is not at all clear that if God acts from the necessity of His own nature that prevents Him from acting freely in a way that is required for moral obligation.”

It seems to me, then, that if there is a convincing argument that God lacks moral duties, we will need to look elsewhere.

3.4.2 ALSTON’S ARGUMENT

Despite disagreeing with Morris about whether the ability to do morally otherwise is a necessary condition for one’s having moral obligations, Alston agrees with Morris that God doesn’t have moral obligations. Alston’s argument, however, relies on the Kantian claim that no duties hold for the divine will since duties constrain actions, and

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God, being essentially good, necessarily acts in accord with the moral law.\textsuperscript{149} Alston argues as follows:

One thing required for my having an obligation to do A [...] is that there are general principles, laws, or rules that lay down conditions under which that action is required. [...] Call them “practical rules (principles)”. Practical principles are in force, in a nondegenerate way, with respect to a given population of agents only if there is at least a possibility of their playing a governing or regulative function: and this is possible only where there is a possibility of agents in that population violating them. Given that possibility, behavior can be guided, monitored, controlled, corrected, criticized, praised, blamed, punished, or rewarded on the basis of the principles. There will be social mechanisms or inculcating and enforcing rules, positive and negative sanctions that encourage compliance and discourage violation. Psychologically, the principles will be internalized in higher level control mechanisms that monitor behavior and behavioral tendencies and bring motivational forces to bear in the direction of compliance and away from violation. [...] I take it that terms like ‘ought’, ‘duty’, and ‘obligation’ acquire a use only against this kind of background, and that their application presupposes that practical principles are playing, or at least can play, a regulative role socially and/or psychologically. And this is at least an essential part of what is added when we move from saying that it would be a good thing for S to do A to saying that S ought to do A. [...]  

[...] Where it is necessary that S will do A, what sense is there in supposing that the general principle ‘one ought to do A’ has any application to S. Here there is no foothold for the ‘ought’; there is nothing to make the ought principle true rather than or in addition to the evaluative statement plus the specification of what S will necessarily do. That is, the closest we can get to a moral law requiring God to love others is the conjunction of the evaluative statement that it is good thing for God to love others, plus the statement that God necessarily does so.\textsuperscript{150}

\textsuperscript{149} Kant claims, “A perfectly good will, therefore, would be equally subject to objective laws (of the good) but it could not be conceived as constrained by them to act in accord with them, because, according to its own subjective constitution, it can be determined to act only through the conception of the good. Thus no imperatives hold for the divine will or, more generally, for a holy will. The ‘ought’ is here out of place, for the volition of itself is necessarily in unison with the law. Therefore, imperatives are only formulas expressing the relation of objective laws of volition in general to the subjective imperfection of the will of this or that rational being, e.g., the human will.” Immanuel Kant, \textit{Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals}, trans, Lewis White Beck (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1959), 29-31.

Following Eleonore Stump,\textsuperscript{151} I take it that Alston’s argument goes something like this:

(A) An agent has a moral obligation to do an action only if there is a general moral principle which identifies conditions under which that action is required.

(B) A general moral principle is in force only if it plays a governing or regulative role.

(C) A general moral principle plays a governing or regulative role for agents only if it is possible that they violate that principle.

(D) It is impossible that God violate a general moral principle.

(E) So, God doesn’t have any moral obligations.

But as Stump points out, this argument assumes that there is a general moral principle laying down conditions under which an action is required only if that general moral principle is in force. But is that assumption true?

Given the way in which Alston understands what it is for a general moral principle to be in force (viz., that it govern or regulate behavior through various social mechanisms, or that it be psychologically internalized in higher-control mechanisms so as to motivate one to comply), (C) is true iff a general moral principle plays one of these social or psychological roles in controlling behavior only if it is possible for an agent to violate that principle. But even if (B) and (C) are true given this way of understanding them, Alston’s crucial assumption that there is a general moral principle laying down conditions under which an action is required only if that general moral principle is in force turns out to be false. Why? Because there are general moral principles laying down conditions under which an action is required even though the general moral principles are not “in force” in Alston’s sense (i.e., there are no psychological or social mechanisms for enforcing them). Stump cites as an example the Yanomama Indians in

Venezuela. In their culture, it is customary for women without protection to be gang-raped. Furthermore, there are no social mechanisms penalizing or discouraging such rapes; the rapists do not show any signs of guilt for their behavior. Even the raped women seem to accept their fate without protest. Nevertheless, it seems clear that the rapists’ behavior is clearly wrong. There is a moral principle forbidding rape that applies to the Yanomama Indians despite the fact that no such principle is “in force” in Alston’s sense.

Fortunately for Alston, Stump suggests an alternative way of interpreting Alston’s claims concerning when general moral principles govern or regulate action so as to be “in force.” According to this alternative interpretation, a general moral principle is in force only if it morally governs or morally regulates. That is, moral principles are in force when they are not overridden or undermined by something in the circumstances. She illustrates with an example from Aquinas. Aquinas believes that:

The moral principle which says that adultery is wrong is always in force, but he doesn’t feel the same way about the principle that taking someone else’s property is wrong. In extreme cases in which the human convention that some created things belong to a particular human person might result in the death of other people, the principle that taking someone else’s property is wrong is abrogated; in such circumstances, we might say, the principle is no longer in force.\(^{152}\)

On this understanding of “in force,” Alston’s crucial assumption amounts to this: there is a general moral principle laying down conditions under which an action is required only if that general moral principle is not overridden or undermined by something in the circumstances. And on this understanding of what it is for a moral principle to be in force, Alston’s crucial assumption is plausibly true. However, given this way of

\(^{152}\)Ibid., 483
understanding (B), we can make (C) more perspicuous by reading it as follows: a general moral principle is not overridden or undermined by something in the circumstances only if it is possible for that principle to be violated. In other words, if it is not possible for a given moral principle to be violated, then that moral principle is overridden or undermined. Why would that be? Unless one assumes that having alternate possibilities is a necessary condition for freedom and that freedom is necessary for moral obligations, it is hard to see why one should accept this claim. However, this was essentially Morris’ strategy for denying that God has obligations. However, I argued above that Morris’ strategy fails (and Alston agrees with me on this point).

But what other reason could one have for thinking that it must be possible for one to violate a moral principle if that principle is not to be overridden or undermined? Perhaps Alston just has the intuition that the possibility of violating a moral principle is a necessary condition for moral obligation. I do not share the intuition, however. And, presumably, anyone who is convinced by Frankfurt style counterexamples to the principle of alternate possibilities will not share the intuition either since, as Stump illustrates, it is easy to construct Frankfurt-style counterexamples to Alston’s principle.\footnote{See \textit{ibid.}, 485-487.}

\footnote{Alston objects to Stump’s uses of Frankfurt-style counterexamples in her critique of his argument since he meant to refer to tendencies to act otherwise rather than the possibility of acting otherwise, but see Stump, \textit{ibid.}, 486-487 for a revised Frankfurt-style objection to which Alston’s argument succumbs.}

\footnote{Interestingly, both Alston and Stump agree that if God makes promises, then God has moral obligations since both agree that the very concept of a promise entails that promises engender obligations. That is, both agree that it is self-contradictory to say that God promised X, but God has no obligation to X. But whereas Stump thinks that God has made promises and, therefore, that God has moral obligations, Alston

So, both Morris and Alston fail to establish that God lacks moral obligations. Of course, I have not offered an argument that God does have moral obligations.\footnote{See \textit{ibid.}, 485-487.}
Nevertheless, unless there is some independent motivation to accept DCT, then insofar as it is intuitively plausible to suppose that God does have moral obligations, the argument from divine duties constitutes a problem for the divine command theorist.

But even if I am right about that, it is doubtful that this argument establishes that all versions of theological voluntarism are false. For example, if we identify the property of being morally obligatory with the property of being approved of by God (as Jordan’s divine attitude theory would have it), then insofar as it is unproblematic to suppose that God would approve of his acting in some ways and disapprove of his acting in other ways, the divine attitude theorist can happily accommodate the intuition that God has moral obligations. So, even if the argument from divine duties succeeds against DCT, it does not appear to me to succeed against other versions of theological voluntarism.\(^{156}\)

Furthermore, although I have not argued for this claim, it seems to me that property-identity versions of divine attitude theory, for example, can make use of all of the same strategies for avoiding the other objections to DCT that I endorsed in chapter 2 and in the previous sections of chapter 3. So, unless restricted DCT is adequately motivated, then, those seeking a defensible theistic metaethical account of moral

\[^{156}\text{Of course, one might doubt whether the fact that God approves of his doing A and disapproves of his doing B implies that he has a moral obligation to do A and avoid B. Instead, one might think that God’s preferences merely provides him with compelling reasons for doing A and avoiding B. However, if—as I am inclined to do—one takes moral obligations to consist in one’s all-things-considered other regarding reasons, then the argument from divine duties does not pose a serious worry for the divine attitude theorist. God’s preferences for certain other-regarding actions provide him with moral reasons to perform those actions, and if those reasons are not outweighed by competing reasons, they constitute God’s moral obligations.}\]
properties would do better to adopt a version of DWT like Jordan’s, which can more easily accommodate God’s obligations. 157 In the next section, I consider whether restricted DCT is adequately motivated.

3.4 The Superfluous Objection

As I have mentioned in previous chapters, if developing a defensible theistic account of moral properties (like restricted DCT) is the best way to account for the soundness of the sovereignty argument, then the restricted divine command theorist will need to supplement her theistic account of moral obligation with a theistic account of moral axiological properties. But, according to Murphy, this means that the sovereignty argument cannot be used to support restricted DCT. He explains:

The movement to restricted theological voluntarism commits the theological voluntarist to the view that there is nothing about the divine nature itself that entails a voluntarist view of any normative status. Once one commits oneself to the restricted view only, one cannot claim that theological voluntarism must be the true view of the right because God is free, or omnipotent, or sovereign, or exhibits any other divine perfection or combination of divine perfections, for any such argument will apply also to normative statuses other than the deontic. Rather, the restricted theological voluntarist needs to give a story about why the deontic calls for a theological voluntarist treatment, a story that does not also apply to the axiological; and that requires the restricted theological voluntarist to...

157 To the best of my knowledge, Jordan does not ever cite divine attitude theory’s ability to avoid the divine duties problem as a reason to prefer his view to DCT. However, he does think it preferable to DCT (as well as other metaethical systems) on other grounds. For a nice overview, see his, “Theism, Naturalism, and Meta-Ethics.” See also his “Some Metaethical Desiderata and the Conceptual Resources of Theism,” “Metaphysical Naturalism and Some Moral Realisms,” “Theistic Ethics: Not as Bad as You Think,” “Divine Attitudes, Divine Commands, and the Modal Status of Moral Truths,” and “Divine Commands or Divine Attitudes.” Other versions of divine will theory have been developed. See, for example, Christian Miller’s, “Divine Desire Theory of Obligation,” and “Divine Will Theory: Desires or Intentions,” Thomas L. Carson’s, Value and the Good Life, and Mark Murphy’s, “Divine Command, Divine Will, and Moral Obligation.”
say what is it about the natures of rightness and wrongness […] that makes them apt for an explanation […] in terms of divine willings.\textsuperscript{158}

That is, while \textit{unrestricted} versions of DCT may be motivated on explanans-driven grounds, restricted versions of DCT cannot be. So, even if there are no good objections to restricted DCT that establish that it is implausible or false,\textsuperscript{159} for the reasons that Murphy provides, unless there is some \textit{explanandum-driven} reasons to think that restricted DCT is true, not even the theist has any reason to accept it.

