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Why “*Tolle Lege*”?

The title of this journal is a reference to an extraordinary moment of conversion in the life of St. Augustine, the great philosopher and theologian of the early medieval period. The story begins with St. Augustine sitting beneath a fig tree, weeping in distress over his inability to leave his life of sin behind him and follow God faithfully. Amid his tears he hears the distant voice of a child chanting the words “*Tolle, lege!*” or “Take up and read!” Aroused from his pitiable state and taking this as a sign from God, he goes to his house, picks up the first book he finds, and reads the first chapter. The book contained the letters of St. Paul, and the verse that Augustine read spoke to his heart with such force that he was convinced beyond any doubt of the truth of God and was converted on the spot.

This journal of philosophy and theology is meant to embody a spirit of truth-seeking—on the part of both the contributors and you, the reader. Like St. Augustine, we are all faced with the choice between complacency and continual conversion toward truth. We hope that this journal will serve as an aid in the discovery of truth, and thus we exhort you in all earnestness to “Take up and read!”

Editor's Note

Two words. In the case of St. Augustine, the call of two simple words became the catalyst for his belief in and conversion toward God's truth. At our journal, these two words have been our inspiration to bring outstanding essays in philosophy and theology into print each year. As we celebrate our eighth year, we continue to hope that our readers will discover truth as they read what we present in our pages. Whether by learning something new about self-forgiveness or by poring over an in-depth analysis of the Humean theory of motivation, those who take up and read our journal will, it is hoped, gain a renewed sense of truth through the words of others.

On a more personal note, I find myself once again in the position of having to thank a great many people in a space that is certainly too short to do them justice. I would particularly like to thank all of the undergraduate editors for their immense efforts in evaluating our submissions and deliberating over which essays to include in this issue. The journal's faculty mentors, Dr. David Cloutier and Dr. Thane Naberhaus, are also owed tremendous gratitude for aiding in the process of producing this journal at every step of the way. Special thanks go out to the university provost, Dr. David Rehm, and the dean of the College of Liberal Arts, Dr. Joshua Hochschild, for their financial backing for this journal; thanks are owed in equal measure to the chairs of the philosophy and theology departments, Dr. Richard Buck and Fr. James Donohue, for their financial support. Ms. Katie Soter, the administrative assistant for the Philosophy Department, is due far more thanks than I could provide here for the help she has given in crafting the finished product that you are reading now. I would also like to thank my family, both those to whom I am related by blood and those who have blessed me with their friendship, for supporting me throughout my stint as editor-in-chief of this journal.

Most of all, however, I would like to thank two groups without whom this journal would not exist. The first consists of those who submitted essays this year—almost one hundred submissions were received. The second consists of you, those who have taken up this journal and decided to read it. We hope you find what it contains to be both personally and intellectually edifying.

John-Paul Heil
Editor-in-Chief

Contributors

Amy Jo Bowers is a member of the Mount St. Mary's University Class of 2015. She will graduate in May with a degree in business management. Amy Jo plans to enter the business world immediately following graduation, with hopes of working in her hometown area.

John-Paul Heil is a member of the class of 2015 and is a triple major in history, philosophy, and Italian studies, with a minor in English. He plans on attending graduate school and hopes one day to teach history at the university level.

Francis Lukban is a member of the Class of 2015 and a double major in philosophy and English. In lieu of a conventional biographical note, Mr. Lukban requested that the following message be published: "What if I should die before this gets published? God knows, you'd all feel bad. I wouldn't because I wouldn't exist."

Allison McGinley (formerly Boyd) graduated in May 2014 with a degree in theology and English. She married shortly thereafter and now lives with her husband, David, in Hagerstown, Maryland.

Teressa Schuetz will be graduating from Mount St. Mary's in the spring of 2016. She is an elementary and special education major with minors in Spanish and philosophy.

Elizabeth Wakuluk is a senior at Mount St. Mary's University. She has been studying theology with an emphasis on religious education, and will graduate in May, 2015.

Imprisoning Ourselves: Why Is It So Hard to Release the Burden?

Teressa Schuetz

Forgiveness is an extremely complex process, and forgivingness is a very difficult virtue to cultivate. Forgiveness can be broken down into interpersonal forgiveness and self-forgiveness, two similar but slightly different practices. While both are difficult, it seems true to common experience that self-forgiveness is often the harder of the two to achieve. The complexity of self-forgiveness may be attributed to many factors. For instance, in the case of interpersonal forgiveness there are two clear parties, the forgiver and the one forgiven. However, in self-forgiveness, these two “parties” are not separate entities per se but rather separate aspects of the same person. This creates an inner split and an interesting dynamic: the same person must both extend and receive forgiveness. The unique relationship between self-forgiveness and self-respect may also make self-forgiveness more difficult because it seems to demand self-respect in an even greater way than interpersonal forgiveness, or perhaps to a greater extent. This may be because those who are most in need of forgiving themselves often have the lowest amount of self-respect. This may also speak to character traits or to the fact that self-image is shattered when one commits wrongs and needs to regain lost self-respect and hope for one’s own transformation. Thus, self-forgiveness seeks to unify or reconcile opposing aspects of oneself while at the same time providing hope and restoring self-respect. This paper will explore the complexities of self-forgiveness that make it so much harder to practice than forgiving another.

Charles Griswold presents an in-depth list of the requirements of forgiveness and then discusses how forgiveness appears to present challenges when applying this list to oneself. For instance, one fundamental aspect of forgiveness that appears in almost every account of forgiveness is that of forswearing resentment. However, as

Griswold points out, it is impossible to resent oneself,¹ and so he seeks to uncover what it is exactly that is being forsworn in relation to oneself. Ultimately, he decides that it is self-hatred, not self-resentment, that is forsworn when one forgives oneself.² He says this is so because of the “retributive impulse embedded in resentment” and because of the nuance involved in resentment’s signaling a sense of being “outraged.”³ He compares this self-hatred to wrongly seeing oneself as a monster, which offers a parallel to his discussion of interpersonal forgiveness, in which he claims that the victim sees the offender as a sort of monster.⁴ Just as this conception of another as a monster dehumanizes the other, leads to rejection, and must be overcome in order to forgive the offender, so too must this conception of oneself as a monster be overcome. This is because when the judging aspect of the agent views the offending aspect of the agent as monstrous, rejection of this monstrous part leads to self-alienation and self-contempt.⁵ If one has this dysfunctional schism within oneself, then, Griswold claims, there is an “impossibility of self-forgiveness or any kind of moral self-improvement.”⁶ Because of this, one remains stagnant, and any attempt to forgive oneself will prove fruitless unless one first comes to rebuild one’s self-concept, renew one’s self-respect, and once again view oneself as redeemable.⁷

Another way in which self-forgiveness is difficult to unravel is the idea of multiple aspects of the same self being both the forgiver and the forgiven. However, Griswold suggests a logical aid in discussing multiple aspects of the self so as to eliminate confusion tied to language that may suggest that these aspects are akin to multiple personalities. Such an aid is the narrative which allows one to view a specific action as being part of a larger life story. Just as the narrative is used in interpersonal forgiveness in order to come to a better understanding of perpetrators as persons and to put their action in a

¹ I am working with Griswold’s conception of self-resentment versus self-hatred; however, I have some reservations about the claim that one cannot resent oneself. This is because resentment seems to be a sort of holding on to a negative feeling such as bitterness or anger brought about by some word, action, or character trait of a person in order to punish the one resented. Thus, it seems plausible that people might become so indignant because of their past words, actions, or traits that they feel they need to punish themselves.

² Charles L. Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 125.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 126–27.

life context, the narrative is also used as a tool to view one's own past action in the context of one's whole life story. In the personal narrative of one's own life, there are multiple dimensions of the same character manifest throughout the narrative. These represent past and present dimensions of oneself which allow distinctions to be made among the dimensions of the person that committed the past wrongdoing and the dimensions of the person at present trying to forgive his or her past self.⁸ Thus, the self is viewing itself over time in the context of the unfolding of its personal narrative.

Robin Dillon explores the issue of self-respect as tied to self-forgiveness and how this relationship relates to the difficulty of forgiving oneself. Dillon presents the paradoxical issue of self-respect being both necessary to forgiveness of self and being the desired outcome of self-forgiveness. Dillon critically examines an in-depth account of self-forgiveness offered by Margaret Holmgren, who has incorporated self-respect as a critical part of an account of self-forgiveness. Holmgren's account of self-forgiveness focuses on transformational self-forgiveness, and she offers six steps which one must take in order to be in the right frame of mind to forgive oneself.⁹ According to her account (and consistent with the account of Griswold), the focus of self-forgiveness is on overcoming feelings of self-hatred, guilt, and self-contempt.¹⁰ These feelings and attitudes arise in the aftermath of a wrongdoing, wrong way of thinking, or wrong way of being.¹¹ Therefore, self-forgiveness entails not reducing oneself to one singular act or pattern of thinking or being. This point appears to be consistent with Griswold's emphasis on viewing past action in the context of a developing life narrative.

This aspect of self-forgiveness illuminates yet another necessary precursor of self-forgiveness. Because people are affected by their wrongdoing differently and what is judged to be wrongdoing is viewed differently by different people, wrongdoing is not the only criterion for determining when one is in need of self-forgiveness. At times, persons unjustifiably hold themselves responsible for actions they view as requiring forgiveness. Because of this, as Dillon points out, self-reproach also precedes self-forgiveness, and because self-reproach sets up the need for self-forgiveness, one must have been the agent of the action, thought, or character trait which brought about

⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁹ Robin Dillon, "Self-Forgiveness and Self-Respect," *Ethics* 112.1 (2001), 54–56.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

such reproach.¹² This is because the assumption of responsibility is one of the steps in self-forgiveness, and if one has not been the intentional, willing agent of the wrongdoing, one does not have a responsibility to be addressed.¹³ Furthermore, according to the account provided, the extent of the negative feelings of the agent is also important in that very minor wrongs may not require self-forgiveness.¹⁴ Dillon points out that not all self-reproach need be removed by self-forgiveness since it is morally justified and, at times, is helpful for the moral advancement of the individual. However, when a person's negative assessment of self becomes all-consuming and such self-assessment is determined solely by his or her character flaws or wrongdoings, self-reproach is taken to an unhealthy extent.¹⁵ In these cases, the people become burdened by an overly negative self-assessment and develop what Jeffrie Murphy calls "moral self-hatred."¹⁶ According to Murphy, moral self-hatred is "a kind of shame placed on top of guilt—guilt over the wrong one has done but . . . shame that one has fallen so far below one's ideal of selfhood that life—at least life with full self-consciousness—is now less bearable."¹⁷ This excess of guilt and shame undoubtedly leads to a significant, if not total, loss of self-respect. This is serious in the eyes of H. J. N. Horsbrugh, with whom Dillon agrees when he says, "Self-forgiveness only arises as a genuine and serious issue when the agent has acted in a way that leads to diminished self-respect."¹⁸ This becomes problematic when such diminished self-respect leads to an understanding of oneself as irredeemable and as defined completely and reductionistically by one's past wrongdoing.

In order to forgive oneself, then, it would seem that one must first overcome, to at least some degree, this excessive self-reproach which gives rise to self-hatred. However, as Dillon points out, "to overcome something is not necessarily to eradicate it."¹⁹ The first step in overcoming warranted self-reproach, according to Dillon, is to take responsibility for one's actions, thus proving to oneself that one still has the capacity to be morally good.²⁰ Dillon claims that the next step

¹² *Ibid.*, 59–64.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 69–71.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 62–63.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 77–78.

is not to eliminate self-reproach completely, as one might think, but to discern the right amount that should be left at the right time, for the right duration. She claims that the right amount of self-reproach actually shows a strength of character because it shows “self-respect and sustained commitment to the values and standards of one’s normative self-conception, as well as an honest appraisal of oneself that refuses to compromise for the sake of comfort.”²¹ However, despite the potential need to retain some of this discomfort, one does need to change one’s conception of oneself so that one is not dominated by these negative thoughts and feelings regarding the culpable actions of one’s past. Rather, these thoughts and feelings should act only as motivating reminders of what one should not do in the future. Thus, it is important to note that morally responsible persons should not completely forget the wrongs they have done or change their judgments about their wrongdoings in order to diminish their gravity. Rather, it means that one must accept responsibility for having committed these actions in the past without fixatedly dwelling on them, and then one must view oneself “as someone who has transcended the past and so again has merit.”²²

In her account of self-forgiveness and self-respect, Dillon repeatedly refers to and bases her philosophical view on Immanuel Kant’s conception of self-respect. In his discussion of self-respect, Kant gives special attention to failures of moral duty to self. He claims that in order to properly fulfill one’s duty to another, it is absolutely essential to first be properly disposed to fulfilling one’s duties toward oneself.²³ He further claims that when one does not fulfill one’s duties to oneself, which he refers to in terms of misused freedom, then one loses one’s worth.²⁴ His assertion of this stems from his views about the proper use of free will, a capacity which sets mankind apart from the rest of creation and which also creates in man moral responsibility.²⁵ Being free does not mean that one can do as one wishes. According to Kant, the more one rightly places one’s free will within self-imposed limitations under the guidance of reason, the freer one really is.²⁶ This is why in abusing the freedom one is given as a gift

²¹ Ibid., 78.

²² Ibid., 79.

²³ Immanuel Kant, “Dignity and Self-Respect,” in *Vice & Virtue in Everyday Life: Introductory Readings in Ethics*, eds. Christina Sommers and Fred Sommers (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1997), 527.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 530.

²⁶ Ibid.

there is such great harm done to the person. The person has so distorted the exercise of his or her freedom that he or she risks “[using] himself as a [mere] means and treat[ing] his person as a thing” instead of the end he or she was created to be.²⁷ Because freedom is so central to the human person, when one abuses this freedom, one fails to respect one’s own dignity and separates oneself from one’s humanity.²⁸ This is when one “becomes an object of contempt, worthless in the eyes of his fellows and worthless in himself.”²⁹ According to Kant, “man must not appear unworthy in his own eyes; his actions must be in keeping with humanity itself if he is to appear in his own eyes worthy of inner respect.”³⁰ In addition to the loss of self-respect and alienation from self, both of which make self-forgiveness necessary and difficult, there are many other aspects of self-forgiveness which make it extremely challenging.

The psychotherapist Everett Worthington offers seven specific ways in which self-forgiveness is often harder to carry out than interpersonal forgiveness. The first is the previously mentioned issue of being both the forgiver and the forgiven. The second concerns the inability to escape from one’s own unremitting conscience. The third reason focuses on the fact that the only person who knows the intimate and gritty details of every wrongdoing committed by that person is him- or herself. Thus, people are more prone to condemn themselves and to know the compilation of their own transgressions which compound each other. Fourth, according to Worthington, depending on the specific transgression in question, there are generally other people also condemning the transgressor, which only augments the self-condemnation. The fifth reason Worthington offers for why forgiving oneself is so difficult is that often persons believe they have “sinned against God, nature, or humanity” in addition to the immediate victim, whether it be oneself or another.³¹ The sixth aspect of self-forgiveness listed by Worthington is that people feel an imminent need to practice self-forgiveness in order to move forward, because of a sort of overwhelming heaviness from which they need to break free. The final reason that Worthington discusses appears to be very similar to the sixth reason. It is that one is often more deeply

²⁷ Ibid., 529.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 529–30.

³⁰ Ibid., 533.

³¹ Everett L. Worthington, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Theory and Application* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 188.

affected by the weight of one's own transgressions than by that of others' transgressions toward oneself. Because of this, the desire to forgive oneself is usually greater than the desire to forgive another, because one is so deeply affected by one's own burden of guilt and shame.³²

In addition to offering these seven aspects of self-forgiveness, one of the main focuses of his writing on self-forgiveness is the distortion of one's self-concept. According to Worthington, one main reason that forgiving oneself is often so difficult for many persons is that they have failed to be the kind of person they had thought they were capable of being.³³ Because of this, the self-concept of the person is shaken, sometimes to the core, and so the person begins to see him- or herself in a new and dimmer light. Worthington focuses on three main things that need to be done in order to bring about self-forgiveness. The first of these is to make reparations for the victim in order to close what Worthington refers to as the "injustice gap" as much as possible.³⁴ Once one has done this, one is properly disposed to dealing with one's own person.³⁵ In order to do this, Worthington claims that one must make the decision to forgive oneself, allowing the emotional dimension of forgiveness to come later (if it comes at all).³⁶ The third step that Worthington believes is necessary for one to take to achieve self-forgiveness is to firmly commit to living differently in the future—to resolve to live a more virtuous life.³⁷ In doing so, one affirms one's human freedom, refusing to view oneself reductionistically as defined by one's past and singular character traits.

