
 HUME AND THE MORAL ARGUMENT

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David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* purports to be a "compleat system of the sciences, built on a foundation almost entirely new, and the only one upon which they can stand with scrutiny."¹ Hume's ambitious attempt, despite its many flaws, has exerted a powerful influence in the history of philosophy. So striking is Hume's project that Thomas Reid observed that, prior to the *Treatise*, it was assumed that sensation cannot exist without a mind or sentient being: "For till that time, no man, as far as I know, ever thought either of calling in question that principle, or of giving a reason for his belief of it."²

Undaunted by historical precedent, Hume set forth his case so forcefully that he would awaken Immanuel Kant from his "dogmatic slumber." In more recent days, philosophers such as J. L. Mackie,³ Antony Flew⁴ and Michael

¹*A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon, 1740; reprint, 1888), p. xx. Hereafter references will be given in the text with THN and page number(s).

²Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind: On the Principles of Common Sense*, 4th ed., ed. Derek R. Brookes (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 1997), 2.6.28-30, p. 32. Regarding Hume's denial of the self, for instance, Reid sarcastically remarks that "it is certainly a most amazing discovery, that thought and ideas may be without any thinking being." Presumably then, the *Treatise* had no author after all! It is only a set of ideas which came together, and "arranged themselves by certain associations and attractions" (2.6.13-14, p. 35).

³See J. L. Mackie, *Hume's Moral Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980) and *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982). In the latter work, Mackie explicitly endorses a post-Humean skepticism regarding any moral argument in favor of a "subjectivistic or sentimentalist account of morality": "We can find satisfactory biological, sociological, and psychological explanations of moral thinking which account for the phenomena of the moral sense and conscience in natural terms" (p. 118).

⁴Antony Flew, *Hume's Philosophy of Belief* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961).

Martin⁵ bear the imprint of Hume's thought. Philosophy of science,⁶ philosophy of religion, epistemology, philosophy of mind and my topic, morality, cannot ignore Hume's impact.

A theistic response to Hume's work on morality demands much more than the brief chapter I am writing. In this case, brevity demands modesty, but we can explore some key ideas in Hume's moral thought—along with some of his epistemological and metaphysical assumptions—and note where they fall short. Moreover, we can adduce good reasons for thinking that objective moral values do exist, that humans have intrinsic dignity and worth, and that these serve as pointers to the existence of a good God, in whose likeness human beings have been made.

First, I shall sketch out Hume's position on morality. Second, I shall expose some of its faulty skeptical assumptions and conclusions.⁷ Third, I shall show that a theistic (and specifically Reidian) understanding of morality—with its self-evident first principles—is a far more plausible approach to ethics and that objective moral values are best explained by the existence of a good, personal, supernatural Being as the ground of objective morality and human worth or value. The moral argument does not purport to show that the ultimate standard of goodness is necessarily all-powerful and all-wise,

⁵Michael Martin, *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

⁶For example, take the problem—or “the old riddle”—of induction. Barry Stroud summarizes it: “Hume claims that, for any particular thing any human being believes about what he has not yet experienced, the person has no more reason to believe it than he has to believe its contradictory.” Barry Stroud, *Hume* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 14.

⁷Although Hume has commonly been labeled an atheist, some have observed that Hume's position is not actually atheistic but more accurately deistic. For example, see H. O. Mounce's essay “Reason and Theology” in his book *Hume's Naturalism* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 99-130. John Earman asserts that Hume was “a theist, albeit of a vague and weak-kneed sort.” John Earman, *Hume's Abject Failure* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 4. For instance, Hume (assuming Philo expresses his position) writes, “That the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence.” *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (New York: Hafner, 1948), p. 94). David O'Connor considers Hume's minimalist religious belief to be deistic as opposed to theistic. *Hume on Religion* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 15. Hume elsewhere wrote, “The whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author; and no intelligent inquirer can, after serious reflection, suspend his belief a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine theism and Religion.” *Natural History of Religion*, in *The Philosophical Works of David Hume*, ed. T. H. Green and T. H. Grose, 4 vols. (London: n.p., 1874-1875; ed. reprint, Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1964), 4:309. Beyond this vague conception, one could not be more specific. Such a position does not affect the thrust of my chapter, since Hume clearly approaches ethics naturalistically and as a moral sense theorist. Thus tying a moral realism to God's existence undercuts Hume's position.

but it is sufficient to render us morally accountable to a personal Being in whose image we have been made.

HUME'S POSITION ON MORALITY

For our purposes, Hume's view of morality can be summarized by the following six points.