In fact, some have even argued that the restricted divine command theorist’s method of splitting the horns of the Euthyphro dilemma ultimately makes God’s commands superfluous. Given that there are axiological facts that are independent of God’s will and which provide him with reasons for issuing one command rather than other, it seems God’s commands simply become irrelevant. The very axiological facts that allowed the divine command theorist to avoid the arbitrariness objection seem sufficient to explain the deontic facts, and God’s commands are out of a job.

John Chandler defends this objection to restricted DCT.\textsuperscript{160} Unfortunately, Chandler misunderstands Adams’ account. He writes, “The most general characterization [of what is essential to DCT] is that, both in modified and unmodified forms, a D.C.T. asserts that ethical facts consist in facts about the will or commands of God […] D.C.T. must deny that there are any moral truths or standard independent of

\textsuperscript{158} Mark Murphy, “Restricted Theological Voluntarism,” \textit{Philosophy Compass} 7.10 (2012): 684.
\textsuperscript{159} Of course, I have not argued that there are no good objections restricted DCT. In fact, not only are there numerous objections to DCT that I have not considered, I argued in the previous section that absent some independent reason to think that DCT is true, DCT is unable to provide a plausible account of God’s obligations.
God’s will.”\textsuperscript{161} Chandler’s mistake is to assume that DCT must account for \textit{all} moral facts in terms of God’s will. Adams is quite explicit that his modified (i.e., restricted) DCT accounts only for facts about \textit{moral obligations} in terms of God’s commands. His treatment of moral goodness, on the other hand, is explicitly non-voluntaristic. In fairness to Chandler, however, Adams’ early account (which is the account to which Chandler is responding), does make much of the notion of God’s love, which, we may agree with Chandler, is a nonmoral notion. Nevertheless, the view with which I have been concerned holds that there are moral axiological facts (not merely facts about divine love) that hold independently of God’s will, and these facts provide God with reasons for issuing the commands that he does. Fortunately, although I present Chandler’s objection in his own terms, we can—without doing any damage to his argument—understand his claims concerning the property of being loving as, instead, concerning the property of being morally good.

Chandler’s argument consists of three claims:

1) God commands \(a\) iff \(a\) is right (obligatory).
2) \(a\) is a loving act iff God commands \(a\).
3) So, \(a\) is a loving act iff \(a\) is right (obligatory).

He continues:

If an action’s being loving is a good (or compelling) reason for a loving God to command it, it must be equally good reason for us to perform it. […] That loving actions are commanded by God, may be an additional reason for believers to perform them; but there is already sufficient (justificatory) reason. […] The content of the moral code can in principle be read off from the knowledge of which acts are loving, without reference to God. […] Indeed, God’s role will approximate that of the omniscient, benevolent, observer of the ideal observer

\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 231.}
theory, since it doesn’t make any difference whether he is divine, or creator, or omnipotent [...] and like the notion of an ideal observer, the usefulness of the concept doesn’t depend on whether such a being really exists.\textsuperscript{162}

Fortunately for the divine command theorist, however, Chandler’s argument can be challenged on numerous fronts. To begin with, Adams denies that God commands all loving acts (or, if we prefer, all morally good acts) because Adams denies that there is a unique set of commands that would be issued by a perfectly loving (or good) God.\textsuperscript{163} So, he rejects Chandler’s claim that the content of morality can be read off from facts about the nature of love.\textsuperscript{164}

Secondly, as Wainwright points out, the first premise and the conclusion of Chandler’s argument merely state biconditionals. So, they do not tell us that an action’s being loving (or good) is what justifies or explains why that action is right (in the case of premise 1) or commanded by God (in the case of premise 2).\textsuperscript{165} However, while I agree that Chandler’s formulation of the objection is flawed for the reason that Wainwright gives, I take it that the problem is easily remedied. According to Adams’ DCT,

\begin{enumerate}
  \item For all right actions, $a$, $a$ is right because God commands it. \hfill (1*)
  \item For all right actions, $a$, God commands $a$ because $a$ is loving. \hfill (2*)
  \item For all right actions, $a$, $a$ is right because it is loving. \hfill (3*)
\end{enumerate}

Of course, if this argument is to be valid, the word “because” must be used univocally in each of the premises. Unfortunately for Chandler, it is not. In (1*), the explanatory relation signaled by the word “because” is constitutive, but for (2*) it is a rationalizing

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 236.
\textsuperscript{163} See Adams, \textit{Finite and Infinite Goods}, 255.
\textsuperscript{164} For additional reasons to reject Chandler’s claim that, like the hypothetical Ideal Observer, God’s commands are immaterial, see \textit{ibid.}, 256-258.
\textsuperscript{165} See Wainwright, \textit{Religion and Morality}, 90.
explanation. That is, while 1* tells us what it is for action $a$ to be right, 2* merely provides God’s reason for commanding $a$. So, the argument commits the fallacy of equivocation and is invalid. Chandler seems to recognize this. He writes:

It must of course be denied that if an action possesses the property of being right (wrong) it does so in virtue of possessing the property of being loving (unloving). That would eliminate the role of God’s commands. […] Instead, the divine command theorist must maintain] that if an action possesses [the property of being morally right or wrong] it does so because and only because it is commanded or forbidden by God. Their being loving acts is a reason for God to command those acts He does; not the reason those acts are right.166

I take it that it is his recognition of the fact that the revised argument that I suggest above is invalid that he states the argument in terms of biconditionals instead. However, if Chandler does recognize the invalidity of the above argument, it is puzzling why he thinks that it is problematic for the divine command theorist to agree with him that if an action’s being loving is a good—even compelling—reason for God to command it, it is an equally good reason for us to perform it. The divine command theorist can (and, I think, should) happily agree to that! But it doesn’t follow from that that the action’s being loving is a good reason to regard the action as obligatory. So, Adams can maintain that what makes it the case that $a$ is obligatory rather than merely good is that God commands $a$. Furthermore, it is not merely that there is conceptual space for such a view, which makes it possible for DCT to escape refutation. Rather, as we began to see in previous chapters, Adams thinks there is actually good reason to think that more is required for an action to be morally obligatory.

166 Chandler, op. cit., 236.
Adams defends what he calls a “social theory of obligations.” For him, the right (unlike the good) is essentially social in nature. That is, to say that one has an obligation to φ is not merely to say that it would be good (perhaps even best) to φ. Rather, to say that one has an obligation to φ is to say that one must φ, that φ-ing is required of one. Social theories of obligation maintain that, “Having an obligation to do something consists in being required (in a certain way, under certain circumstances or conditions), by another person or group of persons, to do it”\textsuperscript{167} such that, “If an action is wrong, […] there must be a person or persons, distinct from the agent, who may appropriately have an adverse reaction to it. For the meaning of the obligation family of ethical terms is tied to such reactions to the wrong.”\textsuperscript{168} Of course, this is not a sufficient condition for an action’s being wrong. Rather, Adams lists several platitudes concerning our use of the term “moral obligation,” e.g., that moral obligations are something we should take seriously such that, if one fails to fulfill one’s obligation, it is appropriate for others to blame one and for one to feel guilty; moral obligations can motivate action; moral obligations ground reasons for compliance; fulfillment of obligations and avoidance of wrongdoing are to be publically instilled, etc.\textsuperscript{169} Understanding moral obligations as an essentially social notion makes sense of these platitudes. We have both reason and motive to comply with the demands that others make on us because (we fear) others might punishment us for our failure to comply. More positively, one has reason to comply with the demands of others insofar as one values the social bonds between

\textsuperscript{167} Adams, \textit{Finite and Infinite Goods}, 242.
\textsuperscript{168} \textit{Ibid.}, 233.
\textsuperscript{169} \textit{Ibid.}, 235ff.
oneself and others, and complying with the demands of others expresses one’s valuing our social relationships.

Moral obligations, however, do not arise from just any demand that others might make on an individual. Rather, as I explained in chapter 2, Adams thinks that the social bonds that give rise to moral obligations must not only be valued, they must be properly valued. That is, they must be good. One’s reason for complying with the demands of others becomes stronger to the extent that the one making the demand is good and to the extent that the demand itself is good.\textsuperscript{170} For these reasons, Adams thinks that a social theory of obligations does well at capturing the platitudes about our use of the term “moral obligations.”

According to Adams, the main problem with social theories is that they cannot adequately account for the objectivity of moral obligations. Whether one has a moral obligation to tell the truth neither depends on whether one believes that one has such an obligation, nor does it depend on what attitudes one has toward truth telling. I can have an obligation and fail to believe that I have an obligation, and I can believe that I have an obligation and fail to have an actual obligation. Something similar can be said with respect to societies. Whether one has a moral obligation does not depend on the demands of one’s society. If they did, then, as Adams points out, “Society would be able to eliminate obligations by just not making certain demands.”\textsuperscript{171} Furthermore, some existing societies have demanded far less than they should have. For example, the antebellum south did not demand that all persons be treated with dignity and respect. Fortunately, divine command theory is a sort of idealized version of the social theory of

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., 242-245.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., 247.
obligations, and since God is good, his commands are good, and the relationship between God and humans is a valuable relationship, God’s commands not only provide the needed objectivity, they are perfectly suited to constitute moral obligations. So, if Adams is correct in thinking of moral obligations as having this kind of social character and if he is correct in thinking that God is needed to account for the objectivity of moral obligations, then contrary to Chandler, God’s commands are far from superfluous.

Of course, whether either of the conjuncts of the above antecedent is true is a contested matter. Unfortunately, space precludes a full evaluation of Adams’ social theory of obligations (or other explanandum-driven arguments in favor of DCT). Nevertheless, it seems to me that there are good reasons for theists and non-theists alike to reject Adams’ social theory of obligations. While I agree with Adams that God’s commands can generate new obligations and strengthen existing obligations, it seems to me that—contrary to Adams’ social theory—God’s commands are not necessary for the existence of moral obligations.

Adams believes otherwise, I suspect, because his account of the relationship between the properties of being commanded by God and being morally obligatory is

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174 For Murphy’s criticism of Adams’ social theory of obligation, see Murphy’s God and Moral Law, 124-32. For Murphy’s criticism of social theories more generally (but with particular focus on Darwall’s account), see God and Moral Law, 166-72.
modelled on the relationship between the properties *being the law of the land* and *being the edict of the sovereign*. Unfortunately, this strikes me as a poor model. I am prepared to accept that unless an appropriate legislative body forbids me from driving 120 MPH in residential areas, I do not have a legal obligation to refrain from doing so—and this despite the fact that driving 120 MPH in residential areas poses a great danger to those in my community. By contrast, it seems to me that I do have a *prima facie* moral obligation to refrain from such reckless behavior regardless of whether an appropriate authority (including God) forbids it. Similarly, the mere fact that torturing innocent children causes them tremendous pain is sufficient to generate a *prima facie* obligation not to torture them—irrespective of whether or not God forbids the torturing of innocent children.\(^{176}\)

While I concede that, absent further development, the above argument does not constitute a compelling defeater for Adams’ DCT, it does seem to me constitute a *prima facie* reason to think that moral obligations do not depend on God’s commands. In any case, it is sufficient for my purposes to point out that Adams’ explanandum-driven argument for DCT relies on a highly controversial view of the nature of obligations, *viz.*, that they are social in the way that Adams imagines, which the theist should feel free to reject given both that unrestricted versions of DCT are implausible and that there is no explanans-driven reasons to accept restricted versions of DCT.\(^{177}\)

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\(^{176}\) Murphy offers a powerful statement of this objection in his *God and Moral Law*, 116-20.

CHAPTER 4: GOD AND GOODNESS

In the previous two chapters, I argued that Adams’ restricted divine command theory can successfully rebut a number of prominent objections; nevertheless, I argued that the divine duties objection and the superfluity objection render his account unmotivated and, ultimately, implausible. But even if I am wrong about that and restricted DCT is defensible, we still need to ask whether the theist who is motivated by considerations like divine sovereignty has the resources to ground moral axiology in God. In this chapter, I explain a theistic account of goodness that was proposed by William Alston and further developed by Adams, and though I find various elements of Adams’ view to be obscure and in need of revision, I tentatively argue that a view of this sort is defensible.