Worthington's account of self-forgiveness is very informative because it views self-forgiveness through a psychological lens. One noteworthy point that Worthington makes is in regard to the various personality factors that also contribute to a person's predisposition to be more or less forgiving or more or less self-condemning. For instance, he identifies four types of self-forgivers: guilt-prone self-forgivers, self-absorbed non-self-condemners, nonreactive non-self-condemners, and reactive self-condemners.³⁸ The first type of person, the guilt-prone self-forgiver, is, as the name suggests, prone to guilt,

³² *Ibid.*, 189.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 190.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 191.

but can come to forgive him- or herself through a lot of hard work.³⁹ The second type of person, the self-absorbed non-self-condemner, does not condemn him- or herself often, and therefore rarely has to forgive him or herself, as self-condemnation is what leads to requiring self-forgiveness.⁴⁰ According to Worthington, self-absorbed non-self-condemners “have high degrees of narcissism, self-involvement, and a sense of entitlement, and are low in shame- and guilt-proneness.”⁴¹ The third type of person is also slow to condemn, making him or her a rare participant in self-forgiveness. These people are “low in empathy and tend to be self-involved. They do not ruminate; they dissipate condemnation.”⁴² Such persons have a tendency to fail to recognize their wrongdoing due to a self-absorbed lack of empathy regarding the impact of their actions on others. The fourth type of person is closer to the guilt-prone self-forgiver, but even with a lot of hard work is unable to forgive him- or herself. This type of person is called a reactive self-condemner by Worthington.⁴³ Thus, one’s personality also influences the degree to which one will need and be able to forgive oneself, and those who are overly prone to guilt, shame, and self-condemnation will need to compensate for these tendencies in their efforts, if they are to practice self-forgiveness.

For Steen Halling, self-forgiveness often accompanies interpersonal forgiveness and shares several components with it. For instance, it requires one to take responsibility for one’s actions just as interpersonal forgiveness requires. It also is often accompanied by a compassionate response to oneself, just as interpersonal forgiveness is often accompanied by compassion for another.⁴⁴ This compassion for another, according to Halling, requires “letting go of one’s preconception of the other, connecting with the other as similar to oneself, and yet being aware of the other’s separateness.”⁴⁵ Since he claims there is a link between compassion toward another and that toward oneself, it does not seem to be a stretch to claim that compassion can be similarly applied to oneself. Thus, one could draw on Griswold’s image of the self as a monster, a thing deserving of being loathed, permanently defined by past traits and actions,

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Steen Halling, “Embracing Human Fallibility: On Forgiving Oneself and Forgiving Others,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 33.2 (1994), 109–10.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

unchanging and ultimately irredeemable. If one is going to forgive oneself, then, one must connect with oneself fundamentally as a human being capable of self-assessment and change one's self-image from that of a monster to that of a person who is worthy of self-respect, not reductionistically defined by past traits or actions, capable of change, and therefore redeemable. Once this connection is made, one can then view the self who committed the wrongdoing, wrong thinking, or wrong way of being as capable of moral transformation and self-forgiveness.

Halling talks about another very important reason why forgiving oneself is so difficult: the human tendency to strive for perfection. In this discussion, he quotes Leslie Faber who compares perfection to a state which humans strive for only to be continually disappointed because it is ever beyond their reach.⁴⁶ Faber claims that as a result of this, people can come to view their imperfect state of being as a permanent state which they can never fully overcome.⁴⁷ This speaks to the common experience of many who require self-forgiveness. They are overcome with negative, incriminating feelings and attitudes toward themselves and driven by their constant failure to attain perfection as shown in their past actions, and it is this failure which causes them to regard themselves in such a negative light. To such persons, even small mistakes affect them greatly, and each mistake, no matter how small, reaffirms their negative view of self. According to Halling, this lack of forgiveness of oneself seeps into one's daily life and actions and ultimately can come to control oneself, one's self-assessment and one's self-expectations.⁴⁸ In order to heal oneself of this negative tendency, it appears to Halling that self-forgiveness requires a certain letting go in order to attain hope.⁴⁹

In contrast with Halling and Faber's view of the role of perfection as a standard which evokes negative feelings brought about by the constant failure to meet unrealistic expectations, Kant offers another view of moral perfection as a standard. According to him, one should not be overcome by a sense of failure at not achieving perfection but should instead be humbled by this.⁵⁰ Humility, he claims, does not come from comparing oneself to another person, but from recognizing that one is indeed not morally perfect and therefore has

⁴⁶ Ibid., 111.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 112.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 110.

⁵⁰ Kant, "Dignity and Self-Respect," 533–34.

room for improvement.⁵¹ When judging oneself morally, Kant argues, one should compare oneself with the “purity of the moral law.”⁵² However, importantly tied to this is Kant’s view of self-respect.⁵³ Humility does not require one to believe that one is not as good as others. Kant says, “We have a right to consider ourselves as valuable as another. This self-respect in comparison with others constitutes noble pride.”⁵⁴ Such self-respect evokes the realization that one has the capacity to live morally. Thus, it is in fact necessary to have both humility and noble pride.

In light of all these views, there are certain truths which emerge regarding the common experience of the difficulties of self-forgiveness and how to overcome these difficulties. For instance, there is clearly a complexity to self-forgiveness which makes it harder for people to forgive themselves than to forgive others because the wrongdoer and the one wronged are the same person. Because of this, the same person must both extend and accept forgiveness. In order to do either of these actions (extending or accepting forgiveness to oneself), a person must first put aside this divisive distinction within his or her own person and see him- or herself as a whole person. It is only in viewing oneself as a whole person that one is able to come to see that, by virtue of being a person, with rationality and free will, one is capable of change and is therefore redeemable. By viewing oneself in light of these uniquely human capacities for intelligent thought and decision-making, it also becomes clear that humans are endowed with a certain dignity that allows them to both love and accept love, to be compassionate and receive compassion, to be merciful and receive mercy. If a person is to forgive him- or herself, he or she must first come to see him- or herself as inherently good—not perfect, but worthy of love. Just as love of another involves seeking what is best for the other, love of self involves seeking what is best for the self. This does not mean acting in a selfish way, but in a way which calls the self to be closer to what is good, as expressed in the highest moral standard. In other words, love of self calls the self to aspire to moral greatness in virtue. To not allow oneself to be self-respecting, and to allow oneself to only focus on the negative aspects of one’s past, may seem morally justified or what one “deserves” as a wrongdoer, but it actually leaves no room for moral improvement or reconciliation

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 533.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

between the offending and judging aspects of the person. This self-alienation poses the great danger of evoking self-hatred, because it leads so directly to a loss of self-respect.

After coming to view oneself as worthy of self-respect and love because of one's inherent dignity and worth, one can then begin to address the demands of self-forgiveness. At this point, self-forgiveness is possible because the person can see him- or herself as a whole person situated in time, in the narrative of a life story entailing both a past and a future. This is why compassion for oneself is so important to self-forgiveness. Compassion is necessary in order to reconcile oneself with one's past, which must be done for one to even be capable of growing in the virtues, including merciful and compassionate forgiveness. Compassion allows people to see the dignity in themselves even as imperfect, flawed persons who cause suffering and endure suffering, and, thus, aids in gaining the basic level of self-respect that is needed for self-forgiveness. Compassion is even more intimate in the case of self-forgiveness because, in suffering with oneself, one can literally feel the pain experienced by the "other," that other in this case being the self who has done wrong. Having compassion for oneself allows one to view oneself as a fallible person capable of change but ultimately deserving of respect and worthy of love. It is necessary for self-forgiveness to heal this intrapersonal schism so that the person forgiving him- or herself can move forward and once again strive for a higher moral standard as a whole person.

It is also true that perfection as a standard must be viewed in a certain way in order for it to be helpful in the process of self-forgiveness and growing in virtue. Perfection must be viewed in the way that Kant describes for it to be productive: as a standard of virtue to strive for, but in a motivating and constructive way. Persons must not belittle or loathe themselves when they do not reach the standard, because to achieve perfection in all our actions would be impossible. Instead, people must recognize that they are fallible and flawed beings who can humbly get back up when they do wrong and once again strive to be the best version of themselves possible.

It is clear that condemning oneself too leniently shows a certain moral failure or vice; however, condemning oneself too harshly also shows moral failure even if it seems to be deserved because of the (perceived or real) wrongness of one's actions. It is important to note that one's intentions in condemning oneself too harshly can be good insofar as they express remorse over wrongdoing and the desire to not repeat these things in the future. However, these good intentions can

be twisted if they not only discourage future wrongdoings, wrong ways of thinking, or wrong ways of being toward which they are directed, but also encourage a different flaw in one's moral character. This flaw is the loss of self-respect, which is a fundamental basis for cultivating the other virtues. In this way, the aim of self-condemnation actually defeats itself. It is aimed at being sure one will not do future harm to oneself or others, but excessive self-condemnation leads to immense harm done to both the present and future self. Self-respect, then, is necessary for rightly judging one's own actions and in taking responsibility for wrongdoing, while allowing oneself room to become better.

The degree of difficulty of self-forgiveness is clearly tied to the extent of self-reproach that one experiences. Because self-reproach always precedes self-forgiveness (as mentioned in the discussion of Dillon's views), and because there are different degrees of self-reproach, it is clear that the extent to which a person's negative attitudes have power over that person's life greatly influences how difficult it will be for that person to break free from those attitudes. In this way, it is clear that when one cannot let go of negative attitudes and turn toward the future instead of being mired in the past, one becomes imprisoned in and solely defined by one's past. Instead of the person in need of self-forgiveness believing that he or she can direct future actions, words, or thoughts, the person comes to be controlled by his or her past actions, words, or thoughts. As a consequence, he or she cannot live his or her life in the present. Self-forgiveness is about a person taking back control of his or her life and not allowing his or her worth to be defined exclusively by past wrongdoings. A fundamental truth about self-forgiveness, then, is that it gives people the ability to once again move forward with their lives. It gives them hope.

Self-forgiveness is extremely complex and even more difficult to achieve than interpersonal forgiveness. The reasons for this are many. In general, self-forgiveness is necessary more frequently than interpersonal forgiveness, because it is required both when one wrongs oneself and when one wrongs another. However, without self-forgiveness, one is consumed by one's negative emotions and judgments, and this impact extends into every aspect of one's life, ultimately imprisoning not only the offender but also the victim, because they are the same person. This partially stems from the fact that self-forgiveness is closely linked to self-respect. This makes self-forgiveness extremely difficult to achieve because often those who

have little self-respect are also those who most need to forgive themselves, thus showing the central importance of self-respect. A basic level of self-respect is necessary before self-forgiveness can take place; moreover, self-respect is also reinforced through self-forgiveness. Overcoming extreme self-contempt or self-hatred is never easy because it requires allowing oneself to be freed from the burden of guilt, which may be wrongly interpreted as condoning wrongdoing.⁵⁵ However, it is necessary in order to rebuild a relationship with oneself and to learn to see oneself in a new light, one which humbles oneself to embrace one's humanity and proudly strive to live better. This allows a person to see him- or herself as a transformed being, one distinct from and yet the same as the previous self who is in need of forgiveness. This newly formed self-understanding and newly gained self-respect is what ultimately provides one with inner unity, inner peace, and hope for the future.

⁵⁵ Glen Pettigrove makes important distinctions among understanding, excusing, and forgiving. He talks about how understanding may or may not lead to the type of forgiveness that he has outlined (Glen Pettigrove, *Forgiveness and Love* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012], 54–72). He also talks about how true forgiveness does not excuse or condone the wrongdoing (even if the perpetrator is unapologetic), but rather provides the perpetrator with the grace to be transformed (ibid., 54–72, 110–42). This position is extremely pertinent in the case of self-forgiveness because self-forgiveness allows people to see themselves as capable of being transformed. Understanding that forgiveness does not condone is also crucial to self-forgiveness because people must recognize that they are not condoning their wrongdoing by forgiving themselves, but are acknowledging that the action was wrong while not allowing themselves to be defined by it and deciding to avoid future wrongdoing.

Aristotle and the Mystery of Particular Essence

John-Paul Heil

Despite his great contributions to the study of philosophy, Aristotle's metaphysical account of the universe, specifically in regard to primary substance, secondary substance, and, most importantly, essence, leaves much to be desired. Aristotle states in his account of essence that the essence of something (a primary substance) is specified in the account of that thing's genus and species (the secondary substances). The essence of a human being, for example, would be to be an animal that is rational.¹ Thus, all human beings have the same essence. By definition, all human beings are essentially the same. This does not seem to be the case outside of Aristotle's account. Every human being is different, with regard to trivial things like hair color, height, and weight, but also in more important qualities that seem essential, like race, gender, personality, and so on.² Of these qualities, this paper will focus especially on personality, addressing the question of why Aristotle did not seem to believe that human personality is essential to human beings.³

Aristotle does head these problems off slightly in his definition of accidental qualities. He defines accidental qualities as things that, if separated from the primary substance, would cease to exist. This includes things like the aforementioned skin color, hair, etc. However, Aristotle never delves directly into the question of particular human essentiality, including personality.⁴ Would Aristotle say that

¹ Rationality is the specific difference, that which separates humans from all other animals.

² This assumes, and rightly so in my view, that most human beings would call their individual personalities, races, and genders essential and important.

³ The significance of personality is clear (most, if not all, human beings consider their personalities important). Moreover, each human being has a different personality.

⁴ Some argue that the very idea of "personality" is a modern one. However, personality does not here mean a modern psychological definition of personality, but a concept similar to Aquinas' account of particular essence or even something as simple as "that which defines and differentiates between individual human beings." Aquinas ties this to an individual human's matter. Personality in this paper is defined more specifically as the part of a person's rationality that is influenced by that individual's choices and dispositions (dispositions which are in turn

personality could be removed from a person and yet that person would still retain his essence? After all, he would continue to be a rational animal. St. Thomas Aquinas, in *Essence and Existence*, clarifies many of these problems, drawing a distinction between particular essence (which varies from person to person) and generic essence (similar to Aristotle's account of essence). Most assume that the reason that Aquinas was able to critically re-evaluate and clarify Aristotle's thought was because of his theological world view. Admittedly, the concept of particular essence is much easier to understand if one espouses the Christian belief that God has a plan for all of his creatures. Aristotle did not have the advantage of the Christian world-view and thus cannot be compared to Aquinas. However, upon further examination of Aristotle's writings, this lack of theological equality does not seem to absolve the great philosopher of the kind of ignorance and lack of effort to go farther with his philosophical thought that he accused the pre-Socratic philosophers of suffering from. Aristotle should have been able to conclude the existence of particular essence, but did not, as seen through examining not only his thoughts on essence, substance, and knowledge, but also his work on the soul and ethics.

In detailing Aristotle's thoughts on essences, Marc Cohen states that for Aristotle,

[e]ach individual has an essence. An essence is general, in that more than one individual may have the same essence. An essence is, literally, what a thing is; and if this last clause is understood in a suitably general way, there is no puzzle about how what one thing is can be the same as what another thing is. If things are two of a kind, then what one is (say, a horse) is the same as what the other is.⁵

However, within three sentences, we seem to encounter the difficulty at the heart of Aristotle's theory of essence. To say that "an essence is general" and then say that "an essence is, literally, what a thing is" seems to be contradictory. Even the Pre-Socratics realized that no two things are uniformly the same. Heraclitus most famously

influenced by an individual human's matter, thus remaining in accord with Aquinas' definition). If Aquinas was able to touch, however briefly and perhaps ambiguously, on the subject of personality, then Aristotle should have been able to do the same.

⁵ Marc Cohen, "Individual and Essence in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*" (Washington University, n.d), <http://faculty.washington.edu/smcohen/Individual&Essence.pdf>.

says, “one cannot step in the same river twice.”⁶ While the point Cohen is specifically trying to make here is that there are things that all objects in a species share (as he illustrates with the example of the two horses), he is unknowingly stumbling on to a problem in Aristotle’s understanding of essence which has to do with Aristotle’s understanding of the knowledge of things.

In Book I of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle states that “we suppose that knowledge about everything necessarily belongs to the one who has the best claim to universal science.”⁷ That is to say, Aristotle means that people who have knowledge of universals are wiser than those who have knowledge of particulars because universals are farther away and more difficult to deduce from particulars. It is not difficult to infer from this statement that this preference for universal knowledge is part of the reason why Aristotle places so much stress on the importance of secondary (universal) substance as essence, specifically for humans. However, in doing so, Aristotle seems to undervalue the importance of particular things, leading to his apparent assumption that there is no such thing as particular essence. Aristotle appears to be making the mistake of presuming that essence is a strictly universal thing. Although essence does in some ways apply to the entirety of a particular species or genus of creatures, such as human beings, there are also things that we would call essential to ourselves that not all humans share, such as our own personal particular personalities, beliefs, and characteristics. By stating that knowledge of universals is always a higher science than knowledge of the particulars, Aristotle lacks a certain kind of knowledge about particulars.⁸ In some ways, Aristotle is jumping, just as his teacher Plato did, directly to something higher, something almost formal.⁹ Aristotle makes a similar mistake by passing over the importance of matter quickly in his account of substances, an omission which Aquinas later rectifies by focusing on

⁶ This is paraphrased, of course, but the original fragment seems to come from Eusebius’ Preparation for the Gospel, XV, 20, 2 (“Heraclitus,” *Wikiquote*, accessed October 22, 2013, <http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Heraclitus>).

⁷ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, in *Aristotle: Introductory Readings* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), 982a21.

⁸ Some will argue that it is right for the sciences to be this way. Going back to the example of horses, the universal knowledge of what makes a horse a horse comes from taking particular horses and making universal claims about all horses. Particular knowledge of particular horses is not the work of a scientist or a metaphysician, but of a jockey. This is why “always” is stressed. In some (perhaps even most) cases, knowledge of universals is a higher science than that of the particulars, but the claim being made here is that Aristotle is passing over the issue of the importance of particulars in regard to essence. The implicit claim here is that particular essence is a higher kind of essence than universal essence, and thus that knowledge of a thing’s particular essence is better and fuller than knowledge of a thing’s universal essence.

⁹ That is, in the sense of “having to do with form.”

the importance of understanding matter and form together as a composite.

However, there is a further problem beyond this one (Aristotle's seeming disregard for knowledge of the particulars) having to do with Aristotle's theory of knowledge in relation to substances. Again in the first book of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle details how human beings come to knowledge.¹⁰ The path to knowledge starts first through sense-experience, then moves to memory (a grouping of sense-experiences), then experience (if one has many memories about a certain situation, that person should be able to make judgments and predictions about what will occur if that situation arises again), then knowledge (a comprehending of things), then a fuller kind of knowledge which could be called understanding (an understanding of the causes of something), and finally wisdom (the understanding of the causes of many things). If Aristotle believes his account of the acquisition of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom to be true, it is possible that he could have been able to extract the idea of primary essence from his findings.

In order to understand human beings in a universal sense according to Aristotle's own account of knowledge, one would need to have sense-experience and memory of individual human beings from which one could draw experience, from that experience knowledge, from that knowledge understanding, and from that understanding wisdom. In making claims about the essence of human beings, Aristotle implies that he has wisdom about human beings. To obtain wisdom about human beings, Aristotle would need to know several human beings individually, from which he could draw a larger concept of the entirety of humanity. In order to gain understanding of individual human beings enough to make a general claim about all human beings, Aristotle would have to know their individual causes. This does not only mean their efficient causes (their parents), but also their material, formal, and, most importantly, final causes.

However, if Aristotle knew the final causes about several individual humans, it is possible that he could have been able to develop the idea of personal essence. Though Aristotle defines the final end of all human beings as "human flourishing," in examining individual flourishings, as Aristotle would have had to do in order to gain understanding of individual human causes and therefore obtain wisdom about human beings, we can clearly see how different one

¹⁰ *Metaphysics*, 980a21–982a4.

person's flourishing is from another's.¹¹ While one person might flourish through that person's vocation as a carpenter, another person might flourish as a politician.¹² Though the commonality of flourishing certainly pervades humanity as a whole, it is clear that every individual has a completely unique kind of flourishing. Human flourishing is the end not only of humankind universally, but also of human beings individually. If human essence, what human beings are, is only rational animality, something that all human beings share, why would there be so many variations on the universal end of human flourishing? It is possible that Aristotle picked up on this point, but missed its significance. This could possibly be attributed to the influence of his teacher Plato and his getting caught up in the importance of the universal. Or perhaps Aristotle was merely unable to fully extend his ideas regarding essence to the realm of the particular. That being said, Aristotle is not excused from missing the idea of particular essence as manifested through his own teleological theory.

If Aristotle was not able to discover particular essence through his own theory of knowledge acquisition, then he could have at least developed an idea of particular essence through his ethics and his account of virtues and vices. In the first four books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle explains how living a morally virtuous life, in conjunction with a life of study, is the way to achieve the highest human flourishing and, by extension, happiness. A virtue, of course, is the mean between two vices: one a deficiency and the other an excess.¹³ The virtue of temperance illustrates this relationship between virtues and vices, which governs how we enjoy pleasurable things. Too much enjoyment of pleasure is licentious, while too little enjoyment of it implies insensibility. We must therefore aim for the middle ground of temperance. At the end of book II, Aristotle gives several pieces of advice to those who are trying to live a life of virtue and attempting to

¹¹ Ibid., 1097a15–1098b10.

¹² Some argue that these individual flourishings are merely expressions of the universal principle of human rationality. Thus, Aristotle would not need to understand individual flourishings, because they all conform to a universal claim. This is correct, and is actually touching on the larger issue at play here. Aristotle assumes that because he knows a something universal that applies to an entire category of things, he understands that category of things well enough to have full knowledge of it. For example, Aristotle assumes that because he knows universally that all human beings are rational animals, he has full knowledge of the human essence. Aristotle is once again more interested in universal claims than in paying any significant attention to particulars.

¹³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1999), 1104a10–20.

hit the mean.¹⁴ The first is for the person seeking a virtuous life to imitate someone virtuous and to choose to act like that person. The second is that if a person seeking a virtuous life is trying to hit the mean but misses, it is better to hit the vice that is closer to the virtue than the vice that is further away from the virtue.¹⁵ The third is to guard against pleasurable things in any form. The fourth is to avoid areas in which the person seeking a life of virtue is prone to weakness. These pieces of advice all seem very clear and wise.

Aristotle, in giving these pieces of advice, is once again inadvertently touching on the subject of particular essence. If the sole essence of human beings is rational animality, should we not always be prone to the same specific areas of weakness? Why would different rational animals be tempted by different vices? All feline non-rational animals have the same passions: the passion to hunt and eat tasty creatures, to sleep all day, and so on. Likewise, most animals are governed by the pleasures they desire through their own animality. However, in being so governed, animals are not living a life of vice. Animals are non-rational. They have little or no rational faculty which they could use to pursue the higher life of virtue and study. It is natural for animals to be guided by their whims and desires.

Human beings, on the other hand, are susceptible to different pleasures that are unique to individual persons. Socrates, for example, may be a fan of maple bacon doughnuts and thus may have to guard against being a glutton. Plato, on the other hand, hates maple bacon doughnuts,¹⁶ but loves sexual pleasures. Thus, Plato does not have to guard himself against over-consumption of maple bacon doughnuts but does have to guard against sexual pleasures. It thus seems that the reason why human beings have different individual pleasures that tempt them connects to their rational faculty, something found in Aristotle's account of human essence.

However, something is not quite right here. Why would rationality, the very thing that guides us away from experiencing too many pleasures, be responsible for each person's predisposed to certain pleasures? Thus, it seems that it cannot be the rational part of "rational animality" that is responsible for our varied pleasures.

¹⁴ Ibid., 1109a20–1109b14.

¹⁵ Every virtue has a vice that is closer to it than the other vice. Continuing with the example of temperance, the vice that is closer to temperance is insensibility (though this can vary from person to person).

¹⁶ Obviously, this is just a hypothetical example. No one in real life hates maple bacon doughnuts.

Likewise, as we have just examined, animality in itself would also not make us sensitive to particular pleasures. There must be something else, something personal and unique to each person that is the cause of these variations.¹⁷ This implies something more in each human being, a particular essence. This part of particular essence, which makes us inclined to these specific pleasures, is our individual personality, which is in turn formed by our predispositions and the choices we make.¹⁸ However, Aristotle, for some reason, did not draw this conclusion from his premises.

In discussing the perfection of human souls through virtue, it would undoubtedly aid us to examine Aristotle's thoughts on the soul itself. In the appropriately named *De Anima*, Aristotle details some of the potentialities of the soul, as well as the things that the soul causes. First, Aristotle defines what the soul is exactly, stating that the soul is "the first actuality of a natural body that is potentially alive."¹⁹ By first actuality, Aristotle means that the soul can do things but does not always do them. He gives the example that if the eye "were an animal, sight would be its soul."²⁰ The eye does not always have to see, but the eye always can see. In book II, chapter 3, Aristotle explains the potential faculties of the soul, including "nutrition, perception, desire, locomotion, and understanding."²¹ Plants, for example, can take in nutrition, but because of the kind of soul they have, they cannot perceive, desire, move, or understand. Animals, on the other hand, can take in nutrition, perceive, desire (as we have detailed before), and move. Rational animals, that is to say humans, can engage in all of these, and in addition can understand. This seems to tie into Aristotle's account of human beings: his account of the kinds of souls things can have reinforces his conception of the human essence as rational animality.

¹⁷ Defenders of Aristotle might argue that these variations are not essential. For example, what if Socrates started to hate bacon? Is he essentially different? The argument being made here is not that specific preferences are essential (preferences can change), but rather that particular moral character is essential in that it defines what a particular human being is. Take the example of an alcoholic who has been able to successfully quit drinking alcohol: the alcoholic will always be tempted by alcohol, even if he never drinks again. The moral susceptibility to that particular vice helps define that individual person, helps explain what makes him him, and will define him in part for the rest of his life. If he suddenly awoke one day free of his susceptibility to alcohol, he would essentially be a different person.

¹⁸ To keep with the example of the alcoholic, the predisposition of the alcoholic toward alcohol, combined with the choices he makes to drink or not the drink the alcohol, define his personality, which defines who he is.

¹⁹ *De Anima* in *Aristotle: Introductory Readings*, 412a27.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 412b20.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 414a31.

It is in the next chapter, when Aristotle begins to dissect what the soul exactly is, that the question of particular essentiality for human beings re-emerges. Aristotle specifically states that the soul is “the cause and principle of the living body.”²² Because causes are spoken of in many ways, Aristotle details exactly what he means. He states that the soul is the cause of the living body as substance, the source of locomotion for the body, and, most relevantly for us, what a thing is for. What Aristotle is saying here with this last point is that the soul is the final “beneficiary” cause for a human being, that which human beings do things for.²³ It is not only a goal, but also a recipient. Thus, Aristotle is saying that essence is what a thing is, and the soul is what a thing is for.

It seems that Aristotle is superimposing his idea of human flourishing of the soul as the final end for a human being onto his very definition of the soul. This presents some problems. As we have demonstrated before, each human being has a different kind of flourishing. But if human flourishing (what a human being is for) and the soul (what a thing, including a human being, is for) are connected this closely, differences in the kinds of flourishing imply differences in souls.

Here is this argument in syllogistic form:

1. If all souls are the same, they will have the exact same flourishing.
2. Human souls do not have the same exact flourishing.²⁴
3. So not all human souls are the same.

This is a *modus tollens* argument, and is therefore valid. Now, this may seem self-evident, but if human beings have different kinds of souls, should they not also have different kinds of essence, at least in some form? Aristotle states that the soul is the cause of the living body as substance, which implies that the soul causes a living body to be what it is. What a thing is is its essence. Why would different human souls produce the same exact sort of essence? Should there not be things

²² Ibid., 415b9.

²³ Ibid., 415b21.

²⁴ This could be challenged from a theological standpoint inasmuch as the Catholic Church teaches that every human soul has the same end: life with God in Heaven. Thus, all human souls have the same flourishing. This is not entirely correct. To paraphrase the apocryphal saying attributed to St. Therese, imagine two cups: a thimble and a beer stein. If one fills both up to the brim, both are full. One is not more full than the other. So it is with life with God in Heaven. Each person experiences God in His fullness, but each individual person has different amounts to fill. Thus, while human souls may have the same flourishing universally (“life with God in Heaven”), life with God in Heaven is different for every person, and thus the flourishing is not exactly the same.

(important things, not only accidental things) that are different from person to person in essentiality if every human soul is different? While the human soul as a human soul denotes the living body with a certain kind of human-ness and rational animality, because it itself is a human soul,²⁵ in the souls' differences there are crucial differences between individuals that make every member of our species unique. There are not only minor differences such as those involving hair and weight, but there are also differences in personality. If we continue to follow Aristotle's claim that a thing's essence is what the thing is, we cannot deny that personality is essential. While a human being is undoubtedly a rational animal in part, it would be extremely difficult to distinguish between and define individual human beings²⁶ without appealing to their individual personalities and non-accidental qualities. This is particular essence, and yet, despite giving his own account of the soul and essence, the mystery of particular essence did not seem to strike Aristotle.

This all raises the crucial question of why Aristotle missed particular essence entirely. While the following ideas are purely speculative, some possibilities are more probable than others.

The problem the foregoing considerations seem to exhibit is the presence of the fallacy of equivocation in Aristotle's theory. Aristotle's definition of essence is simply too broad. He most probably meant, when he defined essence as a thing being what it is, that a thing is what it is in relation to other things. He seemed more concerned with the universal categories than with the importance of the particulars. To point out biases, modern philosophy and culture as a whole has stressed heavily the importance of individuality. Individuality is something that Aristotle probably could not have cared less about. This ties into the problem of the broad definition of essence, Aristotle's major mistake. Aristotle defines essence rightly as what a thing is, but in giving his account of what the human being is, he gives too broad of an answer. To say that human beings are only rational animals is to oversimplify; defining human beings solely as rational animals and ignoring the importance of their individuality is about as helpful as categorizing human beings as "bipedal, talking animals." His definition of the human essence overlooks the importance of human individuality to the species. While it may not particularly matter if one

²⁵ This sounds complicated, but it is not: Why would the human soul denote a body with horse-ness or table-ness? A human soul would have to give the body humanness because this soul itself is human.

²⁶ That is to say, what each individual human being *is*, the human being's essence.

lion is different from another, knowing the fact that human beings are all separate entities with separate souls and personalities helps define what human beings are. It seems Aristotle was simply more interested in the larger categories than he was in particular cases, becoming too wrapped up in his own ideas about universal sciences at the expense of providing a full definition of human essentiality and providing an account of particular essence.

Mary: Fullness of Grace, Fullness of Salvation

Allison McGinley

The Marian doctrines in the Catholic Church are not only some of the key doctrines that make the Catholic belief unique, but also some of the biggest causes of controversy and confusion among Christians. The Virgin Birth, the Immaculate Conception, and the Assumption are the three main doctrines about Mary, and also the most debated. In his book *Daughter Zion*, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger addresses these doctrines and attempts to clarify the origin and theology behind them.¹ For Catholics it is important to understand this most delicate subject so that we can appropriately honor Mary as is right and proper without slipping into the realm of idolatry, and to understand that all doctrines about her simply point toward the greatness and graciousness of God.

Ratzinger begins where we should begin all theological inquiry: with the Bible. One concern that many people have is that there is actually not much said there about Mary directly, and only the Virgin Birth has a textual basis; the other two doctrines are not found explicitly in the Bible. However, as Ratzinger argues, Mary represents and embodies key biblical themes and figures. For example, it is common to compare Mary with Eve. She is spoken of as the new Eve and plays a key role in restoring creation through her *Fiat*, which reverses Eve's part in the Fall of Man through her denial of God. Mary's total and complete yes to God is the beginning of the plot of salvation history, to be continued and fulfilled in the Passion of her son. In humanity's relationship with God, God has chosen to make it so that we need to participate, to give our consent, in order for Him to fully work in our lives. Just as Eve spoke for all of creation through her rejection of God, Mary's *Fiat* was also spoken on behalf of all creation; through it, she not only accepted God into her own heart, but paved the way for us also to say yes to Christ.

¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church's Marian Belief* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983).

However, Ratzinger's interpretation of Mary's presence in the Old Testament neither stops nor is focused there. He instead dwells on her relationship to the patriarchs of the Old Testament and draws out the connection between them. In some ways, the connection is obvious. Just as Abraham and Sarah's child Isaac began the line of descendants that constituted the chosen people, so does Mary's son Jesus fulfill the covenant and widen it to include all peoples. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. In other ways, though, Ratzinger takes the connection a step further by speaking of the individual women and their specific role in salvation history. In the pairs of the patriarchs Sarah—Hager, Rachel—Leah, and Hannah—Penina, there is a recurring motif of the fertile and the infertile. Fertility is a blessing whereas infertility is a curse. And yet in each case, as well as in the case of Mary, the infertile is blessed and raised above the fertile. This theme is echoed in Hannah's praises in 1 Sam 2:8 as well as in Mary's Magnificat: "for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant / . . . He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, / and lifted up the lowly" (Lk 1:48, 52–53). As Ratzinger says, "the theology of virginity finds its first, still hidden formulation: earthly virginity becomes true fertility."² This theme of raising up the lowly and glorifying the weak is a theme that is found throughout the Bible, and Ratzinger is pointing out that Mary fits in with that theme not by coincidence but because that is truly how God operates. God works through the impossible, the improbable, and the illogical: "the infertile one, the powerless one becomes the savior because it is there that the locus for the revelation of God's power is found."³

The Virgin Birth not only fits in with the pattern of God's actions in the Old Testament but also is a culmination of Old Testament theology. The participation of Mary is directly prophesized about in Isaiah 7:14, but Ratzinger also argues for a wider interpretation of Mary's relationship to the Old Testament in the imagery and symbols that she embraces and embodies. Israel herself is spoken of as woman, wife, beloved, virgin, and mother, and therefore "the great women of Israel represent what this people itself is. The history of these women becomes the theology of God's people and . . . the theology of the covenant."⁴ God's relationship with Israel throughout the Old Testament is constantly being tried by the sinfulness and infidelity of the people, and God's reaction to their unfaithfulness is one of pain

² *Ibid.*, 19.

³ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴ *Ibid.*

and hurt. He punishes Israel because it is just, but that is not what He desires the relationship to be. He longs for and rejoices over Israel as a lover does for his beloved, as is shown in the Song of Songs. Mary then is able to represent and embody Israel, and in her gift of self she finally responds to God's love in the way that Israel did not. In Mary's *Fiat*, God is joined "in his historical revelation, [to] the chosen creature, Israel, the daughter Zion, the woman. To leave woman out of the whole of theology would be to deny creation and election and thereby to nullify revelation."⁵ Through the women of the Old Testament, and their "fruitful infertility," revelation is fully expressed, and consequently God is revealed to us. The figure of the women, the mother of creation, the spouse of God, is personified in the great women of Israel and even in Israel herself, but ultimately she emerges with a name: Mary.

This background of Mary's place in the Old Testament must be understood in order to appreciate any further doctrine about her, even the Virgin Birth, which is directly based in the Bible. We must be able to see that she is the fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament so that we don't perceive her to be just a necessary plot point in a play that ultimately has nothing to do with her. In the words of Ratzinger: "Mariology cannot be found apart from its union with the prophetic theology of the bridal people of God."⁶ As I have stated already, one of the biggest connections she has is with the barren women of the Old Testament; however, unlike the women before her, her "bareness" was not a defect but rather the pure state of virginity. In this pure state, though, God can act in a different way: He can begin the New Creation that is Jesus Christ, and Mary's virginity allows for this mystery and new creation to take place inside of her. It also allows for Christ to be fully human, entering the world in the way we all do, and experiencing every aspect of human life except sin. Ratzinger quotes Hans Urs von Balthasar in saying that practically, it also would have been difficult for Jesus to have two fathers and for him to honor his earthly father when he had such a unique relationship to his heavenly father. Joseph's heritage gave Jesus the social status of messianic dignity, but the virgin birth points to the sonship of the Father, which is infinitely more important. Lastly, Ratzinger notes that the importance of the Virgin Birth is not only theological but also biological. Man is both body and soul and therefore so is Christ.

⁵ Ibid., 23.

⁶ Ibid., 31.

Christ's birth from a virgin intends to affirm that God really acts and that the Earth produces its fruit because He acts. He has not "let creation slip out of His hands" and on this is based "the hope, the freedom, the assurance, and the responsibility of the Christian."⁷

The next two Marian doctrines are not strictly biblically based, but the conclusions that can be drawn about her from the Bible are what lead theologians and the Church to declare these two controversial statements as truth. The first is the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, or that Mary was conceived without the stain of original sin. As Ratzinger points out, there is no way for us to know this to be a fact, as we can know other things such as someone's birthday to be definitively true. However, that is not necessary. We can know it is a fact in the same way we know about original sin. We do not see the evidence of original sin in a pure form, but rather we do see the evidence in its effects and undeniable presence in the world. Even the teaching of original sin was not necessarily handed down as a tradition, but is rather a theological truth that has been recognized through scriptural exegesis. It is then not difficult to find similar evidence for the Immaculate Conception. The new Israel and bride of God is spoken of as being pure, holy, and immaculate, and as we have already noted, the New Israel and even the Church achieves a real concreteness in the person of Mary.

There is then the issue of how Mary could be born without original sin. On one hand, we can say that it was made possible through the redemptive act of the crucifixion, and through God's timelessness he was able to preserve Mary from the taint of sin. The question is then why or how that actually happened. One answer follows the line of reasoning as to why she needed to be a virgin: in order to be a pure and holy place for God's new creation to occur. In addition to these explanations, though, Ratzinger explores what exactly original sin is. It is not a "natural deficiency in or concerning man, but a statement about a relationship that can be meaningfully formulated only in the context of the God-man relation."⁸ Original sin is then a statement about God's "evaluation of man" and the latter's lack of love for God. However, that is not the case with Mary, and hence God's judgment of her is a pure "Yes." Therefore, "this correspondence of God's 'Yes' with Mary's being as 'Yes' is the

⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

freedom from original sin,” and it is both necessary and clear that Mary was preserved from the stain of it.⁹

Lastly, Ratzinger explores the doctrine of the Assumption. Again, this is a doctrine that is not strictly biblically based, and yet it is something that we have deduced to be the case from what we have learned about who Mary is. Ratzinger first points out that this article is a theological, not historical, doctrine of faith. Second, he says that it was intended to be an “act of veneration, the highest form of praise.”¹⁰ The veneration of Mary refers to someone who is “alive, who is at home, who has actually arrived at her goal on the other side of death,” that is, she is completely whole, body and soul, in eschatological fulfillment.¹¹ Why do we say, then, that Mary is in complete eschatological fulfillment and not merely together with God, awaiting the second coming like all other saints? Ratzinger says simply that it “is permitted because this name—Mary—stands for the Church itself, for its definitive state of salvation.”¹² It is also because the title Mother of God refers not only to the virgin birth but also to the assumption, in that there is no death in God. If she bears him who is “the death of death” and by doing so has purely and wholly given of herself, then she has already participated fully in the New Covenant, this new birth, and in her complete self-dispossession she is able to be completely united with God.¹³

The Church’s Marian doctrines can be confusing for many, and the language that must be used is very particular and specific so as to make sure we are not speaking heresy. Ratzinger is able beautifully and clearly to make his point and illuminate the truth about Mary without crossing those lines, and hopefully has helped many people to understand Marian doctrine a little better. Mary is such a wonderful advocate for us, and so to understand who she is and what she represents helps us to better venerate her and ask for her intercession. She truly is full of grace, and possibly the best way to sum up both Ratzinger’s work as well as these doctrines of faith regarding Mary is simply to say that “Where the totality of grace is, there is the totality of salvation,” and that in all ways Mary is constantly pointing us

⁹ Ibid., 70.

¹⁰ Ibid., 73.

¹¹ Ibid., 74.

¹² Ibid., 77.

¹³ Ibid., 78.

toward the One whom she bore and to whom she owes her entire self:
Christ our Lord.¹⁴

¹⁴ Ibid.

The Failure of Hume's Belief–Desire Theory of Motivation to Account for Motivational Force

Francis Lukeban

Motivation is deeply tied to two states of human psychology: belief and desire. However, there is disagreement about the extent to which each of these states has power over a person's motivation to act and about how they are related as mental states. Some claim that desire possesses the motivational power necessary for action while belief possesses no such power. Hume pioneered this view by establishing his motivational account of belief and desire and the way in which the two mental states interact with one another in order to motivate one to act. The account that Hume gave of motivation is commonly referred to as the belief–desire model of motivation, or the Humean theory of motivation.

Hume claimed that reason, which leads to belief, “is no motive to action, and directs only the impulse received from appetite or inclination.”¹ This groundbreaking claim takes reason to be motivationally inert and holds that sentiment is the only mental state that possesses motivational power. The Humean picture of motivation relies on both belief and desire for one to be able to commit an action; it claims that it would be impossible for someone to commit an action without both a belief and a desire in relation to the action. Both belief and desire must be in play for an action to be committed. To understand this claim further, though, the way in which belief and desire are defined must be established. In this paper I will argue that Hume's account is ultimately flawed and can at best be an account of deliberate action, not all action. It does not attribute motivational force to belief or desire but is instead solely an account of an agent's mental states of belief and desire when the agent is performing an action.

The Humean theory of the motivation for action also offers claims about the way in which moral judgments are formed, primarily

¹ David Hume, “Concerning Moral Sentiment,” in *Enquiry Concerning the Principle of Morals*, ed. Tom Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 163.

necessitating that both a belief and a desire are held, which then leads an agent to form a moral judgment accordingly. However, this account of Humean motivation is not solely an account of the motivation for actions leading to the deliberate establishing of moral judgments but is an account of the motivation for all deliberate actions. This understanding of the Humean theory of motivation brings to light the way in which the prerequisites of Hume's account, namely, belief and desire, are to be understood. It is not the case that these prerequisites, however, are simply foundational elements from which motivation for action is derived. Rather, belief and desire are directly tied to certain actions and can be understood as states necessarily implying actions.

An agent, when holding a belief, is engaging in the action of believing; believing is not simply a state but rather is itself an action that leads to a representational conception of the state of reality. The naming of this as belief seems to divorce itself from being tied to action, when this is not actually the case. When one holds a belief, the action taking place, in this case, is believing. Beliefs imply the action of believing and are also the states of actively believing something to be the case.

Beliefs primarily are formed through and follow the use of reason. Reasoning is one's engagement with the logical. To use reason is to understand and apprehend things by the use of logic. Reason, however, does seem to have its limits. Hume claims that "reason judges either of matter of fact or of relations."² This implies that the "only objects of reason are representative states of mind, which are of two sorts: relations of ideas or beliefs in matters of fact about the world. That is, reason deals only with representations."³ Reason thus understood deals solely with those states of mind that can be true or false, since representations are true or false. Representations may be understood as one's conception of the connections between one's ideas and one's account of reality. It must be made clear that representations exist only as states of the mind, which is also to say that representations depend for their existence on the presence of reasoning agents. This is not at all to reject the existence of an objective reality but instead implies that one can only come to apprehend reality through representations. Representation is one's depiction of reality. Beliefs are commonly regarded as statements or propositions about one's depiction of reality that are truth-apt, which

² *Ibid.*, 158.

³ Elizabeth Radcliffe, "Hume on the Generation of Motives: Why Beliefs Alone Never Motivate," *Hume Studies* 25 (1999), 103.

is to say that they state something true or false with regard to objective reality. So statements of belief are not expressions but assertions of what one takes to be true and false.

When one is motivated to act and commits actions in light of these motivations, it seems to be the case that there are reasons for one to commit these actions in the first place; one does not commit deliberate actions for no reason. In regard to the way in which reason influences action, Hume believes reason, “when fully assisted and improved, [to] be sufficient to instruct us in the pernicious or useful tendency of qualities and actions.”⁴ This brings to light the instructive nature of reason. This type of language about use implicitly presupposes that there are goals that deliberate action aims at. To make claims about use, whether about usefulness or uselessness, is to imply that certain aims for an agent exist. For there to be qualities of usefulness, there must necessarily be things that they are useful for. Actions are committed for the sake of an end. This account of reason shows that reason is instrumental to the achievement of one’s aims by determining the actions that the successful pursuit of one’s aims consists in.

So Hume holds that reason is helpful to an agent in that it makes clear the particular actions that one ought to pursue in light of one’s aims. Reason influences action by establishing beliefs about the usefulness and uselessness of actions. Beliefs are instructive to action to the extent that they accurately represent reality and identify the course of action that will best fulfill one’s aims. This, however, is not to say that beliefs, with their instructive nature, have the power to motivate one to act. The motivational power required for one to act is lacking in this account of reason and belief. The view that believing, or being in active possession of a belief, is an action entails that one would not even be motivated to perform the act of believing at all. Thus the Humean account of beliefs, as understood here, is not sufficient to explain even itself, much less a person’s aims and the way in which they are established. Reason, on Hume’s view, seems to be utterly lacking in both motivational force and explanatory power with regard to the determination of one’s ends. This is not necessarily a problem for Hume, though. His account of reason is complemented by his account of desires, which he believes to fill reason’s motivational and explanatory void, forming a full account of motivation that relies on both beliefs and desires.

⁴ Hume, “Concerning Moral Sentiment,” 158.

Reason's influence does not extend to the determination and establishment of one's ends but is instead instructive in the pursuit of an end that has already been determined. That is the extent of reason's influence on the ends of action, which is to say that reason has no influence on the determination of the ends of action. Hume claims, further, that "the ultimate ends of human action can never, in any case, be accounted for by reason, but recommend themselves entirely to the sentiments and affections of mankind, without any dependence on the intellectual faculties."⁵ The aims of a person's action, according to Hume, are entirely established by and dependent upon sentiment. The ends are determined by what is "desirable on its own account . . . because of its immediate agreement with human sentiment and affection."⁶ Otherwise, there would be an infinite regress of desire, in which one's ultimate ends would be indeterminable. Sentiment establishes the ends of action entirely apart from reason and without any cognitive deliberation. Motivation then seems to stem from the desire to fulfill one's ends. The power of establishing of ends Hume credits to sentiment, and he consequently credits sentiment with the necessary motivational force for an action to be performed. Since agents still do perform actions despite reason's lack of motivational force, such motivational force must exist elsewhere in human moral psychology.

Hume offers the solution of sentiment to explain this motivational force. Rather than determining morality by reason, "morality is determined by sentiment. It defines virtue to be whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation; and vice the contrary."⁷ This gives an account of how one is motivated to act, shown here by establishing sentiment as the initial motivation for the determination of morality. Sentiment and desire, unlike reason and belief, do not deal with matters of fact. Statements of sentiment and desire are not assertoric but are expressive and so cannot be understood as true or false. Expressions are not truth-apt but are articulations of one's sentiment and feeling. To say that one's desires are true or false makes no sense because desires do not make claims about matters of fact.

Failing to be truth-apt, sentiment and desire determine morality for a human agent. It therefore seems to be the case that statements of morality, too, are not truth-apt; morality cannot be true or false,

⁵ *Ibid.*, 162–63.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 160.

then, because it is the expression of one's ends as determined by sentiment. The aims of an agent, in this case, are determined by one's sentiment. Hume explains his view on the relationship between reason and desire with regard to how one is motivated to act as follows:

the distinct boundaries and offices of reason and taste are easily ascertained. The former conveys the knowledge of truth and falsehood: The latter gives the sentiment of beauty and deformity, vice and virtue. The one discovers objects, as they really stand in nature, without addition or diminution: The other has a productive faculty, and gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from sentiment, raises, in a manner, a new creation. Reason, being cool and disengaged, is not motive to action, and directs only the impulse received from appetite or inclination, by showing us the means of attaining happiness or avoiding misery: Taste, as it gives pleasure or pain, and thereby constituting happiness or misery, becomes a motive to action, and is the first spring or impulse to desire and volition.⁸

Reason, deriving conceptions of that which is true and false through the use of logic, establishes belief as a representational, truth-apt mental state depicting reality, but it itself is motivationally inert, which is to say lacking in motivational force. This also implies that reason itself is stagnant; one cannot be compelled to believe and engage in reason without motivation. The motive to act is credited to sentiment, which sets ends according to our conceptions of happiness and misery, which are rooted in that which one finds pleasurable and painful. Taste is said to have a productive capacity which directs one to view reality in regard to what is pleasurable and painful; “a new creation” is produced from the viewing of objects as themselves things that are pleasurable and painful, or things that are desired and so ought to be pursued and things that are repulsive, or undesirable, and so ought to be avoided. This echoes the point that our ends are set by sentiment, by what one naturally feels to be worthwhile.

So the Humean theory of motivation, or the belief–desire model of motivation, relies on both belief and desire for one to commit an action. Through sentiment one desires certain ends, and it is through this desire that one's ends are established. By holding beliefs, motivated by the desire to pursue one's set ends, one establishes a representation of reality through which one can determine the way in

⁸ *Ibid.*, 163.

which one ought to act in light of one's ends. Actions are performed when an agent is in possession of a desire that is particularized by a belief the agent holds, which represents reality in such a way as to give a depiction of the context in which the agent is to act, so that the agent is motivated to commit a particular action in light of the agent's beliefs and desires. For example, if someone desires pleasure, and that person's sentimental state leads to the feeling of pleasure through the experience of sweet things, and the person accurately believes that there is sweet-tasting cake nearby, then this person would particularly desire to eat the cake through the particularizing of the person's desire in light of the person's belief, and would thus be motivated to engage in the action of eating the cake. The general desire to experience pleasure, although having motivational force in this account, is not itself enough to cause the agent to perform an action with the aim of feeling pleasure because there is no context for the agent to act in. The accurate belief, as a depiction of the existence of sweet-tasting cake, also is not enough by itself to cause the action of eating the cake to be performed. Because the belief lacks the motivational force necessary to commit an action, the agent would simply be in possession of a belief but would lack any motivation to act in relation to it. Only together do belief and desire set up the necessary conditions for an agent to act.

According to Hume, the act of moral judgment also fits into this model. Moral judgment must be understood here as the establishment of evaluations about what one ought to do to in light of one's end as set by desires in the context of one's beliefs. It seems to be the case that on this model, all action committed is moral action. If one always acts in light of one's ends because one is compelled to act by the motivational force of desire, which sets and determines one's ends, then all actions are moral, insofar as actions for or against one's ends are moral.