4.1 THEISTIC VALUATIONAL PARTICULARISM: THE BASIC VIEW

Recall that conceiving of God the way that perfect being theologians do plausibly entails the following principle concerning God’s aseity and sovereignty:

AD: (i) God does not depend on anything distinct from Himself for his existing, and (ii) everything distinct from God depends on God’s creative activity for its existing.178

We have already seen how a restricted DCT (according to which some moral facts, viz., the deontic ones, are grounded in God’s commands) not only respects AD but has

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resources for dealing with a variety of concerns associated with the Euthyphro dilemma. However, this critically involved taking the axiological facts as independent of God’s commands. But if AD is true, then the theist must not only explain how deontic facts depend on God; she must also explain how axiological facts depend on him. How, then, can a theist motivated by something like AD account for the axiological facts in theistic terms? Commenting on this problem, Alston writes:

> We are not confronted with that horn [of the Euthyphro dilemma] in the original form, ‘God commands us to love our neighbours because that is what we ought to do’, but with a closely analogous form, ‘God commands us to love our neighbor because it is good that we should do so’. And that possesses the sort of feature deemed repellent to theism just as much as the first form, namely, that it makes goodness of states of affairs independent of the divine will, thereby subjecting God to valutational facts that are what they are independent of him. It thereby contradicts the absolute sovereignty of God; it implies that there are realities other than himself that do not owe their being to his creative activity…He must conform himself to [valuational truths] and so is not absolutely sovereign.¹⁷⁹

Alston’s response to this worry, which he calls *valuational particularism*, has become the standard view among theists looking to ground morality in God.¹⁸⁰ According to valuational particularism, God himself, i.e., the individual being, is the standard of goodness—not some abstract platonic principle. According to such a model, “God plays the role in evaluation that is more usually assigned, by objectivists about value, to Platonic Ideas or principles. Lovingness is good (a good-making feature, that on which goodness supervenes) not because of the Platonic existence of a general principle, but because God, the supreme standard of goodness, is loving. Goodness supervenes on

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every feature of God, not because some general principles are true but just because they are features of God.” Of course, this is not to deny the existence of general moral principles; rather, it is to deny that general moral principles are ontologically fundamental.

Robert Adams notes that Alston’s suggestion, which Adams admits helped arouse his interest in the subject, fits well within a long tradition of philosophical theologians who have thought that there is an affinity between Platonism and theism—in particular, that the role that Plato assigns to the form of the Good is best filled by God. Adams has since developed Alston’s suggestion that God is the Good into a comprehensive theory. Because Adams’ account is the most prominent and well-developed account of the how goodness depends on God, it is his way of developing the view that will be my primary focus. However, it is worth pointing out from the beginning that some aspects of Adams’ account are obscure and—to the extent that I understand them—implausible. Ultimately, then, I will go on to amend Adams’ view. But before doing so, I attempt to get Adams’ view on the table, attempt to make sense of it, and see what can be said on its behalf.

182 This quotation from Alston presents some difficulties. For example, whereas one would expect that lovingness’s having the property of being good to be the truthmaker for moral principles, Alston seems to conceive of Platonic principles as the truthmakers for lovingness’s being good. But Moore, a paradigmatic Platonist, would not say that goodness supervenes on pleasure because some general principle is true. Rather, the general principle “pleasure is intrinsically good” is true in virtue of some internal relation between goodness and the property of being pleasurable. As we will see, various aspects of both Alston’s and Adams’ views are hard to pin down. My goal is to get their views on the table and then seek to clarify them as I go on.
183 Adams notes that there are two strands of thinking in Plato’s thought about the forms. According to one strand, the forms are conceived as properties or universals; in the other, forms are conceived as exemplars. Adams makes it clear that to the extent that he is following Plato, it is the exemplarist stand of Plato’s thought that he is following. Adams writes, “If God is the Good itself, then the Good is not an abstract object but a concrete (though not physical) individual. Indeed, it is a person, or importantly like a person.” Adams, Finite and Infinite Goods, 14.
In order to explain Adams’ theory, it is helpful to recall that Adams denotes that
the meaning of moral terms like “rightness” and “wrongness” can be understood in
theistic terms. Rather, as we saw in the previous chapters, for Adams the natures of
rightness and wrongness consist in being commanded and forbidden by God,
respectively. Furthermore, as I argued in chapter three, to give an account of the nature
of something is to explain it; in particular, it is to give a constitutive explanation.
Similarly, Adams’ valuational particularism suggests an account of the nature of
goodness, which, if defensible, provides a theistic explanation of goodness. But what is
the nature of goodness according to Adams, and what reasons does Adams offer on
behalf of his account?

Following the lead of Alston (who himself follows the lead of many cognitive
scientists), Quinn points out that at least some of our concepts are “structured in terms of
a prototypical individual and a system of relations of similarity to it.”184 Alston
illustrates with the concept of a meter. What makes a given length a meter is its equality
to (what was, anyway) the standard meter stick in Paris—not its conformity to a platonic
principle or property. Similarly, according to Adams’ valuational particularism, what
makes actions, character traits, et cetera morally good is the way in which they resemble
God.185 Though Adams goes on to finesse the view a bit, the central tenet of his axiology
is this: God is what Plato called “the Good,” (i.e., he is the paradigm or standard of

184 Quinn, “Theological Voluntarism,” 76.
185 The analogy is not perfect, of course. For whereas it is arbitrary which object was chosen to be the
standard meter, Alston does not think that it is arbitrary whether God is the standard of goodness. See
“Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists,” 321-2. For discussion, see Wes Morriston, “Must
There Be a Standard of Moral Goodness Apart from God?” Philosophia Christi 2.3.1 (2001): 133-5. I
return to this and related issues below.
goodness) and the goodness of finite beings consists in their resemblance to God, or more crudely, goodness is God-likeness.

Note well that when Adams says that God is the Good, he is not using the expression “the Good” in the same sense that Moore uses the expression. Moore distinguishes between “good” and “the good,” and for him the former refers to the property of goodness (or the property of being good), and the latter refers to those things that have the property of being good. But when Adams claims that God is the Good, he does not mean that God is the only thing on the list of items that has the property of being good. Rather, Adams takes “the Good” to refer to the perfect standard, exemplar, and ontological ground of goodness in the sense that the property of being good is the property of resembling God.

Why think this account is true? In order to motivate it, Adams follows Richard Boyd in employing developments in the philosophy of language regarding natural kind terms in the service of metaethical accounts of the nature of moral properties.186 But whereas Boyd thinks that ethical terms pick out natural kinds, Adams denies this. Nevertheless, Adams claims to detect a general pattern about the relationship between natures and meanings. According to Adams, “What is given by the meaning, or perhaps more broadly by the use of the words, is a role that the nature is to play. If there is a single candidate that bests fills that role, that will be the nature of the thing. In the case

of a natural kind, arguably, the role its nature is assigned by our language is that of accounting causally for the observable common properties of identified samples. The role that the meaning of ‘good’ picks out for the nature of the good is rather different.”\textsuperscript{187}

As Adams continues, it is clear that, for him, what fixes the role of goodness includes more than what is conceptually true of goodness; in particular, the various first-order normative judgments concerning what Moore called “the good,” i.e., judgments concerning which things have the property of being good.\textsuperscript{188}

But given that the term “good” is used in disparate contexts, Adams limits his project to the uses of the term “good” or “goodness” which are naturally interpreted as meaning “excellence.” Unfortunately, he says surprisingly little about what he means by “excellence.” What is clear is that Adams intends his account of goodness or excellence to be quite broad, encompassing, for example, beauty as one variety of excellence, and as we will see, he clearly thinks that excellence is a property of a wide range of kinds of entities including, for example: persons, physical objects, poems, mathematical proofs, qualities, and lives. And although he doesn’t explicitly says so, I take it that he also intends for excellence to in some way map onto intrinsic goodness. In any case, he clearly intends for excellence to be contrasted with instrumental goodness. He also contrasts excellence with well-being (a person’s good).\textsuperscript{189} Because Adams says so little about the concept of excellence and because what he does say suggests that he intends it to apply to surprisingly disparate things, I find his view difficult to grasp. Nonetheless, I attempt to faithfully present Adams’ view so that we can see the difficulties that arise,

\textsuperscript{187} Adams, \textit{Finite and Infinite Goods}, 16.

\textsuperscript{188} If, for example, a theory of goodness that yielded on the normative level that all and only leather boots are good, that would be a serious problem for the theory.

\textsuperscript{189} \textit{Ibid.}, 17.
and ultimately, we will see why we are going to have to limit our discussion to intrinsic 
*moral* goodness.

What, then, according to Adams, are the conceptual truths and platitudes about 
goodness that fix the reference of “good” understood as “excellence?” Although Adams 
does not clearly demarcate each of the various features he discusses, I take it that the list 
includes the following:

1) Goodness is not a feature of states of affairs.\(^{190}\)

2) Goodness is an objective property.\(^{191}\)

3) Goodness is a property that—at least typically—we *recognize* as an appropriate 
object of love, admiration, and desire.\(^{192}\)

4) Goodness is reason-giving.\(^{193}\)

\(^{190}\) “Consider beauty, the sort of excellence with which I began this chapter. What types of thing can be 
beautiful? Persons, of course; physical objects; some kinds of abstraction (such as poems and 
mathematical proofs); qualities (such as a beautiful shade of blue); deeds; lives—but not in general states of 
affairs. States of affairs do not typically have the sort of unity that is required for beauty. I believe that 
excellence in general is like beauty in this respect; and I think that is something we can learn by reflection 
on the meaning or the grammar (in a broad sense) of the language we use to speak about excellence.” *Ibid.*, 
17. Although Adams clearly intends to deny that goodness in his sense is a feature of states of affairs, 
elsewhere he affirms that “If anything is good, in the sense of ‘excellent’, it is good for us to love it, 
admire, it, and want to be related to it, whether we do in fact or not.” *Ibid.*, 25. But assuming that Adams’ 
second use of the term “good” refers to excellence, then it seems as if Adams affirms that one’s having the 
attitude of love or admiration is good, and *that* seems like a state of affairs.

\(^{191}\) “I believe that the way we speak about ‘goodness’ in contexts where we mean excellence treats it as a 
*property* and as one that objects of evaluation possess (or lack) independently of whether we now think 
they do. We say things about excellence that have the grammar of assertions of fact and that fit into 
arguments that are subject to the rules of logic applicable to assertions of fact. In our inquiries about what 
is or is not good, we generally think and speak on the assumption that we could be mistaken. Our keeping 
an eye out for possible corrections of our views in is important part of the seriousness of evaluative 
discourse. These considerations strongly favor *realism* about the good; as candidates for the role of the 
good, this is, they favor properties possessed *objectively.*” *Ibid.*, 18.

\(^{192}\) Of course, we can love, admire, and desire things that are not objectively good. Nevertheless, “The role 
that our use of evaluative language assigns to goodness is partly determined also by the things we regard as 
good...But a property that belonged mainly to things that almost all of us have always thought were bad 
would surely not be filling the role picked out by our talk of ‘goodness.’ Goodness is therefore an object 
not only of admiration and desire, but also of *recognition*, at least commonly and to some degree. That is 
part of the role it must fill. Something’s seeming good to us is not what makes it good on my view, not 
what its goodness consists in. But if we do not place some trust in our own recognition of the good, we 
will lose our grip on the concept of good and our cognitive contact with the Good itself.” See *Ibid.*, 19-20.