However, there seems to be something deeply problematic with this account. If all motivation for action rests on a foundation of beliefs and desires, then this raises the problem of how to understand believing and desiring as actions. If believing and desiring are understood as actions, then they necessarily have to be explained by and fit into the confines of the belief–desire theory of motivation as well. The fact that reason was not able to compel itself, that it lacked the motivational force necessary to bring one to engage in the act of reasoning solely by itself, was devastating to the claim that reason was motivating because it would not be able to contribute to action if it

was not itself motivated. It is not clear whether this is also the case with desires and sentiment. Desires do seem to imply action in the same way that beliefs do. Using the term “desire” seems to imply that desire is a state that one is in possession of. However, this actually seems to be a mistaken semantic issue that leads to the divorcing of desire from the acting of desire, which is implicit in desires. The problem is that the use of the term “desire” seems to imply that desires are states themselves independent of action. Desiring is an act. So understanding desiring as an act necessarily confines desiring to the belief–desire motivational account. Hume would have to submit that the act of desiring would also have to be explained motivationally by the belief–desire theory of motivation, because it claims to give an explanation for the way in which agents are motivated to commit actions. If this is the case, then to commit the act of desiring one must be motivated to do so in light of a particular belief and a motivating desire. This is to say that in order to commit the act of desiring one must be motivated to do so in light of a motivating desire preceding it. This must also be the case with the act of believing. In order to commit the act of believing, one would have to be motivated to do so in light of a preceding belief and a motivating desire.

This exposes a devastating flaw in the belief–desire model. The belief–desire theory of motivation fails to explain the origin of the factors necessary for action. There must be foundational beliefs and desires from which all other actions are derived; otherwise there would be no determinable origin of action. This can be better understood by establishing the distinction between deliberate and non-deliberate action, particularly in regard to deliberate and non-deliberate beliefs and desires.

Beliefs and desires can be deliberate or non-deliberate. The establishment of non-deliberate beliefs and desires is necessary for understanding deliberate beliefs and desires and consequently all other deliberate action. Non-deliberate beliefs and desires work in the same way as all other beliefs and desires. The distinct difference concerns their origin. Non-deliberate beliefs and desires are held involuntarily, which is to say that the agent has no say in whether the beliefs and desires are held. For non-deliberate beliefs, “the beliefs in question must rather be simple attributions of perceptual qualities, founded on a single experience and formed immediately.”⁹ These beliefs are produced without the use of reason and are reached by “a mere passive

⁹ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 73.

admission of the impressions thro' the organs of sensation."¹⁰ Non-deliberate beliefs are depictions of reality held without the use of reason but through sensation, which "is the immediate cause of belief."¹¹ Similarly, non-deliberate desires are not reached through any sort of voluntariness or reasoning. This desire is unmotivated and is so understood as affection, which is "(not susceptible to rational assessment) to which one is either subject or not."¹² Hume held that all desires were unmotivated in this way. These desires require no reasoning and "arise from a natural impulse or instinct, which is perfectly unaccountable."¹³ One is inevitably passive with respect to one's desire. He thus views all desires as primitive and does not take into account desires that "are arrived at by decision and after deliberation," desires that "need not simply assail us, though there are certain desires that do."¹⁴ The possession of these non-deliberate beliefs and desires, the action of non-deliberate believing and desiring, is not intentional action and so is not explained by the belief–desire theory of motivation. The belief–desire theory of motivation can only be understood as an account of deliberate actions.

Motivational force cannot be accounted for in the case of non-deliberate actions; these actions are committed without volition and rest on desires that assail an agent without motivational explanation. Hume claimed that actions could be explained by his belief–desire theory of motivation. Instead it seems to be the case that only deliberate actions are accounted for. Even so, his account seems to lack an explanation of motivational force; motivational force is not necessarily attributed to the mental states of belief and desire. While one can be in possession of a desire to act and an accurate representative belief and then act in light of these, this only explains some of the necessary conditions for deliberate action. When one acts, it is necessary that one be in possession of the desire to act and the required particular belief, but this is only an account of the agent's necessary state for action not an account of motivation. If actions are derived initially from foundational non-deliberate beliefs and desires, then motivation is still not attributed to either belief or desire. Non-deliberate actions are committed without an explanation of

¹⁰ Radcliffe, "Hume on the Generation of Motives," 106.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹² Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 4.

¹³ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 415.

¹⁴ Nagel, *Possibility of Altruism*, 29.

motivation. Deliberate actions are derived from this non-deliberate basis and so borrow their motivational force from this foundation. Motivational force is not explained or attributed to the mental states of deliberate belief and desire in the belief–desire theory, which instead gives an account of the conditions necessary for deliberate action without providing an explanation of motivational force.

Improving the Way We Treat Our Neighbor: An Exegesis of Matthew 7:1–5

Amy Jo Bowers

Stop judging, that you may not be judged. For as you judge, so will you be judged, and the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you. Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, "Let me remove that splinter from your eye"? You hypocrite, remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother's eye.

—Matthew 7:1–5

Matthew 7:1–5 is the evangelist's recounting of one of the many teachings of Jesus when he addressed the crowd for the Sermon on the Mount. In this particular pericope, Jesus is telling his followers to abstain from judgment of others, using the analogy of the splinter in the brother's eye in comparison to the wooden beam in one's own eye.

1. Historical and Theological Context

A majority of theologians agree on the theory of Markan priority setting the basis for many aspects found in Matthew's Gospel.¹ The idea that Mark was the first to write and that Matthew and Luke followed afterward suggests that Matthew's Gospel finds a large majority of its context in Mark. In fact, theologians have affirmed that "97 percent of Mark's words are paralleled in Matthew."² Despite this vast amount of similarity, there are certain aspects of both Matthew and Luke that are simply not found in Mark. This gap is explained through the Q source, which is the "hypothetical source that would account for the Gospel material (not found in Mark) that Matthew and Luke have in common."³ Mark and Q are believed to be the primary sources used to develop the Gospel of Matthew as a whole. This

¹ David L. Turner, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 13.

² *Ibid.*

³ David Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:567.

particular passage, which is found in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount address, is one of those pericopes found in Matthew that is not accounted for in Mark. It can therefore be assumed to be derived from Q and other sources that Matthew found in his tradition.⁴

As for the specific human author of this Gospel, multiple theories have been developed. A reader's interpretation of just who wrote the Gospel of Matthew relies heavily on the "inferences" drawn from the text itself; the style of writing found in the Gospel of Matthew suggests to scholars that the author was perhaps a Jew who was well versed in both Hebrew and Judaism.⁵ The reader's authorship opinion may also be swayed by the various historical conclusions that have been made regarding the human author.⁶ Historically, the Gospel of Matthew "was ascribed to Matthew the apostle by the first quarter of the second century CE."⁷ Though the majority of the theological community agrees with the preceding assumptions, both of the abovementioned conclusions regarding the authorship of Matthew have been disputed. In the last few decades particularly, "a vocal minority of exegetes" has stood behind the belief that Matthew was actually written by a gentile author.⁸ The idea of the apostle Matthew being the author of this Gospel has also been met with skepticism, some critics even going so far as to suggest that authorship by Matthew the apostle is the most unlikely of all the relevant possibilities.⁹ Therefore, we can say that the authorship of the Gospel of Matthew is still a matter of debate; the reader should be aware that many opinions exist regarding this aspect of the Gospel.

Regardless of the dispute concerning the authorship of Matthew, there is a general consensus concerning the dating of this Gospel. Currently, scholars believe that Matthew's Gospel originated in the eighties or nineties, very close to the turn of the first century; this would put the writing directly after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE.¹⁰ This dating makes sense considering the numerous breaks from "Pharisaic observances" found in Matthew, which strengthens the argument that it had to be written after the fall of Jerusalem.¹¹ We see in Matthew's settings of his Gospel "a church in transition, seeking to

⁴ Ibid., 5:1106.

⁵ Turner, *Matthew*, 12.

⁶ Ibid., 11.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 4:625.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Turner, *Matthew*, 13.

¹¹ Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 4:624.

preserve what is viable in its Jewish past as it moves into the uncharted waters of a predominantly gentile future in the Greco-Roman world.”¹² By identifying this transitional period as the period in which Matthew wrote, the reader can better understand “the problems and forces that led to Matthew’s particular approach to the Gospel traditions.”¹³

Now that a general outline has been presented concerning the broader context of the Gospel as a whole, it is next important to understand the context of the particular section in which this passage is found. Matthew 5–7 has become known as the Sermon on the Mount, the first “programmatically” speech that Jesus delivers in the Gospel of Matthew.¹⁴ Though it is unclear who exactly Jesus was addressing in the Sermon, Matthew 5:1 depicts it as being addressed to “the disciples of Jesus after he had separated them from the crowd and moved to the mountain.”¹⁵ However, further into the Sermon, it is mentioned that the “crowds” praised the sermon, so it is likely that the disciples were not the only hearers of Jesus’ speech.¹⁶ The name Sermon on the Mount was first used by Augustine in his commentary on this piece of the Gospel, likely stemming from the “mountain” reference in the text itself.¹⁷ The term has been used not only to refer to this particular section of Matthew, but also as a designation of the particular text that “sums up the uncompromising ethics of the historical Jesus.”¹⁸

2. Literary Context

Though there are a handful of varying opinions concerning the basic structure of the Gospel of Matthew, the most palatable of them is the five-section theory, in which Matthew is believed to be categorized into five major sections, each containing specific patterns and themes. These five sections are surrounded by the two climaxes of the entire Gospel: the Infancy Narrative and the Passion Narrative.¹⁹ The Sermon on the Mount and the particular pericope in question can be found in the first of the five sections in the Gospel.

¹² *Ibid.*, 4:625.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 4:624.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5:1106.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4:629.

In the Sermon on the Mount, however, there is also a unique structure that outlines the underlying messages of the author and text. The number three plays a central role in the Sermon, and so it is no surprise that the Sermon can be broken down into three sections. The passage on judging others can be found in the second section or “Central Section,” in which the main theme is “the way to the (eternal) life i.e., guidelines for a way of life.”²⁰ One of these guidelines or moral sayings is Matthew 7:1–5, concerning the judging of others.

3. Formal Analysis

Matthew 7:1–5 records a direct saying of Jesus during his preaching at the Sermon on the Mount. It has been commonly classified as an exhortation followed by a parable.²¹ Jesus is recorded in the first two verses of this excerpt as laying down “the abstract” of his urgencies.²² He does this by explicitly and directly proclaiming his advice concerning the judgment of others. The next three verses then contain a parable that brings further light to the previous exhortation. This is a common formality of the “Jesus tradition,” in which “the abstract (7:1–2) now melts into the concrete (7:3–5).”²³ The parable, as with others used in the Jesus tradition, acts as an “extended metaphor or simile frequently becoming a brief narrative, generally used in biblical times for didactic purposes.”²⁴ The formal goal of the splinter and beam parable was to further express the exhortation found in the previous verses. This section has also been grouped together with the many “prohibitions” expressed by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.²⁵ The language in the beginning of this passage (“Do not judge”) is echoed throughout the Sermon, in which Jesus repeatedly prohibits his listeners from doing certain things.

4. Detailed Analysis

The passage begins with an initial prohibition not to judge others.²⁶ In this context, “judgment” has been thought to connote “analysis and evaluation or condemnation and punishment.”²⁷ It is

²⁰ Ibid., 5:1108.

²¹ William David Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 1:670.

²² Davies and Allison, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 1:670.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 5:146.

²⁵ Donald Senior, *Matthew* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 87.

²⁶ Turner, *Matthew*, 204.

²⁷ Ibid., 205.

important to note that the historical Jesus did not mean that all “judgment” was to be denounced. It is unlikely that Jesus would have denied the possibility of judgment concerning moral absolutes, in which one makes “absolute statements about right and wrong, good and evil.”²⁸ This term “judgment” is not referring to “simple ethical judgments” such as those that are required in our everyday lives in order to discern obvious right from wrong.²⁹ It would be contradictory for “judgment” to have such a definition here, for it would be going against what Jesus has “commanded and exemplified elsewhere.”³⁰ Rather, as noted previously, the “judgment” here is referring to the act of rigid and critical judgment of others without considering one’s own faults first.³¹

The inexplicit warning found at the end of the first verse indicates a connection between the way in which we judge others and the way in which God judges us at the final judgment.³² There is a direct link here between the “prohibition not to judge others” and “what one can expect from God” at the judgment.³³ Continuing into the second verse, this linkage between our judgment of others and God’s judgment of us is made stronger with the phrase “the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you” (Matt. 7:2). “The notion of ‘measure for measure’ was manifestly well known in ancient Judaism” and was “frequently brought into connection with eschatology, as it is here.”³⁴ In this particular verse, the measure is referring to the way in which we judge and the way in which we will be judged by God. The notion is that “God will judge people by standards no less strict than those they use in judging other people.”³⁵ Therefore, if you would like to refrain from receiving harsh punishment from God in the end, you should equally refrain from distributing harsh judgment to others in the present.³⁶ The way in which this phrase is presented calls the reader (and at the time of the Sermon, the disciples) to constantly be oriented toward the final judgment that they will receive from God.³⁷

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Davies and Allison, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 1:668.

³⁰ Turner, *Matthew*, 205.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 74.

³³ Senior, *Matthew*, 88.

³⁴ Davies and Allison, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 1:670.

³⁵ Turner, *Matthew*, 205.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

These first two verses are forbidding this type of judgment for a very specific and definite reason. Such judgment by the common sinner “arrogates to man the prerogative of God on the last day.”³⁸ By judging others in this context, the individual judge is taking on a role that has been reserved by God, for God.³⁹ We should refrain from this type of judgment because it is not our place to engage in it; rather, we should confine ourselves to judging only in fields in which we are capable of judging, that is, in the domain of those “simple ethical judgments” previously mentioned.⁴⁰ The rest should be left in “God’s hands.”⁴¹ As Augustine puts it:

On things that are manifest, therefore, let us pass judgment, but with regard to hidden things, let us leave the judgment to God. For whether the works themselves be bad or good, they cannot remain hidden when the time comes for them to be revealed.⁴²

We can see in this Gospel passage the clear distinction between certain truths that we are permitted to pass judgment on and other, “hidden” truths that we are prohibited to pass judgment on. It has been said that Jesus may have been referring to the Pharisees when he presented this command to the disciples.⁴³ It has been suggested that “this teaching is intended to warn the disciples against being like certain Pharisees who are presented as being judgmental.”⁴⁴

The passage then undergoes a transition in the style of writing, moving to two rhetorical questions directed toward the listener. These questions, along with the seemingly absurd image they depict, are meant to further consecrate the prohibition stated in the previous verses to the listener. The questions present an exaggerated situation in which “a disciple whose vision is obscured by a log attempts to remove a speck from a fellow disciple’s eye.”⁴⁵ Verse three is meant to depict our tendency to criticize the flaws in those around us while ignoring the flaws that we have within ourselves.⁴⁶ In common terms, verse three is meant to ask the listener why it is the case that we have no trouble noticing the sometimes minor flaws in our neighbors when

³⁸ John P. Meier, *Matthew* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1980), 69.

³⁹ Davies and Allison, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 1:668.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Augustine, “The Rush to Judgment,” in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 1:147.

⁴³ Davies and Allison, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 1:668.

⁴⁴ Turner, *Matthew*, 204.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 205–06.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 206.

we ourselves have flaws that, in some instances, are much more severe than those of our neighbors.

It is important to note the use of “brother” as the person the listener is being accused of criticizing. The word “brother” here suggests first and foremost “another member of the community,” not just any person.⁴⁷ This is meant to indicate a fellow member of the Christian community, someone who is “regarded as family.”⁴⁸ The use of “brother” only “adds to the culprit’s hypocrisy, for in truth the man is not acting like a brother but more like a parent with a child.”⁴⁹ This is obviously meant to serve as an example of how Jesus says not to act toward a fellow human being, particularly someone within the common Christian community.

Considering this hypothetical situation, it is easy to see the absurdity that it presents. “The outcome of someone with a beam in the eye correcting one with a speck in his is the blind leading the blind.”⁵⁰ How could “someone whose vision is totally obscured render a just assessment of another person’s minor vision problems?”⁵¹ In other words, how can someone with “blatant sins” attempt to correct and critique the “minor shortcomings” of a fellow disciple?⁵² It seems ludicrous even to attempt this. Verse four takes this ludicrous scenario even further with the proposition that the culprit of the scenario is actually wanting to remove the splinter (minor shortcomings) from the eye of his brother, while still carrying a beam (blatant sins) in his own eye.⁵³ This verse is attempting to illustrate the insanity of “attempting the delicate task of correcting a problem” that you have no right correcting.⁵⁴ It also connects back to verses 1–2, in which the “delicate task” of judging others has been left completely in the hands of God, not human beings.

Verse five brings this passage full circle, allowing Jesus to connect his original prohibition and his hypothetical situation, thereby creating a command to the listeners, shedding light on what he is expecting of them in order to help them avoid the shortcomings of the hypothetical culprit. Here, “Christ wants to show the great outrage he has toward people who do such things” as he has outlined in the preceding

⁴⁷ Senior, *Matthew*, 88.

⁴⁸ Turner, *Matthew*, 206.

⁴⁹ Davies and Allison, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 1:672.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:671–72.