\(^{193}\) Adams writes, “I have already acknowledged as a conceptual truth that if anything is good, in the sense of ‘excellent’, it is *good* for us to love it, admire, it, and want to be related to it, whether we do in fact or
5) Goodness is motivating.\footnote{The meaning of ‘good’ is in large part shaped by the fact that most users of the term are in fact motivated to pursue many of those things that they judge to be good, and are sometimes so motivated because they judge them to be good, and that it is therefore an important part of the semantically indicated role of the good to be the object of this motivated pursuit. \textit{Ibid.}, 26-8. This is what Peter Railton refers to as the “normative role” of the good. See Railton, “Naturalism and Prescriptivity,” \textit{Social Philosophy and Policy} 7 (1989): 151-74, especially 165 and 168.}

6) The goodness of an entity supervenes on that entity’s natural features.\footnote{“It is important also that the excellence of anything have grounds in its own nature or condition, and resemblance satisfies the requirement by having parts of its grounds in each of the resembling things…If something resembles God, it does so in some respect and by virtue of other features that could be identified by someone sufficiently knowledgeable. Goodness likewise is a property that things have in some respect and by virtue of other features they have.” Adams, \textit{Finite and Infinite Goods}, 29.}

Following Plato, Adams thinks of the good as an object of desire or pursuit and that the character of our pursuit of the good (including the character of the things we think are good) determines what would satisfy our pursuit. Whatever most closely fits the criteria indicated by the character of the pursuit as characterized above picks out an objective property and fixes the referent of the term “goodness.” And just as it is possible (though extremely difficult) on Plato’s view for us to grasp the Form of the Good and that, once we do, we will recognize it as the good that we were looking for all along, the theist holds a similar view about God. Adams writes, “In one version it is possible for humans (in this life or the next) to attain a ‘Beatific Vision’ of God, which is both as adequate and truthful a cognition of God as we could ever have, and one that will leave us no doubt that God is supremely and unsurpassably the good that we (in our better moments, at any rate) were seeking.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 23.}  Indeed, Adams goes on to say that it is “part and parcel of the package of views that define theism.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 28.} So, because God is the (infinite) Good, the goodness of finite beings consists in their bearing some relation to
God, and—again following Plato—Adams tentatively suggests that resemblance is the best candidate. The goodness of finite beings consists in their resemblance to or imaging of God. The property of resembling God, like the property of being good, is not a property of states of affairs but is an objective property that is at least to some extent recognizable, reason-giving, motivating, and supervenient on the good entity’s natural features.

But even if one grants to Adams that the property of resembling God could play the role that is semantically indicated by our use of the term “good,” what reason is there to suppose that only God could play this role or even that God is the best candidate to play this role? Here Adams cites another feature of the semantics of “good” that he thinks demonstrates the superiority of his theistic account, viz., that the Good is transcendental. I don’t think that the transcendence of the Good does uniquely favor Adams’ theistic valuational particularism, but because my focus is not on explanandum-driven arguments for theistic metaethics, my explanation of Adams’ account of transcendence, why he believes it favors his account, and why I am skeptical of Adams’ argument can be brief.198

For Adams, the transcendence of the good is a feature that guarantees that we are always able to take what he calls “the critical stance” toward any item that is characterized solely in terms of its natural properties. That is, “For any natural,

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empirically identifiable property or type of action that we or others may regard as good or bad, right or wrong, we are committed to leave it always open in principle to raise evaluative or normative questions by asking whether that property or action-type is really good or right.\textsuperscript{199} Adams view accommodates the critical stance nicely because God is transcendent, i.e., never fully known or comprehended, and consequently, it is always an open question which properties resemble God. However, because naturalists can discover whatever natural property they identify with goodness, e.g., what is pleasurable, they are unable to adopt the critical stance with regard to whether a particular action or property is good.

For present purposes, we may remain agnostic whether the ability to accommodate the critical stance is an adequacy condition for any metaethical account and focus, instead, on whether its ability to accommodate the critical stance favors Adams’ theistic account of goodness over naturalist accounts.\textsuperscript{200} I believe it does not; here is why. Imagine some naturalistic property P that is capable of filling the semantically indicated role of the good and respecting the various plaitudes that help fix the reference of the concept “good,” and imagine that one comes to believe that P perfectly fills this

\textsuperscript{199} Adams, \textit{op. cit.}, 78. For Adams, this is the real lesson of Moore’s Open Question Argument. Contra Moore, Adams denies that the mere fact that a metaethical analysis can be intelligibly questioned shows that the analysis is not correct. “In the case of evaluative and normative language, however, we have a special commitment to allow that language to be used to question or challenge the value of any human thought or action and any object of human experience...[T]o treat the value of any natural object or action...as immune to such criticism is a fearful abridgement of ethical possibility. In a religious perspective it is idolatry.” \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{200} Even if Adams is right that the critical stance favors a view according to which the good is transcendent, this leaves open whether his view is preferable to non-naturalistic accounts of moral properties \textit{vis-à-vis} the role they play. Adams does not explicitly compare his theistic account with non-naturalist accounts, but as Murphy argues, Adams’ view is preferable for two reasons: “First, Adams’s view explains why the various aspects of this role cluster as they do...; second, there are specific aspects of the goodness role—in particular, supervenience and knowledge—that seem to work better on a theistic reduction than on a nonnaturalist account.” Murphy, \textit{op. cit.}, 152, 160. See also Adams, \textit{op. cit.}, 70.
role. Now, so long as one continues to believe that some action A has P and that P perfectly fills the semantically indicated role of the good (and that whatever perfectly fills the semantically indicated role of the good is identical with the good), then one cannot take the critical stance toward A. But this isn’t a terribly interesting conclusion because it still remains possible that, upon reflection, one comes to believe that A is good while simultaneously recognizing that A does not have property P (or, alternatively, one might come to believe upon reflection that A is not good while simultaneously judging that, nevertheless, A does have property P). Of course, in some such situations, one might be inclined to discount one’s moral intuition about the particular case, but in other cases, you might not. You might, instead, take the moral intuition as veridical and thereby come to deny both that A is good and, consequently, that P is identical to the property of being good. But however one actually comes down on the issue, while the agent is reflecting on how to resolve the tension, one is capable of taking the critical stance with respect to the goodness of x. So long as one’s naturalistic account of goodness is subject to revision in the light of contrary evidence (e.g., one’s moral intuitions), it seems that Adams is wrong; proponents of naturalistic accounts of the good are capable of adopting the critical stance.201

Now, one might think that I have somehow mischaracterized the critical stance or Adams’ use of it because what makes it possible for one to take the critical stance given Adams’ theory is directly tied to his theistic account of the Good. In particular, the reason why we are able to adopt the critical stance in a given case is the fact that it is not

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201 See Murphy, God and Moral Law, 153. Murphy speculates that the attraction of Adams’s view over naturalistic views stems from the fact that he uses of Boyd’s naturalistic account as his foil. See ibid., 152-3. For Boyd’s response to Adams, see Boyd, op. cit.
clear whether resemblance to God is present in the case. But the response I gave above for why the naturalist can accommodate the critical stance does not rely on the fact that it is unclear whether the naturalistic property that one identifies with goodness is present. Instead, it merely relies on the fact that the identity claims are known a posteriori and are therefore subject to revision in light of contrary evidence. But it seems that this should be rather obvious to Adams, which in turn suggests that the response I provide above is somehow beside the point.

I am not sure that this worry is well-founded, but even if it is, Fisher argues that naturalistic accounts can accommodate the critical stance in a way that exactly parallels the way Adams’ account does. On Adams account, the reason why we are able to adopt the critical stance with respect to whether some action is good is the fact that it is not clear whether that action resembles God. Similarly, ‘full-information’ naturalistic accounts of the good (according to which what it is for something to be good is for a fully rational and fully informed individual to desire that thing) do not preclude one from taking the critical stance towards the objects or actions one regards as good because in many cases, at least, it is not at all clear to an individual what he or she would desire if he or she were fully rational and fully informed. Consequently, I think that there is reason to believe that Adams’ argument for valuational particularism fails; in any case, it is not clear to me that his argument succeeds.

Of course, in general, one cannot establish that a given view is *false* merely by criticizing an argument in favor of the view. However, if one can undercut the reasons

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202 See Fisher, 338-40. I doubt, however, that Adams would find this persuasive because he thinks that the role of the Good is best filled by something actual—not merely possible. See Adams, *op. cit.*, 42-5.
that proponents of the view offer in favor of their view, one can argue that the view is unmotivated and, therefore, that one ought not to accept it regardless of whether or not it happens to be true. Fortunately for valuational particularism, one need not rely on arguments like Adams’ in order to motivate the view. So long as Adams’ account meets the various explanandum-centered considerations that are relevant, one need not argue for the superiority of Adams’ account on the explanandum-centered considerations alone. Rather, one might prefer Adams’ account to other accounts on explanans-centered grounds, and as I argued both in chapter one and again at the beginning of the present chapter, assuming that God exists, divine sovereignty does militate in favor of Adams’ account over accounts in which God does not figure prominently in the explanation of moral facts.203 Baggett and Walls, for example, claim that the inseparability of God and the Good is “something of an axiomatic Anselmian intuition; a vision apprehended, not just the deliverance of a discursive argument.”204 As I indicated earlier in this chapter, Adams agrees, claiming, for example, that it is “part and parcel of the package of views that define theism.”205 206

The question to ask, then, is whether Adams’ view is defensible. When I began working on this project, I planned to argue both that Adams’ DCT of moral obligations as well as his theistic valuational particularistic account of goodness are implausible. Over

203 Because he thinks that sovereignty entails control or discretion, Morriston denies that sovereignty favors of theistic valuational particularism. See Morriston, op. cit., 133, 136-8. But, of course, as I have characterized sovereignty, it does not require control or discretion. For discussion of the issue, see Baggett and Walls, 85-92.
204 Baggett and Walls, 93.
205 Adams, op. cit., 28. See also Adams discussion of idolatry on pp. 199-213.
206 Though I haven’t developed this line of thought, it is worth mentioning, at least, that Adams’ account is also congruent with, although not obviously entailed by, the idea that humans have a special sort of value in virtue of their being made in the image of God. For discussion of the special value of persons, see Adams, op. cit., 102-28.
time, however, I have become more sympathetic to Adams’ treatment of goodness. Consequently, I devote the remainder of this chapter to a defense of Adams’ theistic valuational particularism—albeit a modified version thereof. Although I am not entirely confident that the view is true or even that it can withstand the various objections that I will go on to consider, I am no longer convinced that the objections to Adams’ valuational particularism that originally gave me pause are, in fact, persuasive. My defense of Adams’ theory is, therefore, somewhat tentative.

Now, I cannot anticipate every objection to Adams’ theory (or has he prefers to call it, his “framework”), nor can I address every extant objection; there are simply too many potential worries to address each of them. Indeed, Adams’ theory is far richer than those aspects of his view that I discuss here, and the complexity and scope of his theory make it susceptible to a wide variety of objections. Fortunately, Adams anticipates many of the objections in the course of elucidating his theory and attempts to address them. In any case, rather than attempt to a full defense of Adams’ theory, in what follows I must limit my task to addressing what I regard as the primary objections to Adams’ theistic valuational particularism.

4.2 Refining Theistic Valuational Particularism

I began the previous section by elucidating the basic idea behind Alston’s and Adams’ theistic valuational particularism, viz., that goodness or excellence consists in resemblance to God. Unfortunately, the basic view does not accurately represent Adams’ considered view. In fact, the basic view is subject to various objections in response to
which Adams develops a more refined—albeit less wieldy—account. In order to better understand both the motivations as well as the nature of his more refined view, I begin by explaining the objections to his initial, more basic, account. The objections concern whether resembling God is both necessary and sufficient for being good.