⁵¹ Turner, *Matthew*, 206.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

verses.⁵⁵ He does this by beginning his statement with “an open rebuke,” calling the guilty “hypocrites.”⁵⁶ As stated previously, the Pharisees were the “original objects of warning” in this passage, for “hypocrite is nowhere else in the Gospels applied to disciples.”⁵⁷ Following this rebuke, Jesus commands his listeners to tend to their own “wooden beam” before even considering their brother’s “splinter.” The right to examine others’ faults in any sense is only permissible if you yourself have done a prior self-examination.⁵⁸ Jesus is turning “the focus to the question of one’s own integrity before God as a prerequisite for any judgment of others.”⁵⁹ Chrysostom notes that “each person knows his own affairs better than others know them” and so, “if you are really motivated by genuine concern, [you should] show this concern for yourself first, because your own sin is both more certain and greater.”⁶⁰ In other words, self-examination is the obvious starting point for correcting sin. As the hypothetical example shows us, it is in some sense backwards thinking to begin with the sins of others when you yourself have sins which are unattended to. It is imperative that, before helping to correct anyone’s faults, we first have an understanding that “the one to be corrected is my brother [and] my own faults are greater than his and require attention first.”⁶¹ Only then can we act in a way that concurs with the way in which Jesus is calling us to act in the passage.

5. Synthesis

This passage on judging others fits well into the Sermon on the Mount. As a dogmatic testimony to the overall ethics of the historical Jesus, the Sermon was used as a tool for Jesus to spread his messages to his disciples and to gentiles alike. The particular section in which this passage is found was meant to show the reader or listener the correct way to live in accordance to God’s will. The prohibition against judging others is one of those messages that Jesus intended to pass along so that his followers could live in a way that was consistent with God’s will and demonstrate their desire to follow Jesus. Abstaining from judgment of others was obviously a very important aspect of Christian living that Jesus felt necessary to include in his Sermon; it

⁵⁵ Chrysostom, “The Log in your Own Eye,” in *Ancient Christian Commentary*, 1:147.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Davies and Allison, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 1:673.

⁵⁸ Schnackenburg, *Gospel of Matthew*, 74.

⁵⁹ Senior, *Matthew*, 88.

⁶⁰ Chrysostom, “The Log in your Own Eye,” 1:147.

⁶¹ Meier, *Matthew*, 69.

was a vital message to convey. It puts our duties as Christians in perspective, while making clear the divine right of God to judge us in the end.

The lesson of this passage fits well with the time in which Matthew was written. With the destruction of the Temple still vivid in the intended reader's mind, it was important that the Gospel of Matthew present a basic structure of how to live a life that results in grace and happiness. With the destruction also came much doubt in the Jewish community about the character of the Pharisees. This passage is a testimony to that doubt, providing the listener with an alternative to follow, rather than sliding down the slippery paths of the Pharisees. Overall, this passage assists the entire Gospel of Matthew in presenting Jesus as the new teacher who has been sent by God to deliver the message of the proper way of living out God's will and obtaining eternal life.

6. Homiletic Reflection

More often than not, we are quicker to point out the flaws in those around us than we are to consider the flaws within ourselves. It seems to be human nature to avoid our own shortcomings and focus our attention on the shortcomings of others. Perhaps it is easier for us to accept sin when the finger is not pointed at us. Regardless of why we act in this way, it is not consistent with God's will for us. Rather, God would want us to look into our own hearts and recognize the sins we carry within ourselves before even considering the sins of others. Besides, it is not even our place to judge the sins of others; this is solely God's duty, to be carried out in the future. Instead of directing our energy at the sins of others, it would be much more beneficial to society as a whole if we were to direct our attention to our own flaws, for we ourselves are ultimately the only ones who can truly correct these flaws. As Augustine says, "the denouncing of evils is best viewed as a matter only for upright persons of goodwill."⁶² If we do not hold this standing, how are we to justify our judgmental thoughts, actions, or comments against others? As we commonly put it, "we have not room to talk" when it comes to the sins of others, for we are likely to be guilty of similar if not worse sins ourselves.

Rather than engaging in this hypocritical judgment, we should instead look to convey mercy and forgiveness for our brothers and sisters. We should use this observation of sin as a reminder that we are

⁶² Augustine, "Seeing the Speck in Another's Eye," in *Ancient Christian Commentary*, 1:148.

all human and susceptible to sin, just as much as our brothers and sisters are. We should also look within ourselves so as to attempt to better our own moral standing first and foremost. The passage found in Matthew 7:1–5 should be used as a reference for how God wants us to treat those around us. Never should we look to condemn others for the sins they have committed, especially considering that we are just as human as they are, carrying just as much, if not more, sinful baggage. Let us all try to look at our neighbors with a little more mercy and understanding, and also look at ourselves with a little more reflection and examination.

Is There a Moral Obligation to Follow the Law?

Allison McGinley

We are all born into community and society. Whether that is a structured political system that was determined long before we were born, an emerging political society that is still forming, or a less formal community such as a tribe, we all exist in these structured communities with other people. In order to maintain order and peace we must have rules, regulations, and laws that everyone must obey, or else the society will not be able to function productively. As societies grow, more laws are needed, and people become increasingly distanced from the actual making of the laws themselves. Eventually, as we see in the example of modern society, laws are made that citizens have no direct say in. There are laws we the people can vote on, and we elect representatives, but that certainly does not and could not ensure that we agree with every law that is passed. There are of course consequences for not following the law, so that in most cases, if we do not want to be punished, we must follow the law. Ideally, though, there would be more of a reason to follow the law—perhaps, say, a moral obligation—than what a consequentialist approach would dictate. Is there actually an objective wrong committed when we disobey the law? In this paper, I will explore the different historical approaches to this question and the situations in which we do have a reason to disobey the law, aiming to show that if the law is a just law, then we have an objective moral obligation to follow it.

The first question we must ask ourselves is why the law has power in the first place. If the law's power were unfounded or arbitrary, then it would have no real hold on us, and our discussion would be over. I have already stated practical reasons why we need to have the law, and those do carry weight, but there should be more justification for it than there is in the Hobbesian view, which states that we need laws merely because they keep peace. There is a higher purpose that the law serves: promoting the common good. The purpose of the law is not just to maintain peace, but to provide the opportunity and ability for

people to flourish. As the political theorist Mark C. Murphy puts it, “the law’s reason-giving power flows from the common good of the political community.”¹ If the laws are in place to promote our flourishing and the common good, or the flourishing of the whole, then we have a deeper reason to respect them because to some extent, respecting them is respecting ourselves. Also, the law should be aligned with the truth and what is actually right. For example, murder is an objectively wrong act. Outside the law, it is still a wrong thing to do. The law, then, is put in place to outlaw murder and punish it because it is *malum in se*, or evil in itself, and one purpose of the law is to recognize these moral wrongs and enforce them politically. The law should be based on a higher moral order that exists apart from it, and the law serves the function of making that higher morality explicitly known.

However, there do still seem to be laws that are not as clear-cut. There are things that the law prohibits that are not necessarily wrong in themselves but that have been outlawed for the good of the community as a whole. These are the laws that we want to focus on because it could be argued that since they are not necessarily wrong actions outside of the law, we have no moral obligation to follow them, but only have reason to do so to avoid punishment. So the question we need to focus on is this: If there is a particular law that we disagree with, and we don’t feel any moral obligation to follow it outside of the fact that it is a law, do we have a moral obligation to follow it simply because it is the law?

In order to begin to answer this question, we should explore the different reasons that have been given to follow any law, and see if they stand up to the challenge of answering this query. One of the first arguments that come to mind is that we have a responsibility to follow the law because we have consented or promised to. Now, besides reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, not many people actually verbally promise to the government in some official way that they will follow the laws of the land, and yet we can still argue that they have consented to do so. This consent is implicit in their living in the country and benefiting from the services that the state provides, even something as simple as protection. If someone lives and functions every day in society, then that person has consented to follow the laws of the government simply by their daily actions: using the roads, the school

¹ Mark Murphy, *Natural Law in Jurisprudence and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 61.

system, restaurants, etc. Through our use of these things we have promised to return the services that have been provided for us with compliance to the law, and “there is wide agreement that, at the very least, one can become bound to perform some action by one’s own promise to carry out that action.”² This type of unspoken consent is called tacit consent, and not everyone is convinced by it, mainly because we have no other option. It is virtually impossible to live outside of the benefits of the state, and so we have no option but to be a part of it. Having no other option means that free consent isn’t fully given, and therefore it is not fully convincing as an argument, or at least it is not satisfying. This argument is similar to the gratitude argument: “every citizen who has received benefits from the state owes the state an obligation of gratitude not to act contrary to the state’s interest, and this means, among other things, complying with the law.”³ Both of these arguments stem from a sense of obligation that rests on the fact that we have no other choice. They seem to be arguments that you would use with a child in order to get him or her to obey you, knowing that the child can’t fully understand. But as adults we deserve a better rationale than that.

Another argument that is given is the principle of fairness. In brief, this principle states that if everyone else obeys the law, and I benefit from society, then I must obey the law, too. Of course we are not speaking here of unjust laws or simply blindly following the pack, but rather of deliberately choosing to disobey a just law simply because you do not want to obey it and believe for whatever reason that you shouldn’t. The only way that laws can work effectively is if everyone assents to following them, for if no one followed a law at all then it would cease in some ways to be a law because it would not fulfil the function of law. We can see this in examples of ridiculous laws such as not being allowed to play dominoes on Sunday. They are laws that may at one point have had a reason to exist but now seem completely arbitrary, sound ridiculous to us, and are probably not enforced. But these also are not the laws that we are interested in. The example that William S. Boardman gives in his essay “Coordination and the Moral Obligation to Obey the Law” is that of waiting in line. Everyone else has consented to waiting in line, and there is good reason to do so to keep order and maintain fairness. It would be wrong not to wait and to jump ahead “on the grounds that I would be relatively disadvantaged

² Ibid., 93.

³ Mark Tunick, “The Moral Obligation to Obey Law,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 33, no. 3 (2002), 473, accessed December 1, 2013.

in following the customary rules and anyway did not agree to them.”⁴ Not to obey a law on the grounds that you simply don’t want to or are slightly disadvantaged when doing so would be to assert oneself as more important or an exception, which, no matter what one might think, is ultimately arbitrary reasoning. There is no logical reason why one person should be exempt from a law that others aren’t exempt from simply because that person doesn’t want to obey it.

This is related to the contagion argument, which says that if people begin selectively disobeying laws, disobedience would naturally spread. If one person can decide that he or she is above following the law, then what is to stop another person from deciding the same thing? Before we know it, everyone will have begun to disobey the law, resulting in chaos. An example of this can be seen in a particular overlook near my school. It is essentially just a rock formation at the top of a mountain that overlooks the stunning valley below. It is a very popular spot because one can drive to it relatively easily. The one thing that really makes this place stand out besides the breathtaking views is the graffiti that completely covers the main rock and most of the surrounding ones. Though it does present us with an interesting and uniquely stark contrast between urban society and the surrounding natural landscape, we must remember that graffiti is illegal. It is part of a county park, and whoever first decided to permanently mark his or her presence with spray paint was disobeying the law. But as more and more have written over it, and the rock has become slick with layers of spray paint, the law has lost all meaning, no one is punished for doing it, and it has become more so just part of the experience of going there. Though this seems to be a harmless example, the principle applies to larger examples and more serious laws.

Now, one could argue that the first person had no idea of the consequences of leaving his or her mark on the rock or that so many others would follow suit, and Tunick argues that just because other people might begin to disobey the law, too, that doesn’t show that there is a moral wrong involved or that one is accountable for others’ actions. Immanuel Kant would disagree with this objection, though. In his famous categorical imperative, he argues that one’s actions and set of moral codes must be based on the principle that you could and should want to universalize any action to become the moral norm. That is to say, we must live our lives in a way that takes others into

⁴ William S. Boardman, “Coordination and the Moral Obligation to Obey the Law,” *Ethics* 97, no. 3 (1987), 554; accessed December 1, 2013.

consideration and in a way that we would want to be imitated. Since we would not want everyone to break the law, we should not do it either.

All of the arguments that have been presented thus far are reasonable and fair arguments for obeying the law and they might satisfy some people, but we have yet to see a reason that provides an argument from morality and an appeal to an objective truth that the law is based on. If we stopped here, we could conclude that there is no moral obligation to obey the law, but we would be stopping prematurely.

Before we try to answer this question fully, we should first explore reasons and instances where it is permissible to disobey the law and actually morally correct to do so. What if a law is unjust, for example? This is an objection that naturally arises if we claim that there is a moral obligation to follow the law and that we must do so even if we disagree with the law. Are we still bound to respect an unjust law and obey it simply because it is the law even if our conscience is telling us otherwise? The obvious and immediate answer is no: we certainly do not have such an obligation because we must always obey our conscience. But this answer needs some fleshing out. Aquinas explores this issue in his question on whether human law imposes on conscience. One objection that he raises is that “human laws sometimes nullify God’s commandments.”⁵ In other words, sometimes laws can act contrary to what our natural or religious moral code requires. In this case, Aquinas says that our obligation to obey the law of God is higher than our obligation to obey the law of man, and that the authority of the laws of humans cannot overshadow the authority of God’s commandments. Therefore, if a law seems to contradict what our conscience is telling us, then it is considered unjust, and we are not obliged to obey such laws “if it be possible to resist them without giving scandal or causing greater harm.”⁶ The next question we must ask is how we determine what laws are just or unjust. We cannot have everyone disobeying just laws by appealing to a subjectively arbitrary morality. Aquinas defines just laws as those that are ordained for the common good, are given under rightful authority, are proportionate, and impose reasonable burdens. Unjust laws can be identified as those that fail to satisfy one of these categories, or those that are contrary to divine good. The objection that is raised to saying

⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *On Law, Morality, and Politics*, trans. Richard J. Regan, ed. William P. Baumgarth (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), ST I-II.96.4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, ST I-II.96.4.3.

that we have a moral obligation to obey the law is that we have natural rights and sovereignty over ourselves, and if a law is one that we through our reason have determined to be unjust, or if we simply don't agree with it, then we don't have to follow it. As we have seen through Aquinas, this is partly true, but we cannot use only our own arbitrary reasoning to justify disobedience. One must be able to appeal to one of the widely acknowledged categories of unjust laws in order to justify disobeying it. As Boardman points out, there is no "mechanical way for an observer to distinguish between a person's rare and principled refusal to obey and his seizing upon a readily available excuse to refrain from doing what he simply prefers not to do."⁷ Thus, we must default to the position of always obeying the law unless legitimate circumstances arise where we shouldn't obey it, as opposed to needing to justify obeying it in the first place.

Interestingly enough, we have broached the territory of morality and law through the question of whether we can justify breaking the law on moral grounds. In order to object to the position that we are always morally obliged to obey the law, we have had to appeal to a set of moral standards that stand outside of the law itself and that the law is responsible to answer to. Therefore we must hold that such an objective standard exists and that the law should have some relation to it. George C. Christie, another political philosopher, explains the relationship between these two laws by saying that "insofar as morality and law interact, it is always morality that informs the law and not law that informs morality."⁸ There is something that stands outside of the law that the law should be based on, but we can also see how the law actually influences our perception of morality. For example, the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments influenced the public's perception on the morality of slavery, as the civil right laws influenced the perception on segregation. We would not say that before the laws were made black Americans were either less human, as the 3/5 law stated, or unequal to white Americans, as segregation implied. We would instead say that the law recognized a moral truth about the human dignity of all people and had now begun to reflect that truth.

A second large objection to the statement that we have a moral obligation to follow the law is that morality has nothing to do with that obligation but that we do have other reasons, which have been

⁷ Boardman, "Coordination," 556.

⁸ George C. Christie, "On The Moral Obligation to Follow the Law," *Duke Law Journal* 6 (1990), 1318.

stated earlier, to follow the law. However, since we have recognized this relationship between the law and morality, we can no longer argue that the two have no involvement with each other. If we have a moral obligation to do a certain thing, and the law recognizes and enforces that same thing, then we can confidently say that we have a moral obligation to obey the law. In the words of Thomas Aquinas, when laws are just, “they indeed have obligatory force in the court of conscience.”⁹

An immediate objection that could be raised to this statement is that a “violation of the law becomes a matter for moral concern only when it involves an act which is believed to be wrong on grounds apart from its illegality.”¹⁰ In other words, the only laws that are unjust to break are those that reflect objective moral laws that are also unjust to break. Otherwise, breaking a law does not necessarily enter into moral territory, but it could still obviously be punishable and reasoned to obeying. An example of this might be driving on the right side of the road. This is something that is arbitrarily decided by the community and that varies from country to country. It is not objectively moral to drive on either the right or left side of the road; “it is only important that some choice be made and then strictly followed.”¹¹ Why must a law that does not have a direct basis in the moral code be followed so strictly? It is for the good of the community and the safety of all. It becomes a moral concern because driving on the wrong side of the road would result in injury and possible death of oneself and others. Driving on the wrong side of the road is absolutely morally wrong simply because it is disobeying a law that is in place for the good of all.