On the face of it, God-likeness seems neither necessary nor sufficient for goodness. Taking the question of necessity first, Adams cites a gourmet meal as an instance of something excellent that might appear not to be a case of God-likeness.\(^{207}\) Susan Wolf echoes this worry, claiming that theistic valuational particularism “is totally baffling if we are to understand the idea of resemblance or imaging literally. In what sense can a good meal, a good basketball game, a good performance of the Brandenburg Concerti, a field of wildflowers, the *Critique of Pure Reason* and my next door neighbor all resemble or image the same thing? How, in any event, can a good meal be said to image God?”\(^{208}\) Wolf seems to be expressing two worries. First, how, in general, can such a disparate list of good things resemble one thing? Second, how can certain particular good things, e.g., a good meal, resemble God? In his response to Wolf, Adams appears to neglect the first worry, and I must confess that I don’t see how this question is supposed to pose a problem for Adams.\(^{209}\)

But in response to the second worry, Adams

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\(^{207}\) See Adams, *op. cit.*, 30.  
\(^{209}\) It does not seem to me at all difficult to explain how a disparate group of items can all resemble some one particular thing. For example, Bourbon Old-Fashioned, reading philosophy, and the color black all resemble the Bahamas. How so? They are all liked by me. Now, there is a related problem for non-naturalist views that take goodness as *sui generis*. The problem with such views is that they offer a disparate list of good things (e.g., pleasure, knowledge, affection, etc.), but it is not clear what they have in common—other than the fact that they are all good. However, because Adams is a reductionist, he has no trouble identifying a feature that all the good things have in common, *viz.*, they all resemble God. Yet another related question, which Adams does address, concerns whether broadly Platonistic accounts of the good (such as Adams’) are able to account for the varieties of goodness. Adams response to this worry involves appeal to “focal meaning.” The idea behind focal meaning is that a term like “goodness” can be
agrees with Wolf that it is not easy to see how a good meal can resemble God.

Nevertheless, he claims that

We are prepared to analogize a good meal to other excellent things, such as good music, in the predicates of aesthetic appreciation and analysis that we are prepared to apply to it. Such analogies are precarious, and it is hard to identify a clear resemblance between a good meal and a good performance of the Brandenburg Concerti; but it seems that they can have a certain kinship in excellence. And if at a deeper level that kinship is a shared resemblance or analogy to an excellence so transcendent that it largely escapes our understanding, we should perhaps not be surprised if it is hard to understand that more momentous resemblance.\(^{210}\)

It is difficult to know what Adams has in mind when he speaks of the “predicates of aesthetic appreciation and analysis that we are prepared to apply” to both a good meal and a good performance of the Brandenburg Concerti. Nevertheless, the heart of Adams’ reply involves his emphasis on the transcendence of God. Given God’s transcendence, it is not surprising that there will be cases in which we fail to see clearly the resemblance between finite goods and the infinite good; the resemblance might nevertheless exist—albeit in fragmentary or analogical way.

What is more problematic, perhaps, is the fact that—as Adams’ points out—even moral virtues pose a problem to theistic valuational particularism. In particular, some of the moral virtues seem to essentially depend on our finitude, e.g., our mortality, weakness, and liability to frustration, temptation, and error, features that are generally thought to be incompatible with the divine nature. So, even certain moral excellences are not so much as capable of fragmentary and humble resemblance to God since they are

\[^{210}\text{Adams, “Responses,” }\textit{Philosophy and Phenomenological Research} \textbf{64.2} (2002): 476.\]
incompatible with the divine nature. In response to this worry, Adams suggests that in the case of those virtues that involve the accommodation, mourning, or struggle against our limitations, the resemblance to God will consist primarily in the content, strength, and effectiveness of our caring (and perhaps also in our knowledge of the situation). “Human limitations may be inextricably involved in the only ways that such perceptiveness and care can be manifested in human life, but it does not follow that there cannot be analogues of these excellences, without the limitations, in God.”

So, it is not clear to me that there is good reason to deny that God-likeness is necessary for goodness. The more troubling question concerns the sufficiency of God-likeness for goodness. Adams seems to agree that it is not, which leads him to refine the basic view. There are certain properties that are essential to God which are, nevertheless, not excellences in humans. Consider the following two examples given by Adams: 1) God is powerful. 2) God believes himself to be divine. But while being powerful and believing oneself to be God are properties of God, not every creature that resembles God in these respects will thereby be excellent. For example, Adams denies that political power was an excellence in Hitler, and it is clearly not an excellence in me, a non-divine person, to believe that I am divine.

In response to this worry, Adams suggests that resemblance is more holistic than what these alleged counter-examples suggest. In particular, “Not every sharing of a property constitutes a resemblance.” Rather, according to Adams, the way, context, and especially the importance of the shared properties determines whether two items

212 Ibid., 31-2.
213 Adams, *op. cit.*, 33.
resemble each other. For example, a squirrel and I might have the same number of hairs on our bodies, but, according to Adams, we would not say that the squirrel resembles me in that respect or that it is more like me than another squirrel that has 10 fewer hairs.\textsuperscript{214} But while I agree with Adams that the squirrel that has the same number of hairs as I does not resemble me more than the squirrel with 10 fewer hairs, it is hard to see how Adams could deny that the squirrel does resemble me more with respect to the number of hairs on our bodies.\textsuperscript{215} And even with respect to the claim about overall resemblance, it’s far from obvious that \textit{importance} (whatever that amounts to) is what does the explanatory work here as Adams suggests. It seems to me at least as plausible to suppose that our judgement that the two squirrels resemble each other more than I resemble the squirrel with the same number hairs as me is explained by the number of properties shared by the two squirrels as compared to the number of properties shared by the first squirrel and myself. I am not sure. Still, perhaps all that Adams needs in order to blunt the force of the alleged counter-examples to theistic valuational particularism is the claim that only \textit{holistic resemblance to God constitutes goodness}.

However, because parodies and caricatures show that even holistic resemblance to God is not sufficient for goodness, Adams rejects this view in favor of the view that “the excellence of other things besides God will consist…in the \textit{faithfulness} of their imaging of God.”\textsuperscript{216} The reason that caricatures and parodies do not share the excellence of their original is that they are distorted in ways that faithful representations are not. “The

\textsuperscript{214} The example is Adams’.
\textsuperscript{215} Murphy provides a nice example: “You are a bouncer at the All Mammal 115,000-120,000 Hairs Club. My identical twin and I show up; I have 117,298 hairs and my twin has 121,298 hairs. The squirrel waiting patiently in line behind us has 117,298 hairs. You rightly take the squirrel to resemble me more closely than I resemble my brother.” Murphy, \textit{Op. cit.}, 157.
\textsuperscript{216} Adams, \textit{op. cit.}
caricature exaggerates one or more features of the original, whereas the faithful portrait represents the features in a balanced way and in relation to those other features to which they are most importantly related to the original. How much, and what, must be included in a faithful image depends on what is most important about the way in which the original has the features shared or represented."\textsuperscript{217} \textsuperscript{218}

As Adams emphasizes, the degree of importance of the properties that are shared by God and finite beings plays a central role in determining whether there is genuine or, perhaps better, the relevant kind of resemblance. Questions arise at this point concerning the objectivity of resemblance and whether Adams’ account is circular. Indeed, Adams spends several pages attempting to address these concerns,\textsuperscript{219} but regardless of whether or not he succeeds, it is not clear to me that the alleged counterexamples that Adams raises for his basic theory require him to jettison the simple idea that Goodness is Godlikeness. In any case, there are alternative ways of dealing with the issues that Adams raises which are worth exploring.

One of Adams’ arguments against basic valuational particularism is as follows: 1) If basic valuational particularism is true, then, because Hitler’s power resembles God’s power, Hitler’s power is an excellence in Hitler. 2) Hitler’s power was not an excellence in Hitler. So, 3) Basic valuational particularism is false. This is one of the arguments

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\textsuperscript{217} \textit{Ibid.}.
\textsuperscript{218} For this reason, Adams goes on to say that it is probably best to think of Hitler’s power as a caricature of God’s power rather than to deny that Hitler’s power resembles God’s power. Presumably, Adams would say something similar with respect to the example of a finite creature believing itself to be God. I find this strange, however. Hitler’s power does not really strike me a caricature of God’s power. Qua power, it holistically and “faithfully” resembles God’s power. What is true is that Hitler is a caricature of God insofar as Hitler’s power is exaggerated relative to his other features, e.g., his concern for others.
\textsuperscript{219} He outlines two ways of appealing to God’s attitudes toward things that might help safeguard objectivity while avoiding circularity. See \textit{ibid.}, 33-8.
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that leads Adams to modify his basic theistic valuational particularism by limiting the
kinds of resemblances to God that constitute excellence. But I think Adams is wrong
about premise 2. Hitler’s power was one of the features contributing to his excellence. I
think that the reason Adams accepts 2 is that he confuses Hitler’s overall value with his
intrinsic goodness. Hitler’s power contributed to his excellence, but his intrinsic
goodness is greatly outweighed by his intrinsic badness. Scott Hill agrees and notes that
although Adams offers an account of excellence and (at least something like) an account
of intrinsic badness, he never offers an account of overall intrinsic value. Hill attempts to
remedy this by supplementing Adams’ basic valuational particularist account of intrinsic
goodness or excellence with an account of various kinds of badness and an account of
overall intrinsic value. Hill’s account involves several components, but regardless of
whether the details of his account are acceptable, I think that his strategy for dealing with
the Hitler case is on the right track.

Hill also discusses the objection to basic valuational particularism concerning the
fact that it seems to entail that it would be an excellence in finite creatures to believe
themselves to be God. Unfortunately, rather than discuss the objection in the context of
basic valuational particularism (which is a component of his overall theory of intrinsic
value), Hill presents the objection as a potential problem for his proposed theory of
overall intrinsic value. He labels his theory of overall intrinsic value GOODO.

GOODO: An object, o, is overall intrinsically valuable to degree, n, if and only if
n is the number that is obtained by subtracting the degree to which o is...intrinsically good.

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221 Ibid., 280.
Hill argues that on Lewis’ analysis of counterfactuals, it is false that Adams (or any non-divine being) would become overall more intrinsically valuable if he were to come to believe himself to be God. This is because in the closest possible world in which Adams believes that he is God, the psychological laws remain the same and, consequently, Adams acts much differently (perhaps, like an erratic cult leader) than he does in the actual world in which does not believe himself to be God.

Hill points out, however, that the real worry behind this objection is not whether the counterfactual, “If Adams were to believe himself to be God, his similarity to God would be increased” is true. Rather, the issue is whether there is some possible world, W1—regardless of its distance from the actual world—in which Adams believes himself to be God and in which everything else about Adams remains the same as it is in the actual world. If so, then if GOOD₀ is true, then the Adams in W1 is more similar to God (and is, therefore, more intrinsically valuable) than is the Adams in the actual world who does not believe himself to be God.

Hill’s response to this worry is as follows:

By believing ‘I am God’, Adams at W1 gains a belief in common with God. But its truth-value is relative to the person who believes it. The belief is false with respect to Adams and it is true with respect to God. So, while Adams at W1 shares a belief with God that Adams [in the actual world] does not, Adams [in the actual world] is more similar to God than Adams at W1 with respect to avoidance of false beliefs. This property that Adams [in the actual world] keeps and Adams at W1 loses has more weight in determining similarity to God than the belief that Adams at W1 gains in common with God does. So Adams at W1 is not more similar to God than Adams [in the actual world].²²²

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Obviously, the controversial premise in Hill’s argument is the claim that the property that Adams in the actual world keeps and Adams at W1 loses has more weight in determining similarity to God than the belief that Adams at W1 gains in common with God does. As we saw earlier, Adams also makes use of the concept of importance in determining the resemblances that are relevant to excellence, a fact which raises the specter of circularity and which Hill cites as a reason for preferring his view to Adams refined account. So, it is somewhat odd that Hill’s relies on a similar concept in his defense of his own Adamsian account of intrinsic value.

Recall, however, that I have not taken a stance on whether Adams’ refined account is circular, and I will not press this worry for Hill either. In fact, my concern with Hill’s proposal has nothing to do with whether his response to the objection succeeds as far as it goes. Rather, my worry for Hill is simply that the objection under consideration works as an objection to basic valuational particularism, which remains a central component of Hill’s overall theory of intrinsic value. Hill labels basic valuational particularism GOOD and formulates it as follows:

GOOD: an object, o, is intrinsically good to degree, n, if and only if o is similar to God to degree n.

If GOOD is true, then Adams in W1 shares at least one feature in common with God, viz., both have the de se belief, “I am God.” So, despite the fact that this belief is, for Adams, necessarily false, it is a feature in virtue of which Adams resembles God and therefore, according to GOOD, constitutes an excellence. But it is false that Adams’ de se belief that he is God constitutes an excellence. So, GOOD is false. But since GOOD is an
essential component of Hill’s overall theory of intrinsic value, Hill’s overall theory of intrinsic value is false.

Mark Murphy raises a similar worry. In fact, Murphy’s worry is in some ways also similar to the worry expressed by Wolf, which I cited above. But whereas Wolf’s worry concerned whether the goodness of a meal could consist in its God-likeness, Murphy’s worry concerns the fact that, if it does, then Murphy himself would become God-like by becoming more like a properly prepared chicken fried steak. He writes:

Suppose that I come down with a rare disease. Interestingly, the symptoms of this disease include my muscles taking on the taste and consistency of a piece of deep-fried tenderized round steak, my epidermis becoming crisp, like buttermilk-and-egg-saturated flour dipped into hot oil, and my pores oozing a whitish substance that is peppery and creamy. *I begin to share the properties that make properly prepared chicken fried steak good.* But this does not make me better, not in the least, or in any way. It is not that I become better in one way (I taste great!) but there are negative effects of other sorts (I’m really, really, sick!). No: tasting like a properly-prepared chicken fried steak just isn’t the sort of thing that makes me good, though it surely is what makes a chicken fried steak good.

In response to the retort that these properties *really would* make him more excellent, Murphy expresses his incredulity that in addition to improving intellectually, morally, creatively, and relationally, the list of ways in which he could improve also include culinarily. “Indeed, one would have to include all of the different taste sensations that I might be made to exhibit on the now-lengthening list.” At this point, it seems that because Murphy and his interlocutors simply have conflicting intuitions about the case; they have reached an impasse. In that case, perhaps all I can do is report that, insofar as I

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223 His example.
224 Murphy, *op. cit.*, 155.
225 Ibid.
am following Adams, Hill, and Murphy in taking excellence as a univocal concept, I find Murphy’s case compelling.

Furthermore, Murphy argues that this objection is problematic even for Adams’ more refined account, according to which only faithful holistic resemblance to God constitutes excellence. The reason is this: we know that at least part of what makes the chicken fried steak good is its flavor and the consistency of its various parts. So, on Adams’s qualified view, it is just those features of it that make it true that it holistically and faithfully resembles God. But then Murphy wonders why he would not holistically and faithfully resemble God (and thereby exhibit excellence) by coming to share those features as well?

I think that Murphy is right that he does not become more excellent by taking on the features of a properly prepared chicken fried steak, and I agree that this poses a significant problem for basic theistic valuational particularism. I am less confident, however, that Murphy is right in thinking that this poses a problem for Adams’ more refined account. One reason that I am unsure is that it is simply not clear to me what Adams has in mind by “holistic” and “faithful” resemblance. Furthermore, when Murphy considers whether the “holism” aspect of Adams’ view blocks the force of his objection, his response seems to me irrelevant; Murphy writes, “It had better be a specific sort of holistic character. I don’t become better just by becoming holistically more like a chicken fried steak!”

But while Murphy is surely right that he would not become better by becoming more holistically like a chicken fried steak (whatever Adams might have in

\[226 \textit{Ibid.}, 157.\]
mind by “holistically alike”), Adams’ refined view doesn’t entail that he would become better by becoming more holistically like a chicken fried steak. At most, Adams refined account would imply (what might be a counterpossible) that if Murphy were to become holistically like a chicken fried steak, he would be good, and I fail to see why Murphy should find that objectionable. After all, Murphy himself believes that the goodness of a chicken fried steak consists in a certain kind of resemblance to God. But then, if Murphy were to become holistically like a particularly excellent chicken fried steak, (which, presumably he would be if he were, e.g., an intrinsic duplicate of one), then he (it?) would be good too.

In any case, as I have already mentioned, because I find the notion of “importance” that Adams employs in his refined account both obscure and potentially problematic, I have decided to put aside Adams’ refined view and focus instead on other ways of modifying the basic view so as to safeguard it from objections. The point I want to emphasize, then, is that regardless of whether Murphy’s criticism succeeds against Adams’ refined view, it succeeds against his more basic view and, by extension, Hill’s modified Adamsian view.

Finally, I want to mention one additional problem for basic valuational particularism (and again, by extension, Hill’s modified Adamsian view), that is in some ways similar to both Murphy’s worry as well as Wolf’s worry. The problem is that in at least some cases we have a fairly good idea of some of the features possessed by finite things in virtue of which they are excellent. To borrow an example from David Decosimo, an excellent strawberry is excellent in virtue of its taste, color, shape, and
consistency. But these are not features that God—at least as he is traditionally conceived (viz., as being incorporeal)—has or could have. If that is true, then it seems that excellence as such could not possibly consist in resemblance to God. This problem is distinct from Wolf’s worry because, on what strikes me as the most natural and straightforward reading, while her worry concerns our inability to decipher the similarities between, a good strawberry, for example, and God, the present worry is that we can decipher some of the features that make a strawberry excellent, and we can also see that God, as traditionally conceived, is unable to possess those properties. The problem is also distinct from Murphy’s worry because, whereas Murphy’s worry concerns whether the features that we recognize that make for an excellent strawberry also contributes to the excellence of human beings, the present problem concerns whether the features that make for an excellent strawberry are features that could be shared by God.

So, despite the simplicity and initial attractiveness of basic valuational particularism, there are several reasons to reject it. Fortunately, there are two refined versions of theistic valuational particularism that, I think, show more promise. According to the first refined view, it is not goodness or excellence per se that is constituted by resemblance to God; rather, only moral goodness is constituted by resemblance to God. We may call this view theistic moral valuational particularism. Of course, it is doubtful that Adams would be happy with this modification of his theory, but given that my goal is limited to explaining how morality depends on God, this move

seems unobjectionable for my purposes. The primary virtue of this modified account is that, on the face of it, it also seems much easier to see how moral agents and their various moral excellences might resemble God, a fact that allows it to evade the three objections discussed above. In particular, this view evades Murphy’s worry involving chicken fried steaks because the excellence of a chicken fried steak is not a moral excellence so we need not worry that the various excellences of a chicken fried steak will also be excellences of human beings. For similar reasons, we need not worry whether God has (or even could have) features that we recognize as good-making features in strawberries. Lastly, this view can accommodate the fact that while it is an excellence in God to believe himself to be divine, it is not an excellence in creatures to believe that they are divine. Because theistic moral valuational particularism is a view only about moral excellence, it simply does not take a stance on the nature of nonmoral excellences.

Of course, this raises the question of how to distinguish moral excellence from nonmoral excellence. Unfortunately, any way of drawing the distinction is bound to be controversial, and in any case, I do not have an account to offer. Still, one way of getting in the ballpark that I believe will be sufficient for my purposes is to say that moral excellences concern both behavior and behavioral and affective dispositions that are essentially other-regarding. Justice and compassion are two paradigmatic examples of morally good dispositions of character and keeping one’s promises and promoting the welfare of others are two paradigmatic example of morally good actions. To be morally good on this view, then, is, roughly, to resemble God with respect to his other-regarding

Frankena points out that the objects of moral and nonmoral evaluation typically differ; while the objects of moral evaluation typically include persons, groups of persons, traits of character, emotions, motives, and intentions, the objects of nonmoral evaluation include physical objects, forms of government, and such experiences as pleasure, pain, knowledge, and freedom. See Frankena, op. cit., 47-8.
actions, motives, intentions, etc. No doubt, this particular sketch of the distinction between the moral and moral is subject to criticism, but I don’t see any reason, in principle, for thinking that a defender of this proposal will be unable to make use of whatever turns out to be the best way of distinguishing the moral from the nonmoral.

According to the second way of modifying basic theistic valuational particularism, finite things are never simply good; instead, the goodness of finite things is always relative to its kind. Murphy defends this claim and thinks that it can be put to use in defending a modified version of theistic valuational particularism. He writes, “My view is that whenever a being belongs to some kind, then the standards for excellence for that thing are fixed in part by its kind. But it is possible to be beyond kinds; and this is what is the case with God. So while we can say truly that God is simply Good, for anything distinct from God its goodness will consist in its resembling God in a way that belongs to its kind.” Murphy prefers this recognizably more Aristotelian view over Adams’ more Platonic view for various reasons, chief among them is its ability to handle problems for Adams’ account that is posed by Murphy’s chicken fried steak example. Murphy’s account also seems to handle the objection to Adams’ account concerning whether it is a virtue for one to resemble God by believing oneself to be God: because it does not belong to the kind “human being” to resemble God in holding the de se belief that “I am God,” Murphy’s account evades this objection. Another strong point in its

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229 Murphy, op. cit., 159. That is, a finite thing’s goodness consists in its resembling God in a way that beings of that kind ought to resemble God, where the “ought” here is the ought of kind-membership. For a discussion of the ought of kind-membership, see Michael Thompson, Life and Action: Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 63-84. In this way, Murphy distinguishes his view of goodness from Peter Geach’s, “Good and Evil,” Analysis 17 (1956): 32-42. For a discussion of how Geach’s account of goodness applies to God, see Eric Wiland, “The Problem of Evil and the Grammar of Goodness,” unpublished manuscript.
favor is the fact that Murphy’s account nicely parallels an independently plausible account of the relationship between God and the laws of nature.\textsuperscript{230} For these reasons, I think that Murphy’s account has much going for it.

However, I must confess that I find the “ought of kind-membership” unilluminating. More importantly, however, it is not clear that Murphy’s account can deal with the strawberry example discussed above. Recall that the problem posed by the strawberry example is that we know what some of the features are that make for an excellent strawberry: their characteristic taste, color, shape, and consistency. Similarly, I assume that Murphy thinks he could identify some of the features that make for an excellent human being. Presumably, these will include various physical features that belong to the kind human being, and it is not clear that God has (or perhaps even could have) such features. So, the fact that it is unclear whether Murphy’s proposal really evades all of the relevant objections combined with the fact there is an account that is both simpler and more faithful to Adams and Alston’s original account, provides some reason to reject Murphy’s account in favor of theistic moral valuational particularism.\textsuperscript{231}

\textsuperscript{230} Murphy’s entire book is an attempt to understand the moral necessities involved in moral laws by appealing to physical necessities involved in the laws of nature. See Murphy’s God and Moral Law, especially pp. 133-66.

\textsuperscript{231} Indeed, given the context in which Alston first developed his theistic valuational particularism and given that each of the virtues that he discusses in connection with his theistic valuational particularism are paradigmatic moral virtues, I suspect that a view of this sort is the view that Alston had in mind all along. Adams, on the other hand, clearly intends his account as a theory of excellence \textit{per se}. 