This example can help us answer our central question: Do we have a moral obligation to obey laws with which we disagree? As we see from the driving example, even if I disagree with driving on the right side of the road for some reason, I must follow the law anyway. I have a moral obligation to do so because it affects the lives of others around me, which I have a moral obligation to consider. Tunick objects that “the must of obeying law expresses an institutional obligation, and institutional obligations do not necessarily have moral force.”¹² I would respond that institutional obligations absolutely do have moral force. The law has authority and we have the moral responsibility to

⁹ ST. I-II.96.4.

¹⁰ Tunick, “Moral Obligation,” 465.

¹¹ Christie, “On the Moral Obligation,” 1321.

¹² Tunick, “Moral Obligation,” 468.

obey it, most especially if it is aligned with a moral good, even if we don't agree with it. Take the graffiti example. Because so many people have broken the law by creating graffiti in this place, there is little to no chance that one would get in trouble for doing it oneself. One might not think it is much of a problem at all to sign one's name on the rock alongside everyone else's, but doing so is still defacing public property and one shouldn't do it. Even if one thinks that it is reasonable to do it, reasonableness "refers not simply to what the lawbreaker believes is reasonable, but to what is reasonable."¹³ Even though we are all reasonable creatures and use that reason to decide what is right or wrong, in a political society, we are not left totally to rely on our own subjective reasoning.

Murphy calls the ability to make reliable decisions for the whole of society epistemic reliability, and he argues that we do not have it as individuals. Instead he says that "the epistemic credentials of the law in pursuit of the common good are characteristically superior to each individual's own epistemic credentials."¹⁴ This is to say that only the law as a whole has the authority to decide what is legal or illegal, just or unjust. It is obviously based on objective understandings of these things and what we should reason to individually anyway, but we do not have the authority to make the individual decision of which laws to follow based on our sense of right or wrong, except for the case of objectively unjust laws, as previously discussed. Even if we believe a law to be trivial such as the one concerning graffiti, "one cannot conclude that a moral obligation does not exist on the grounds that the obligation is trivial and the consequences of the breach of that obligation have no practical significance."¹⁵ Just because the obligation varies in strength, it does not follow that there is no general obligation at all to follow the law or behave morally. We all have a legal duty to uphold the law, and legal duties naturally impose moral obligations.

In a perfect society, the law would be completely aligned with and backed by moral obligation, and we would be able to say without a doubt that we had a moral obligation to obey the law. However, as we have noted there are unjust laws and laws that people don't agree with, whether they are backed by moral obligation or not. For some, the argument that the law has authority and that we must respect it will not be convincing, and likewise the claim that the law is based on a higher moral authority so even if we don't personally agree with it, we

¹³ Ibid., 480.

¹⁴ Murphy, *Natural Law*, 121.

¹⁵ Christie, "On the Moral Obligation," 1331.

must follow it because we participate in society. These arguments definitely have their weaknesses, and this paper has not fully explored the issue by any means. So if the arguments presented so far are unconvincing, we can at least say that in situations in which we are unsure whether it is immoral to break the law “the fact that we are under a legal obligation to choose one particular line of action may, from the moral perspective, without regard to the sanction imposed by the law, tip the balance in favor of that particular line of action.”¹⁶ It is true that we have a civic duty to follow the law, that we can reason to having an obligation of some kind to follow it, but we can also assert that we have a moral duty. We can say this because the law should be promoting virtue and objective moral truth, and so acting against the law could be acting against those things, even if we don’t recognize it. Also, acting against the law is placing ourselves above the authority of the law and others, which we have already seen is arbitrary, and unless the law has lost authority and become unjust, we are morally obliged to follow it.

¹⁶ Ibid., 1334.

“We Don’t Need No Education” Is a Double Negative: The Case for the Legalization of Natural-Religious Education

John-Paul Heil

The current practice of religious education in the United States public school system is one of non-espousing tolerance. Students are allowed to participate in private prayer, and religion can be taught objectively, either as a source of artistic influence or as works of fiction—the Bible, for example, can be taught as a work of literature just like any other book, but it is not taught as truth.¹ This has had a constitutional basis² since as early as the First Amendment to the Constitution, specifically in two parts of the Amendment called the “Establishment Clause” and the “Free Exercise Clause.” The Establishment Clause states that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion,” meaning that Congress cannot espouse the beliefs of a particular religion.³ The Free Exercise Clause counters this idea, asserting that, just as Congress cannot make a law respecting a particular religion, it likewise cannot make a law “prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” meaning that the government cannot stop anyone from freely exercising his or her religious beliefs.⁴

Until 1947, these clauses applied on a Federal level and mostly dealt only with the creation of federal laws; the Bill of Rights did not specifically apply to nor did it overrule state laws. The Supreme Court, in the case *Everson v. Board of Education*, applied the Due Process Clause

¹ ACLU, “Joint Statement of Current Law on Religion in the Public Schools,” last modified April 12, 1995, <https://www.aclu.org/religion-belief/joint-statement-current-law-religion-public-schools>.

² One item of note is that at the time of the ratification of the First Amendment, most of the states in the nascent union had official state religions. However, because this paper deals with natural religious education on a federal level, this interesting avenue of research shall not be delved into deeply.

³ Terry Jordan, *The U.S. Constitution and Fascinating Facts About It* (Naperville: Oak Hill, 2012).

⁴ *Ibid.*

of the Fourteenth Amendment to relate the Constitution and federal law to state legislatures, remarking in the ruling that the “statute and resolution did not violate the provision of the First Amendment (made applicable to the states by the Fourteenth Amendment) prohibiting any ‘law respecting an establishment of religion.’”⁵ This Due Process Clause affirms that states shall not “deprive any person of life, liberty, or property,” thus ensuring that the right to life, liberty, and property will be upheld even outside of state laws. This precedent was applied to public religious education beginning with the Supreme Court case *McCullum v. Board of Education*, which ruled that it was unconstitutional for schools to set aside time for prayer as an official part of the school day, stating that the “utilization of the State’s tax . . . for compulsory public school attendance to enable sectarian groups to give religious instruction to public school pupils in public school buildings violates the First Amendment of the Constitution, made applicable to the states by the Fourteenth Amendment.”⁶ Since this time, several Supreme Court cases, including “*Engel v. Vitale*,” “*Murry v. Curlett*,” and “*Stone v. Graham*” have qualified and clarified this ruling, to the chagrin of many Christian organizations, including the group “Free2Pray.”⁷ The current practice of religion in United States public schools is that prayer can be carried out privately and individually on a student-by-student basis, but religion itself (that is to say not only specific institutional religions, but also belief in a monotheistic God) cannot be taught as anything but literature or as a factor in sociological and historical development. Any particular religious beliefs espoused by students or teachers cannot interfere with the curriculum or teaching. This means that even natural religion, understood as “those duties to God which man can discover by his own reason,” cannot be taught in public schools in the United States.⁸

1. An Explanation for the Current Situation Regarding Religious Education in U.S. Public Schools

There are a multitude of arguments against the teaching of religion in public schools, perhaps due to the fact that arguments for the legalization of the teaching of religion in public schools are not

⁵ Supreme Court, “*Everson v. Board of Education of the Township of Ewing*,” http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC_CR_0330_0001_ZS.html.

⁶ Supreme Court, “*McCullum v. Board of Education*,” http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC_CR_0333_0203_ZS.html.

⁷ Free2Pray, “An Outline History of Religion in American Schools,” accessed October 12, 2013, <http://www.free2pray.info/Schools.html>.

⁸ Fr. Austin Fagothey, *Right and Reason* (Rockford: Tan Books, 1959), 264.

particularly popular in the United States (and, in fact, most of the modern world). To provide a fair and complete argument for why natural religion should be taught as a truth claim in public schools, these arguments against religious education must be examined and evaluated.

The first and most common argument for why American public schools should not teach religion stems from the First Amendment of the Constitution. The First Amendment clearly states that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or the free exercise thereof.”⁹ For Congress to legalize the national teaching of natural religion in public school would ostensibly be a violation of the the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause, which has to do with the government’s establishment of religion, apparently including religious teachings in public schools. In violating this part of the First Amendment, the nation would be going against the very foundation upon which it was founded. Furthermore, if one Constitutional right could be reversed, why could not others? Opening the floodgates to such a possibility is far too dangerous for the future health and security of the country. If one freedom can be changed or revoked, any number of others could follow. Thus, it seems to follow that the teaching of religion, even rationality-based religion free from any particular religious-institutional influence, cannot take place in public schools as a teaching of truth claims because this would violate a Constitutional principle.

Furthermore, even disregarding the fact that the Constitution is one of the most important documents to the past, present, and future of America, legalizing natural religious education could ostracize a group that already has minority status in America: atheists and agnostics. Forcing the belief in God, even the so-called God of the philosophers, down the proverbial throats of children in atheist and agnostic families could jeopardize the free choice that the children make to believe in God and religion or not. This would not only marginalize atheists and agnostics but also impose the wills of a majority onto a minority, something which the Constitution was written specifically to prevent. Moreover, if religion is taught as truth, this would imply that the beliefs of atheists and agnostics are untrue, thus pushing them farther and farther away from being able to participate fully in society. Essentially, legalizing the teaching of God

⁹ Jordan, *The U.S. Constitution*, 45.

and natural religion as truth in public schools would be akin to religious persecution.

This ties in closely with the relativist argument for why natural religion and God should not be taught as truth in public schools. Relativists argue that we do not have the right to “impose” our own religious beliefs or beliefs about truth and God on other people who do not believe that these things are true. If other people do not believe these things are true, who are we to judge them based on our own personal feelings about the way things are? According to the relativist argument, to teach natural religion in public schools would be to impose the moral opinions of a few on the wills of the many, including susceptible young children.

This last facet of the relativist argument is one that has been expanded upon by noted atheist Richard Dawkins. Speaking publicly, Dawkins stated that “There is a value in teaching children about religion. You cannot really appreciate a lot of literature without knowing about religion. But we must not indoctrinate our children,”¹⁰ adding that “what a child should never be taught is that you are a Catholic or Muslim child, therefore that is what you believe. That’s child abuse.”¹¹ Though the media largely took Dawkins’ quote out of context (the headline of the very article being cited declared in no uncertain terms that “Forcing a religion on your children is as bad as child abuse, claims atheist professor Richard Dawkins”¹²), the professor brings up an interesting argument against the teaching of religion, even natural religion, in public schools. Because the people being taught are young, and therefore naturally susceptible to any views that might be taught regardless of error, would teaching natural religion and the existence of God be harmful for children? It seems that taking advantage of people so young could be not only immoral, but also an act of intellectual abuse.

2. Moral Judgment and Assessment

The following moral analysis argues that God should be taught in public schools as a truth claim—not as the God of any particular denomination but rather as the rational God of the philosophers and

¹⁰ Rob Cooper, “Forcing a Religion on Your Children Is as Bad as Child Abuse, Claims Atheist Professor Richard Dawkins,” *The Daily Mail*, April 22, 2013, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2312813/Richard-Dawkins-Forcing-religion-children-child-abuse-claims-atheist-professor.html>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

natural religion. To argue well for natural religion, an account of natural religion itself must be given. Fr. Austin Fagothey, the famous ethicist, provides a very convincing account of natural religion in his book, *Right and Reason*. His definition of natural religion is as follows:

Natural religion comprises only those duties to God which man can discover by his own reason, whereas supernatural religion is dependent on some revelation by God. Such as supernatural revelation could not contradict natural religion but could only add to it and clarify it, for the same God who makes this revelation is also the Author of nature and of man's natural reasoning powers. Though supernatural religion is outside the scope of philosophy and therefore of ethics, natural religion belongs strictly to philosophy, for any philosophy which admits the existence of God must discuss the duties which man by the use of his reason knows that he has to God.¹³

This all, of course, presupposes the existence of God, a proof of which two of history's most famous philosophers, Aristotle and Aquinas, famously undertook. While this paper will not delve particularly deeply into the argumentation of either philosopher (mostly because this is not the point of this paper), their views will be explored briefly.

Aquinas famously details five methods to prove God's existence. The first way is one very similar to Aristotle's account: the unmoved mover argument, which states that, because things in nature are put into motion and there can be no infinite regress, there must have been a first mover that set all things in motion without itself moving—we call this God. The second, the argument for a first cause, states that because no being can cause itself, there must be a being who is uncaused and who brought everything into creation—we call this God. The third argument, the necessary being argument, argues that because everything is contingent on something else and an infinite regress of dependency cannot occur, there must be a being whose being is necessary and not contingent on anything else—we call this God. The fourth argument, the gradation argument, takes into account the fact that there are things we call good and bad—some things are better than others, and thus there must be something that is the most good, Good itself—we call this God. Finally, the teleological argument reasons that because human beings have an end and because things cannot have an end unless an intelligent being gives

¹³ *Right and Reason*, 264.

them an end, there must be an intelligent creator who ordered us and all things towards our end—we call this God.¹⁴ These arguments prove that belief in God, not the God of Christianity or any other religion, is rational and can be proven philosophically.

Fagothey's account of natural religion includes a section regarding supernatural revelation. However, if the teaching of religion in public schools is going to be completely unhampered by any specific religious source, no supernatural revelation can be taught. A strong argument for the rejection of supernatural revelation in teaching comes from the famous orator Thomas Paine and his work *The Age of Reason*. Attempting to set off an American religious revolution, Paine writes that it is "a contradiction . . . to call anything a revelation that comes to us at secondhand Revelation is necessarily limited to first communication. After this, it is only an account of something which that person says was a revelation made to him."¹⁵ Paine rejects the Annunciation and Jesus' divinity because he cannot prove them rationally—they cannot be believed only through reason. Thus, they must be discarded. The natural religious education described here must do the same if it is to be entirely objective and rationally correct. To do otherwise would limit the discussion of the truth of natural religion to a single institution.

In order to make a proper judgment concerning the teaching of religion in public schools, we must first make a moral analysis of it. To do this, we must look at the intent, circumstances, and object of teaching religion in public schools; if any of these are evil, religion cannot morally be taught in schools. First, we should examine the intent of teaching religion in public schools. The purpose of teaching anything is the discovery and communication of the rational truths of reality to others who do not know these truths. As we have established previously, the existence of God is rational and is susceptible of proof by philosophers. Because the definition of natural religion is the rational discovery of our duties toward God (who rationally exists), teaching natural religion would be the discovery and communication of rational truths of reality to others who do not know these truths, which is to say, entirely similar to teaching anything else. Therefore, the intent of teaching natural religion is the same as that of the teaching of anything else, and if the intent of teaching in general is

¹⁴ For all five arguments, see St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (1920), I, 2, 3; <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1002.htm>.

¹⁵ Thomas Paine, "The Age of Reason," in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, ed. Julia Reidhead (New York: Norton, 2012), 655.

morally correct, the intent of teaching natural religion is also morally correct. Therefore, the intent of teaching natural religion is morally correct.

Next, the object or act itself of natural religion must be taken into account. The act itself of natural religion is to teach others about the rational truths about God. If God is rational and exists, as we have established, and natural religion is entirely about objective rationality, the act of rationality itself is morally correct—it seems that this cannot be doubted.

The most complicated part of this moral situation has to do with the circumstances surrounding it. First, can natural religion be taught constitutionally? Because the Fourteenth Amendment's ruling was based on the First Amendment, we shall not consider the Fourteenth Amendment here, but instead rely solely on the First Amendment. The amendment clearly states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or the free exercise thereof." How can the teaching of natural religion be reconciled with this key document? The answer is found in the use of the word "establishment" in the First Amendment. Natural religion, by definition, does not find its roots in any particular religious institution. But, one might argue, this is splitting grammatical hairs. Does the teaching of natural religion really fit into the meaning the Founding Fathers intended when they composed this document? However, as Jefferson clearly states in a letter to his nephew Peter Carr, the point of deism, which most of the Founding Fathers believed in (and which is very similar to, and actually more religious than, the natural religion being discussed here), is to make only rational claims about what one believes.¹⁶ The entire foundation of religion must be built on rationality, which is something the Founding Fathers would certainly have agreed with; this belief is at the core of natural religion.¹⁷ Thus, teaching natural religion in public schools would be following entirely in the footsteps of the Founding Fathers and would not be unconstitutional.

However, there are further considerations to weigh. What about the atheists and agnostics we considered before? Would they not still be ostracized? They would not be at all, if natural religion was correctly implemented nationally—if natural religion, as we have shown, really

¹⁶ Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to His Nephew Peter Carr, from Paris, August 10, 1787," *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Library of America, 1994), 900–906.

¹⁷ For further reading, consult *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* or Franklin's letter to Ezra Stiles.

does have reason at its core, atheists should be encouraging natural religion, at least according to the reasoning of Richard Dawkins. As Dawkins states, teaching religion as absolute yet totally unexplainable and undiscussible truth is unacceptable in a public schooling system. If religion is to be taught as a rational matter, however, discussion of the reasonable facets of religion in the school system would be key. Thus, atheist children could argue for and reflect upon the reasons why they are atheists: if their arguments hold up, then the bounds of natural religion would need to be re-evaluated, for the betterment of the entire educational system. If they find that their arguments cannot withstand scrutiny, then they should cease being atheists. Thinking and pondering about the reasons why we think what we think is one of the major points of teaching and philosophical rational thought in the first place; natural religion would incorporate this seamlessly into its curriculum. Thus, according to the very arguments of atheism, atheists and agnostics would not be marginalized.