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4.3 Theistic Moral Valuational Particularism Defended

I have considered several objections to the details of various versions of theistic valuational particularism and have tentatively settled on theistic moral valuational particularism (the view according to which, to be morally good is, roughly, to resemble God with respect to his other-regarding actions, motives, intentions, etc.) as the account best suited to deal with those objections. I now want to examine two objections—both of which are related to a version of the Euthyphro dilemma—that Morriston has been defending for almost two decades and either of which, if successful, make trouble for any version of theistic valuational particularism, including theistic moral valuational particularism. The first concerns whether such accounts trivialize God’s goodness; the second concerns whether they render moral goodness arbitrary. I take them in order.

4.3.1 The Divine Ascription Problem

Morriston thinks that the following Euthyphronic question poses a serious problem for theistic moral valuational particularism: Is God good because God is loving, generous, faithful, kind, etc, or are these features good because God has them?²³² Like Morriston, Jeremy Koons thinks that the Euthyphro dilemma poses a problem for theistic moral valuational particularism but not merely because he thinks that theistic moral valuational particularism reverses the intuitively correct order of explanation. Instead, Koons’ worry is that theistic moral valuational particularism “strips God’s nature of any

²³² See, Wes Morriston, “Must There Be a Standard of Moral Goodness Apart from God?”
features that would make His goodness intelligible.” That is, because theistic moral valuational particularism takes the goodness of various character traits to depend on God’s exemplifying them, theistic moral valuational particularists cannot point to any feature in virtue of which God is good. Of course, when Alston first proposed valuational particularism as a model, he anticipated and responded to this worry: “Note that on this view, we are not debarred from saying what is supremely good about God. God is not good, qua bare particular or undifferentiated thisness. God is good by virtue of being loving, just, merciful, and so on. Where this view differs from its alternatives is in the answer to the question, ‘By virtue of what are these features of God good-making features?’ The answer given by this view is: ‘By virtue of being features of God’.”

On the face of it, Alston’s proposal looks circular—an illicit attempt to have his cake and eat it too. He wants to say both that God is good in virtue of his various moral virtues, e.g., his being loving, kind, patient, etc. while also maintaining that those properties or character traits are good insofar as they are traits of God. But as Koons argues convincingly, Alston can’t have it both ways. If theistic moral valuational particularism is true, then God’s goodness merely consists in his resembling himself in the relevant ways, and thus, the particularist is saddled “with a notion of divine goodness that is empty of content.”

235 Koons, *op. cit.*, 188. For Koons, this is ultimately what gives the arbitrariness objection considered above its real force. It is because theistic moral valuational particularism is unable to give a substantive account of God’s goodness that God makes for an arbitrary standard.
However, despite what his misleading language seems to suggest, I don’t think that Alston tries to have it both ways. What Alston likely had in mind is a distinction that Koons himself draws in the context of criticizing Alston’s claim that explanations must stop somewhere and, therefore, there is nothing illicit in making God one’s explanatory ultimate. In the following passage, Koons distinguishes between what he calls “explanations-why” and “explanations-what”:

Even if explanations-why come to an end, and no further reasons can be given at this point, it does not follow that at this point there can be no further explanation-what. For we should still be able to explain what something is even if we can give no further explanation why it is the way that it is…To deny this with respect to God’s goodness is to conflate the two types of explanation, explanations why and explanations what…The particularist says, in explaining why certain things are good, that at some point these why-explanations run out when we arrive at the exemplar of God’s character. But this does not entail the absence of any what-explanations, and we should still be able to say what God’s moral goodness consists in. 236

This is precisely the distinction that Alston has in mind when—despite the unfortunate wording—he says that God is good by virtue of being loving, just, merciful, and so on. According to theistic moral valuational particularism, the explanation-why that anything is good is that it resembles God with respect to his other-regarding actions, motives, intentions, etc. What it is to be good (including what it is for God to be good) just is to resemble God in those respects. On the other hand, to give an explanation-what is to give some descriptive content concerning wherein God’s goodness consists. That is, to provide an explanation-what is simply to describe what properties God has; God is

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236 Ibid., 191.
loving, just, merciful, and so on. So, contrary to Koons, ascriptions of goodness to God are not empty of content. We can evaluate God’s actions and character traits, but to do so is to engage in normative ethics rather than metaethics. Matthew Carey Jordan illustrates how this helps illuminate the divine ascription problem:

We can determine whether the standard meter in Paris really is a meter long by measuring it... The point here becomes especially clear if we change the name of the standard meter so that semantic redundancy does not obscure the issue; suppose that there is a stick (the standard meter) in Paris named Stan. We measure Stan according to accepted practices for measurement, and we discover that Stan is precisely one meter long. We engage in [a theoretical investigation into the nature of meterhood], and discover that the ultimate explanation for Stan’s being one meter long is that Stan is the standard meter, the very paradigm of meterhood.

What Jordan’s example highlights, I think, is the importance of medieval distinction between the ratio essendi (the ground of the existence of a thing) and the ratio cognoscendi (the means by which a thing is known). As Mark Linville explains, “One the one hand, God plays the role of the Good on Alston’s view, and so morality derives from God in that he provides the metaphysical grounding for morality. On the other, our understanding of God’s goodness, and of goodness in general, is epistemically derived

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238 Matthew Carey Jordan, “Theistic Ethics: Not as Bad as You Think,” 43. John Milliken provides another helpful example: “Imagine a language called Twing someone makes up and sets down in an official manuscript. Suppose Tim learns Twing indirectly from some friends who speak it. Suppose further that one day he stumbles upon the official manuscript, reads it, and exclaims, “This thing is written in perfect Twing!” Tim is here making what is for him a substantive statement. He has an independent concept of perfect Twing that he applies in this case. Contrast this case with Tim finding some other manuscript (perhaps a translation of Homer) composed in Twing accompanied by the same exclamation. In the first case, Tim’s evaluation of the manuscript depends upon a merely epistemically independent conception of perfect Twing. In fact, his conception is ontologically dependent, for his conception of perfect Twing traces back to the very source he now evaluates. In the second case, Tim’s conception of perfect Twing is both epistemically and ontologically independent of the manuscript he is evaluating.” Milliken, op. cit., 157.
...from our moral concepts." When we begin thinking about the nature of moral properties, we come with many substantive background beliefs in place concerning paradigmatic morally good and bad actions and character traits. This appears to be necessary if our ascriptions of goodness to God are to have substantive content. But this merely shows that we must have an independent conception of goodness—not that goodness must be ontologically independent of God.

4.3.2 Morriston’s Arbitrariness Objection

Wes Morriston offers a clear and compelling statement of the second worry. Recall the Euthyphronic question: Is God good because God is loving, generous, faithful, kind, etc, or are these features good because God has them? The first horn seems to entail that God is not the standard of moral goodness; rather, the properties that constitute his moral nature are. And so, according to Morriston, this horn entails that even if, per impossible, God were not to exist, the standard of goodness (the set of properties constituting God’s moral nature) would remain. So, even if God did not exist, anything that instantiated those properties would be morally good. As a result, divine sovereignty is compromised.

As Morriston admits, however, this argument assumes a Platonist view of properties, according to which uninstantiated properties exist. Those who want to safeguard divine sovereignty but who also find the first horn of the dilemma attractive

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240 Wes Morriston, “Must There Be a Standard of Moral Goodness Apart from God?”
might do well, then, to either adopt a view of properties according to which only instantiated properties exist or else a trope view according to which each property is essentially tied to a particular substance.\footnote{I leave it open whether either of these strategies would be successful. Obviously much more needs to be said. I mention them only to point out that there is wiggle room with which the defender of the first horn can attempt to leverage a response.} An alternative option is to adopt the doctrine of divine simplicity, according to which God is identical to God’s nature. If God is identical to God’s nature, then one need not worry that God’s moral nature provides a standard that is independent of God.\footnote{See, for example Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, “Absolute Simplicity,” \textit{Faith and Philosophy} 2.4 (1985): 353-82, especially 375-6; Eleonore Stump, \textit{Aquinas} (New York: Routledge, 2003), ch 2; Hugh J. McCann, “Divine Nature and Divine Will,” \textit{Sophia} 52.1 (2013), 77-94.} Unfortunately, while the doctrine of divine simplicity has received rigorous defenses in recent years,\footnote{See, for example, Brian Leftow, “Divine Simplicity,” \textit{Faith and Philosophy} 23.4 (2006): 365-80; Alexander Pruss, “On Two Problems of Divine Simplicity,” \textit{Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion} 1 (2008): 150-167; Jeffrey E. Brower, “Making Sense of Divine Simplicity,” \textit{Faith and Philosophy} 25.1 (2008): 3-30; “Simplicity and Aseity,” in \textit{The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology}, ed. Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 105-28. For an overview of the relevant issues, see William F. Vallicella, "Divine Simplicity", \textit{The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy} (Spring 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = \url{https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/divine-simplicity/}.} it remains highly contentious even within religious circles.\footnote{For a recent argument against divine simplicity by a theistic philosopher, see Matthew Baddorf, “An Argument from Divine Beauty Against Divine Simplicity,” \textit{Topoi} 36.4: 657-664. Baddorf also attempts to undercut the traditional motivations for divine simplicity in his “Divine Simplicity, Aseity, and Sovereignty,” \textit{Sophia} 56.3 (2017): 403-18.} Like many of those with whom I am interacting, I find it very difficult to even make sense of the view.\footnote{For a classic criticism of divine simplicity, see Alvin Plantinga, \textit{op. cit.}} In any case, I will not be pursuing any of these strategies for safeguarding divine sovereignty.

What about the second horn of the dilemma—that the various moral virtues are morally good because God has them? As Alston (who as I mentioned above seems to have theistic moral valuational particularism in mind in his discussion of these issues) explains the view, this is clearly the horn to which the theistic moral valuational
particularist is committed: “Lovingness is good (a good-making feature, that on which goodness supervenes) … because God, the supreme standard of goodness, is loving.”  

So, what is the problem? One worry is that because it is only certain kinds of resemblances to God that constitute moral goodness, the view actually reverts back to the first horn of the dilemma. As Morriston puts it, “Just as a stick must be equal to the standard meter bar in length in order to be a meter long, so a person must be like God in moral character in order to be morally good.”  

As Morriston recognizes, however, Alston seems to think that the ultimate standard of goodness is neither God qua bare particular, nor God’s moral nature, but God together with what we regard as his moral properties.

Still, Morriston wonders what role God is playing in the account. In particular, he asks why one should think that love, generosity, and kindness are morally good just because God has those features? It just seems arbitrary to take some particular being and make it the standard of goodness. But this objection seems to me to beg the question against his theistic moral valuational particularism. Alston agrees, claiming that worries of this sort merely express Platonist predilections. He writes:

Whether we are Platonist or particularist there will be some stopping place in the search for explanation…Whichever it is, that is the end of the line. On both views something is taken as ultimate, behind which we cannot go…I would invite one who finds the invocation of God as the supreme standard arbitrary, to explain why it is more arbitrary than the invocation of a supreme general principle.

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246 Alston, op. cit., 319.
247 Morriston, op. cit., 130.
248 Koons and Kowalski actually think that Alston is committed to thinking that the standard of goodness is God qua bare particular. See Koons, op. cit. Dean A. Kowalski, “Remembering Alston’s ‘Evaluative Particularism,’” Religious Studies 47.3 (2011): 265-84.
Morriston concedes the point about explanations running out, but he thinks that there are better and worse places to terminate explanation, and he argues that the *properties* that allegedly compose God’s moral nature are the more plausible stopping place. He writes, “From the point of view of moral theory, it is hard to see any real advantage in [opting to terminate explanation in God]; it complicates things considerably, and the theological window-dressing seems quite superfluous.”