None of this matters if we do not have the right to teach religion to others, or, to put it another way, impose our beliefs on other people. Therefore, the argumentation of the relativists must be defeated if natural religion is to be morally justified. To restate the argument of the relativists, religion, even rationally-based religion, should not be taught nationally because this would be to foist the beliefs of a few select individuals onto an entire country, which is not right, because we should not judge others for what they believe; everyone has the right to believe what he or she believes is right, and there is no morally objective truth. However, there are several glaring errors in this argumentation—for purposes of length, only a few will be refuted here. First, and most glaringly, this argument fails to recognize that it is contradicting itself. In stating that there is no universal moral truth and that the beliefs of a few should not be inflicted upon others, it itself is making a universal moral claim which, it demands, all others should believe. Thus, the argument itself is the one of the very arguments it is trying to refute.

The more appropriate part of the argument to rebut is the part of the claim which states that the beliefs of a few select individuals should not be foisted onto an entire country. This is more apt because currently it is this part of the argument which is particularly powerful with the public. The most common argument against the teaching of religion in schools, whether that religion be based entirely on rationality or not, is that religion should not be imposed on others. However, this argument is also self-contradictory, because it is forcing

a belief that only a few actually hold on the entire country. If natural religion is supported entirely on the truths of philosophy, it would be irrational to not teach it to others merely because a minority argues (with self-contradictory statements) that it would be incorrect to educate others about the truth. Not only is this wildly incorrect, it is detrimental to the educational growth of the entire country.

To obtain a full view of the circumstances of teaching natural religion, an alternative to the current circumstances must be provided. Thankfully, one already has been. Sir Thomas More's account of the objectively great people of the eponymous *Utopia* contains a large section on religion and the Utopians' religious beliefs, which provides a fairly good account of the transformed educational circumstances in the United States envisioned here. More details how most of the Utopians

adore one eternal, invisible, infinite, and incomprehensible Deity; as a being that is far above all our apprehensions, that is spread over the whole universe, not by His bulk, but by His power and virtue; Him they call the Father of All . . . the end of all things come only from Him; nor do they offer divine honors to any but to Him alone. And indeed, though they differ concerning other things, yet all agree in this, that they think there is one Supreme Being that made and governs the world . . . They differ in this, that one thinks the god whom he worships is this Supreme Being, and another thinks that his idol is that God; but they all agree in one principle, that whoever is this Supreme Being, He is also that great Essence to whose glory and majesty all honors are ascribed by the consent of all nations.¹⁸

In other words, though the particular beliefs of students regarding specific religions will be respected (thus further pleasing the relativists), an entirely philosophical concept of a being called, for convenience' sake, "God" will be taught as existing and as being the greatest in the Universe, as well as the Creator of all. More later details how, because of these differences in specifics, the king Utopus instituted a law ruling that people have the right to their own religious beliefs. This ties back into the respect given to all of the particular religious beliefs of students.

¹⁸ Thomas More, *Utopia*, <http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/more/utopia-religion.html>.

More's argument has one fault that the present account of natural religion remedies: later on, More details how the only religious belief that is outlawed is atheism. Again, atheists in the system detailed here are free to express and contemplate their beliefs rationally and without fear of maltreatment. Thus, if the circumstances are like those detailed here (completely rational account of God and religion, atheists and agnostics not rejected, relativism reversed), then the circumstances are morally correct. Therefore, the intention, act, and circumstances of teaching natural religion and the philosophical account of the Creator—God as truth are completely moral and should be taught in public schools.

4. Conclusion

There are still some loose ends to be tied up with regard to the institution of this new natural religious education. One possible counter-argument that could be made to this proposal is that practically speaking, the government should not have the ability to institute such a program. Though it may be a morally correct thing to do in this situation, making a large change like this to federal law could set a precedent, enabling the government and politicians to change the most fundamental rules and rights of our country on a whim, so long as they have the proper excuse. A counter to this counter would be that the teaching of natural religion could be legalized on a state-by-state basis, therefore eliminating the fear of an over-controlling federal government. However, the practicality of a state-by-state institution could also be brought into question—a state-by-state program of legalization would not even be possible if the Supreme Court ruled one of the states' laws unconstitutional. Ultimately, this brings up a problem that must be solved at the federal level: the importance of the distinction between state power and federal power. Because this is a hot-button political issue, this issue will be avoided here.

In the end, the major injustice that the current system is performing is the prevention of human flourishing by preventing American citizens from accessing fully the human good of religion. By denying even the most rational of religions with the most basic of premises (God exists; we have duties towards God) from being taught in public schools, we are denying ourselves on a national level a tool that can be invaluable not only for our personal human achievement but also for rational philosophical discussion. Natural religion must be taught in public schools if we are to give our children a full and formative education.

Mystical Love in Christianity and Hinduism: Witness of God's Manifestation Across World Religions

Elizabeth Wakuluk

Comparisons of world religions often result in discrepancies rather than similarities being brought to the forefront. This is apparent from the hostile clashes of belief found in the world today. Pope John Paul II addressed this issue in his “Dialogue Between Cultures for a Civilization of Love and Peace,” issued in January 2001. In calling for this dialogue, he was asking all men and women to recognize their “human brotherhood,” which is rooted in God, “the common Father of all,” in order to cultivate peace.¹ By seeking a true understanding and knowledge of world religions, great understanding of God’s omnipotent nature can be fostered, in place of kindling bitterness between people of differing faiths. This holds true, as there are many beautiful and profound comparisons which can be drawn among religions.

One such comparison is found between certain mystical spiritualities in Catholicism and Hinduism. This is represented by St. Bernard of Clairvaux, a twelfth-century Christian mystic, and various Hindus who practice bhakti yoga. The way in which each strives for union with God, as especially seen through their writings, bears significant resemblance. Each places a special and distinct emphasis upon the mystical love shared between the soul and God as the means of becoming united to God. From the Catholic perspective, this likeness can aid in developing an understanding of how God manifests Himself within all world religions, as the Holy Spirit moves the hearts of all people.

Both Bernard and bhakti writers strive for union with God in a way that is considered mystical. The spiritualities of each have as their end “a state of consciousness in which a human subject overcomes

¹ Pope John Paul II, “Dialogue between Cultures for a Civilization of Love and Peace,” Message for the World Day of Peace 2001; http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_20001208_xxxiv-world-day-for-peace.html.

the limits of ordinary experience through an experienced union with a transcendent reality.”² This unitive experience is not sought after directly but simply can come about as a final result. In Christianity, this is found in the soul’s mystical union with God through Christ, pointing towards the ultimate experience of union with God after death. In Hinduism, this is found when one “come[s] to Brahman . . . and remain[s] in touch with Brahman,” who is Ultimate Reality, especially as experienced through liberation.³ The works of both Bernard and the bhakti writers reflect these unitive experiences and focus upon love as the primary means of attaining this union.

Bernard firmly holds that “God has loved us first, and secretly, within the very fabric of our humanity and within the winding road of our lives, he woos us to love him.”⁴ This idea is rooted in the understanding that mankind is created in the likeness of God, which Bernard expounds upon in his *Sermons on the Song of Songs*.⁵ The human soul reflects the love of God; therefore, God’s own love for us is the reason, according to Bernard, why it is love which draws His creation to Him. As he writes, “In love alone, of all the movements of the soul and the senses and affections, can the creature respond to its Creator, if not with an equal, at least with a like return of gift for gift.”⁶ All beings are called to loving union with God, for “God is love.”⁷

Similarly, the Bhakta regards love as an innate compass pointing in God’s direction. Huston Smith writes, “The aim of bhakti yoga is to direct toward God the love that lies at the base of every heart.”⁸ Though God is not directly held to be the cause of this love, this love is an attribute of His which, through exemplification, can bring the Bhakta closer to Him. This is clearly seen in the *Bhagavata Purana*, where it is written that God speaks as follows: “As the waters of the Ganges flow incessantly toward the ocean, so do the minds of the Bhakta move constantly toward Me, the Supreme Person residing in every heart, immediately they hear about My qualities.”⁹ The Bhakta strives to live in this way, and can fully experience this loving union through liberation.

² William Collinge, *Historical Dictionary of Catholicism* (Lanham: Scarecrow, 2012), 303–04.

³ Huston Smith, *The World’s Religions* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

⁴ William Harmless, *Mystics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 42.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁶ Bernard, *Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans. Gillian R. Evans (New York: Paulist, 1987), 272.

⁷ 1 Jn 4:16.

⁸ Smith, *The World’s Religions*, 32.

⁹ *Ibid.*

According to Bernard, the love one must have for God, in order to attain true union with Him, is a kind of “pure self-emptying mystical love.”¹⁰ Loving God in this way, one steps beyond simply loving God for who He is, and entirely forgets himself. Bernard writes, “To lose yourself as though you did not exist and to have no sense of yourself, to be emptied out of yourself and almost annihilated, belongs to heavenly not to human love.”¹¹ This kind of love is the truest and the most fitting love to have for God. It is in this way as well, by emptying oneself, that one makes room for God, and therefore can be more fully united to Him. So profound is this love that Bernard writes, “I should call him blessed and holy to whom it is given to experience even for a single instant something which is rare indeed in this life.”¹² Bernard does not see this mystical union as unattainable, but as the result of a pure love for God which mere humans can hope to work toward through God’s grace.

In bhakti tradition, selfless love is also considered the ideal love to have for God in order to be in union with Him. The Bhakta seeks to “love God for no ulterior reason (not even from the desire for liberation, or to be loved in return) but for love’s sake alone.”¹³ This love is understood to be devoid of any egocentric motivation. Ramanuja, a twelfth-century Hindu theologian who practiced bhakti yoga, described the person who loves in this way, writing of him that “[h]e offers his all and his very self at the lotus-like feet of the Supreme Person . . . and dedicates himself once and for all to him.”¹⁴ Through this emptying of self out of love, the Bhakta unites himself to God and comes closer to attaining eventual liberation.

For Bernard, this kind of self-emptying love, which is perfectly shown to us by God, constitutes a true and real “mystical marriage” between God and the soul.¹⁵ The love shared between God and the soul is so intimate and so profound that it is actually spousal. By virtue of being creations of God, all people are united to God in this way, even if unaware of it. It is awareness, however, which sheds great light on this and makes it mystical by nature. The marriage of God to all souls is greater than earthly marriage between a man and a woman, which only reflects this divine unity. According to Bernard, God,

¹⁰ Harmless, *Mystics*, 42.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Smith, *The World’s Religions*, 34.

¹⁴ Klaus Klostermaier, *Hindu Writings: A Short Introduction to the Major Sources* (Boston: Oneworld, 2000), 39.

¹⁵ Harmless, *Mystics*, 48.

through Christ, is the “bridegroom of the soul.”¹⁶ Bernard primarily uses the Song of Songs of the Old Testament to show this. For him, its “central theme—the passions and love play of the wedding night—provides the best analogy for describing the human encounter with the divine.”¹⁷ It is this kind of love which expresses “the mystery of eternal union with God” and “the longing of the holy soul” for union with God through love.¹⁸ The soul is called to rise above this earthly world to truly experience this marital union.

The Bhakta does not specifically view the selfless love shared between God and the soul as constituting the reality of mystical marriage, but bhakti tradition is not unfamiliar with the idea of comparing this love to human spousal love. Analogies like this are found within bhakti tradition, for the Bhakta believes “that love assumes different nuances according to the relationship involved.”¹⁹ For example, Tukaram, a seventeenth-century bhakti poet, compared one’s relationship with God to marriage. He wrote of one longing for God and for the time He would come “[t]o summon back the bride.”²⁰ He also believed that one must totally give oneself over to God, as a husband and a wife give themselves to one another. He writes that one must “throw himself on God as a Sati on her husband,” for “when a Sati sees the cremation fire of her husband . . . [s]he only remembers her husband, and throws herself in the funeral pyre.”²¹ Additionally, Tulsidas, a sixteenth-century bhakti poet, was influenced by his wife, to whom he had become overly attached, to view his union with God as a spousal union in order to strengthen his devotion to God.²² The Bhakta, like Bernard, views the love between God and the soul as deep and intimate; however, bhakti tradition does not see the soul as married to God in the same way as Bernard, who views this as a theological foundation of the Christian faith. Nevertheless, mystical spousal love as an image of union with God is affirmed by the Bhakta.

When Bernard writes of mystical marriage, he maintains the distinction between creature and Creator. The beloved does not become one with the Divine Lover in a way which compromises his own identity or God’s identity. Rather, the soul gives itself over to

¹⁶ Ibid., 49.

¹⁷ Ibid., 48.

¹⁸ Bernard of Clairvaux, 213.

¹⁹ Smith, *The World’s Religions*, 35.

²⁰ N. Macnicol, *Psalms of the Marath Saints* (Calcutta: Association, 1920), 58.

²¹ Ramchandra Dattatraya Ranade, *Tukaram* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 152.

²² Smith, *The World’s Religions*, 32.

God in such a way as not to allow for “the swallowing up of the finite human into the divine infinity.”²³ Bernard writes, “since God and man do not share the same nature or substance, they cannot be a unity, yet they are with complete truth and accuracy said to be one spirit, if they cohere with the bond of love. But that unity is caused not so much by the identity of essences as by the concurrence of wills.”²⁴ God and the soul are fundamentally different. For this reason, Bernard writes that “there is no betrothal or union of equals here,” as there is between the Father and the Son.²⁵ Yet, the soul’s reliance on God does constitute a profound relationship. It is with the response of love, which is so perfectly bestowed by God Himself upon the beloved soul, that one reaches union with God. Here, the soul, in relation to God, is “united but distinct.”²⁶

This understanding is almost exactly present within bhakti tradition. The soul and God are seen to be in a loving relationship, yet “the Bhakta will reject all suggestions that the God one loves is oneself, even one’s deepest Self, and insist on God’s otherness.”²⁷ Just as Bernard held, the Bhakta believes that one’s union with God allows one “to become like that which one loves,” rather than allowing for one to become equally God.²⁸ Here, a profound understanding of the nature of God is respected and upheld, along with recognizing the necessary reliance of God’s creation on Him. One of Tukaram’s poems poignantly reflects this: “Can water quaff itself? / Can trees taste of the fruit they bear? / He who worships God must stand distinct from Him. . . . Where were the beauty if jewel and setting were one?”²⁹ The Bhakta knows that it is with proper knowledge of God’s omnipotent nature that one best loves God and can more surely achieve union with Him.

From the Catholic perspective, these apparent similarities between the mystical spiritualities of Bernard of the Christian tradition and Hindus who practice bhakti yoga can be accounted for by the all-permeating power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit moves the hearts of all, not just those of one particular religion. This was made clear by Pope John Paul II in an address in Manila in 1981: “In the Holy Spirit every individual and all people have become, through the Cross and

²³ Harmless, *Mystics*, 49.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Smith, *The World’s Religions*, 33.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Resurrection of Christ, children of God, partakers in the divine nature and heirs to eternal life. All are redeemed and called to share in glory in Jesus Christ, without any distinction.”³⁰ God’s love and care extends over all mankind, who are united in a profound way through Christ, and He calls all to union with Him.

As the encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem* maintains, the Holy Spirit has always been working universally, even before the Incarnation, as the Holy Spirit has been active “not only these two thousand years of Christianity but going even further back, to before Christ.”³¹ Therefore, those who seek God in any religion are being moved by the Holy Spirit. Pope John Paul II took great note of this, in reflection upon the World Day of Prayer in Assisi in 1986, stressing “that every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every person.”³² This is unchanging, for the true nature of God is of one who “gives life and breath and all things and wants all men to be saved.”³³

The evident similarities between the way St. Bernard of Clairvaux experiences union with God and the unitive experiences of the Bhakta brilliantly illuminate the omnipotent nature of God. The “Father of all” seeks to make Himself known and unite Himself to people of all religions through the Son and the Holy Spirit, for all men and women are His children.³⁴ This is clear in the life of Bernard and in the lives of those following bhakti tradition. All of these come to believe that God seeks mystical union with their souls through an exchange of selfless love in a manner which is spousal yet which maintains a necessary separateness. This strikingly similar manner of the expression of God’s love across Christianity and Hinduism is living witness of God’s manifestation across all world religions. Though world religions are today a source of conflict throughout the world, they can and should be a joyous acknowledgment of God’s supreme goodness and love.

³⁰ Pope John Paul II, “Address of His Holiness John Paul II During His Visit to the Auditorium of Radio Veritas Asia,” http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1981/february/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19810221_manila-auditorium.html.

³¹ Giovanni Cereti, “Presence and Action of the Holy Spirit in the World and in Other Religions,” Commission for Interreligious Dialogue, http://www.vatican.va/jubilee_2000/magazine/documents/ju_mag_01091997_p-56_en.html.

³² Pope John Paul II, “Dialogue between Cultures.”

³³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 843.

³⁴ Pope John Paul II, “Dialogue between Cultures.”