It seems to me that Morriston is correct in thinking that, from the point of view of moral theory, i.e., from an explanandum-driven perspective, God is superfluous. However, as I argued in chapter 1, from an explanans-driven perspective, the theist has very strong reasons to prefer God as the ultimate explanation of moral goodness. In particular, divine sovereignty entails that, if moral facts exist, they are explained by God. And while Morriston entertains this possibility, for the following reasons he thinks that the advantage that theistic moral valuational particularism allegedly has in virtue of its ability to safeguard divine sovereignty is illusory: First, Platonism doesn’t challenge God’s moral (epistemic) authority. Second, Platonism is consistent with God’s sovereignty over *creation*. Third, Platonism is consistent with God’s ability to create moral obligations by issuing commands. Fourth, theistic moral valuational particularism, no less than Platonism, entails that God lacks control over the standards of moral evaluation. It seems to me, however, the first three reasons that Morriston provides are not sufficient for sovereignty, and consequently, contrary to Morriston, Platonism does not safeguard a robust doctrine of divine sovereignty. Furthermore, while I agree with Morriston that the statement expressing his fourth reason is true, as I argued earlier, control is not a necessary condition on sovereignty. Rather, what is essential to
sovereignty is merely some kind of dependence. So, it seems to me that Morriston is wrong to think that considerations of sovereignty do not favor theistic moral valuational particularism over Platonism.

Nevertheless, I suspect that my response will leave Morriston unsatisfied. While he might be prepared to grant both that explanations must stop somewhere and that the theist has independent (theological) reasons to believe that God is the appropriate stopping point, he might insists that the real problem with theistic moral valuational particularism is not so much that it is unmotivated from a nontheistic perspective. Rather, the problem is simply that it has wildly implausible implications. In particular, if theistic moral evaluational particularism is true, then even if—per impossibile—God didn’t exist, the various moral virtues would not be virtues. If theistic moral valuational particularism is true, then if God did not exist, then as Morriston writes, “A person could be as fair-minded and loving and generous and faithful as you please and still fail to be morally better than a cruel and malicious person.”

Certainly no atheist should accept that, but neither should a theist. Rather, the theist and atheist alike should affirm that even if—per impossible—God were not loving or compassionate, compassion and love would still be good-making properties.

However, while I agree that theistic valuational particularism seems to entail a rather counterintuitive counterfactual, I think that upon further reflection one can see that the entailment does not hold, and consequently, the proponent of theistic moral valuational particularism should remain unfazed. Why think that the entailment does not hold? 

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251 Morriston discusses a counterpossible of this sort in his “‘Terrible’ Divine Commands Revisited,” 369-72.
hold? I argued in chapter 1 both that the concept of God is the concept of a perfect being and that sovereignty is a perfection. It follows that God is sovereign. But Sovereignty entails what Richard Brian Davis and W. Paul Franks call the “null world hypothesis,” according to which if God did not exist, nothing would exist.\textsuperscript{252} But if the null world hypothesis is true, then for any counterpossible whose antecedent involves God’s non-existence and whose consequent entails the existence of something, that counterpossible is false. But because the properties of being loving and being compassionate are plausibly essential properties of God, the antecedent of, “If God were not loving or compassionate, compassion and love would still be good-making properties” entails God’s non-existence. And since the consequent is existence-entailing, the counterpossible that Morriston alleges makes trouble for theistic moral valuational particularism does not follow from theistic valuational particularism. Consequently, Morriston fails to show that theistic moral valuational particularism is false.

And though Morriston expresses his skepticism with respect to this sort of response in his most recent article on the subject, regrettably, he doesn’t explain the basis for his skepticism.\textsuperscript{253} Instead, he merely points out that the null world hypothesis does not entail valuational particularism. Of course, I am happy to agree with Morriston about that; I’ve not been concerned to argue that divine sovereignty entails any particular theistic metaethical account. Instead, I have contented myself to establish that there is a possible model of the relationship between God and morality that is both consistent with divine sovereignty and coheres sufficiently well with our pre-theoretical moral beliefs.

\textsuperscript{252} Richard Brian Davis and W. Paul Franks, \emph{op. cit.}
\textsuperscript{253} Morriston, \emph{op. cit.}
Although I retain some reservations, it seems to me that theistic moral valuational particularism may be one such view.
CONCLUSION

I began the dissertation by distinguishing two types of considerations relevant to motivating the idea that morality depends on God, viz., explanandum-centered considerations and explanans-centered considerations. And though explanandum-centered considerations have figured prominently throughout, my project has been driven primarily by explanans-centered considerations. In particular, I argued that theists of a certain sort—viz., those who think of God as the greatest conceivable being—are committed to God’s being essentially sovereign in the sense that everything that exists that is explanation eligible depends on God. Since moral facts seem to be explanation eligible, then—assuming that both God and moral facts exist—God must explain the moral facts. Using Quinn’s schema, I laid out a variety of ways in which one might develop an account of how it is that morality depends on God. In particular, I identified various dependence relations, moral relata, and divine relata, and because his is the most well-developed and most prominent account, I focused primarily on Robert Adams’ restricted divine command theory, according to which the properties of being right and wrong are identical with the properties of being commanded and forbidden by God, respectively.

In chapters two and three, I considered and responded to various objections to Adams’ restricted DCT. In chapter two, I argued that because restricted versions of DCT are consistent with their being axiological moral facts that exist independently of God’s commands, restricted versions of DCT can split the horns of the Euthyphro dilemma and
avoid both the charge of arbitrariness as well as the charge that DCT makes attributions of goodness to God vacuous.

Because I do not have a worked out theory of counterpossibles, however, I am rather less certain of my response to the abhorrent commands objection. Still, it seems to me that there are many—at least *prima facie*—plausible ways of thinking about the various counterpossibles, some of which I have explored, which allow the restricted divine command theorist to rebut the abhorrent commands objection. I am not sure which, if any, of the various ways of thinking of counterpossibles is the best way, but unless one can establish that the best way of thinking about counterpossibles yields the result that DCT implies a false counterpossible, then it seems to me that the abhorrent commands objection fails to defeat restricted DCT. The same applies, I think, to the Karamazov problem.

There are numerous objections to DCT in the literature in addition to those that I discuss in chapter two. In chapter three, I explained and evaluated four such objections. I never claim that the objections that I consider are among the most compelling. Part of what guided my choice of objections on which to focus was whether I thought I had something interesting to say about the objection, but I was also concerned to demonstrate that the divine command theorist has the resources to rebut many of the objections that are commonly raised against it and which many regard as devastating. For example, the prior obligations objection—despite the fact that it is still skillfully defended by prominent philosophers—seems to me to rest on a confusion between the normative level and the metaethical level. The version of the objection that I consider does, at least.
Whether there are alternative ways of stating the objection that are not confused, I do not know.

As for the supervenience objection, again, I am not sure that the “Commanding and Being Commanded” solution that I ultimately favored actually works. At times I think it does; other times it strikes me as a cheat. But regardless of whether my favored response succeeds, the force of the objection—at least for someone motivated to develop a theistic account of moral properties by considerations involving divine sovereignty—remains unclear to me. That is because it is not clear to me that the theist really needs to think that within a given world, God has discretion with respect to the commands that he issues—especially given that God’s having discretion is not a necessary condition for his freely issuing a command. I concede that the issues here are complicated. Another concessive option for theistic metaethicist is to abandon property-identity DCT in favor of some version of property-identity DWT.

But regardless of whether the best way for the theistic metaethicist to respond to the supervenience objection involves opting for some version of property-identity DWT, I think the fact—if it is a fact—that God has duties, does favor DWT over DCT. Nevertheless, I think that the superfluity objection demonstrates that the theist, ultimately, ought to reject all versions of theological voluntarism. The reason, once again, is this: there does not seem to me to be any good explanandum-driven reasons to accept DCT or DWT. The most prominent explanandum-driven reasons (those associated with Adams’ social theory of obligations) are, at best, high contested. Indeed, as I argued briefly, God’s commanding X does not seem to be a necessary condition of X’s being morally obligatory. And though I have not argued for it, it seems to me that
neither is God’s will. So, there are no good explanandum-driven reasons to think DCT or DWT is true, and there are some good explanandum-driven reasons to think it false. Now, if there were some good explanans-driven reasons in favor of theological voluntarism, they might serve to offset the explanandum-driven reasons that favor rejecting it. Unfortunately, however, because restricted versions of theological voluntarism do not account for all the moral properties, divine sovereignty does not provide an explanans-driven reason in favor of restricted theological voluntarist accounts. It seems to me, then, that the theist ought to reject all versions of theological voluntarism.

In the final chapter, I consider whether the theist who is motivated by considerations like divine sovereignty has the resources to ground moral axiology in God. Despite the fact that I find it difficult to understand some aspects of Adams’ view, I did my best to explain his theistic valuational particularistic account of the excellence. After highlighting some of the difficulties with the view, I considered two ways of amending it that were suggested by Hill and Murphy. However, I argued that both of their proposed versions of theistic valuational particularism are problematic because, like Adams, the notion of excellence with which they are working is too broad. I suggested, instead, that the best account in the neighborhood is what I called “theistic moral valuational particularism,” and I explained how it avoids the worries that plagued the other theistic valuational particularist accounts. In particular, because it does not identify excellence \textit{per se}, but rather, identifies the property of \textit{being morally good} (or excellent) with the property of resembling God in certain ways (in particular, those ways in which, 

\footnote{\textit{254} Actually, I am not so sure. If theistic moral valuational particularism is true, then God’s willing X may be a necessary condition of X’s being morally obligatory.}
intuitively, God is morally excellent), it is much easier to see how moral agents and their various moral excellences might resemble God.

Of course, that raised the question of how to distinguish moral excellence from nonmoral excellence, and though, as I pointed out, any way of drawing the distinction is bound to be controversial, one way of getting in the ballpark is to say that moral excellences concern behavior and behavioral and affective dispositions that are essentially other-regarding. To be morally good on this view, then, is, roughly, to resemble God with respect to his other-regarding actions, motives, intentions, etc.

I concluded by considering two objections. In response to the divine ascription problem, I argued that because we have an independent conception of goodness (i.e., when we begin thinking about the nature of moral properties, we come with many substantive background beliefs already in place concerning paradigmatic morally good and bad actions and character traits), the theistic moral valuational particularism does not entail that ascriptions of moral goodness to God are semantically redundant or vacuous. Goodness can be ontologically dependent on God without being conceptually dependent.

In response to Morriston’s arbitrariness objection, I argued that God is not an arbitrary standard of goodness. I concede that absent a commitment to the existence of a sovereign God, theistic moral valuational particularism strikes me as unmotivated at best, and highly implausible at worst. Nevertheless, explanations eventually run out, and the theist has strong explanans-centered reasons for taking God rather than the properties that allegedly compose God’s moral nature as the preferred stopping place. Whether theistic moral valuational particularism is true, however, I do not know. Nevertheless, although I retain some reservations, it does seem to me to provide a possible model of the
relationship between God and morality that is both consistent with divine sovereignty and is not wildly implausible given my theistic commitments.

But suppose I am right that theistic moral valuational particularism is defensible. Because theistic moral valuational particularism is a theistic account of moral goodness, it follows that there is a defensible theistic account of moral goodness. Still, I have not argued that the theist can explain how all moral facts depend on God. In particular, nothing I have said indicates that the theist can explain how moral rightness depends on God. However, if moral goodness is more fundamental than moral rightness (as it is for Adams), then if moral goodness is constituted by Godlikeness, we need not believe (as Adams does) that God plays a novel role in the explanation of moral rightness.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁵ Murphy develops such an account in his *God and Moral Law*, 148-80.
REFERENCES


Thibodeau, Jason. “God’s Love is Irrelevant to the Euthyphro Problem.” *Sophia* (forthcoming).