First, *Hume is a moral sense theorist*.⁸ In the tradition of Lord Shaftesbury and Francis Hutcheson, moral sense theory presented an alternative to *moral rationalism* on the one hand, and the radical *egoism* of Thomas Hobbes on the other. Moral rationalism proposed that reason is able to judge a situation or action as good and to direct the desires accordingly. The passions or sentiments are thus a "slave" of reason. And against Hobbes's egoism, moral sense theorists noted a general benevolent, other-directed tendency among human beings. In his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Hume speaks of "what surely, without the greatest absurdity cannot be disputed"—namely, "that there is some benevolence, however small, infused into our bosom; some spark of friendship for humankind; some particle of the dove kneaded into our frame, along with elements of the wolf and serpent."⁹ This would appear to make Hobbes's egoism untenable.

Moreover, because human nature is universal and fixed (found "in all nations and ages"), it could be studied in a very scientific manner—so much so that human actions and reactions can be predicted with remarkable accuracy (THN 2.1.3, pp. 280-81). "[I]n judging of the actions of men we must proceed upon the same maxims as when we reason concerning external objects" (THN 3.2.1, p. 403). Our sense of obligation or *oughtness* is rooted in human nature; we have been hard-wired, say, to show natural affection for our children, and without this hard-wiring, "no one cou'd lie under any such obligation" (THN 3.2.5, p. 519).

Hume's "scientific" study of human nature is essentially a causal theory of moral perception.¹⁰ Hume describes his view of morality in this way: "virtue is distinguished by the pleasure, and vice by the pain, that any action, sentiment or character gives us by the mere view and contemplation" (THN

⁸These comments are based on James Baillie, *Hume on Morality* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 15-18.

⁹David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 9.1, p. 74.

¹⁰David Fate Norton, "Hume and the Foundations of Morality," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, ed. David Fate Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 164.

3.1.2, p. 472). Pain or pleasure, arising from viewing an action or quality, “constitutes its vice or virtue, and gives rise to our approbation or blame” (THN 3.5, p. 614).

Second, *reason cannot move us to action but is the slave of the passions*: According to Hume, the passions are impressions, not the less “vivid” ideas which are formed from—and are copies of—impressions. All ideas—whether simple or complex—originate from impressions. Because passions or desires are ultimately impressions that motivate human action, they cannot be true or false: “[R]eason and the passions are not the sorts of mental entities that can oppose one another.”¹¹ Hume declares, “Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them” (THN 2.3.3, p. 415). Reason by itself cannot produce action, nor can it give rise to volition or prevent volition (THN 2.3.3, pp. 414-15). Reason may provide information on how to satisfy certain ends, but is powerless to motivate behavior; it does not give rise to our inclinations. Reason *alone* cannot move us to action, nor is it the source of our desires in a particular interest. David Hume claimed that morality is “more properly felt than judg’d of” (THN 3.1.2, p. 470). Indeed, the origin of morality is found *within*. One can never find vice “till you turn your reflexion into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action” (THN 3.1.2, pp. 468-69). Thus Hume’s view is that morality is not discovered by reason alone.¹²

Third, *moral judgments are not demonstrable, nor do they reflect objective reality*. For Hume, morality is rooted in the rousing of sentiment, not discerning a fact or relation. So he asks: How can we condemn incest among humans but not the same sorts of actions by animals?¹³

Also, in Hume’s view, morality is essentially a human product and is thor-

¹¹Terence Penelhum, *David Hume: An Introduction to His Philosophical System* (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 1991), p. 143. Cp. *Treatise* 2.3.3, p. 416.

¹²As presented by Jonathan Harrison in *Hume’s Moral Epistemology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), pp. 5-15.

¹³THN 3.1.1, p. 467. Although we cannot treat the question of intrinsic human superiority to the beasts, see James B. Reichmann, *Evolution, Animal “Rights,” and the Environment* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 2000). For instance, Reichmann argues that a human being brings about events as an uncaused cause; nothing *causes* it to react to its physical or intellectual environment the way it does. Nonhuman animals are *caused causes* in that their thinking and actions are “a spontaneous response to the automatic internal calculus determined by its own nature” (p. 159). See also David S. Oderberg’s essay on “Animal Rights,” in *Applied Ethics* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 2000).

oughly embedded in a naturalistic worldview.¹⁴ Moral intuitions do not refer to anything beyond themselves. They just *are*—like any other physical or psychological state. Hume declares: “When I am angry, I am actually possessed with the passion, and in that emotion have no more a reference to any other object than when I am thirsty, or sick, or more than five foot high” (THN 2.3.2, p. 415).

Moreover, following Locke’s primary-secondary distinction of qualities,¹⁵ Hume treats vice and virtue as “secondary” properties or qualities that are found not in objects themselves, but in perceptions of the mind. Comparing morals to physics, Hume writes, “Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compared to sounds, colors, heat and cold, which according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions of the mind” (THN 3.1.1, p. 469).

Thus, according to Terence Penelhum, Hume’s ethic cannot properly be called moral realism but rather *intersubjectivism*, in which one (under normal circumstances) feels and expresses the same sorts of sentiments others do.¹⁶ Penelhum further describes Hume as broadly *utilitarian* (what is virtuous is useful). Hume maintains that justice, honor and fidelity are “artificial” virtues (i.e., useful to oneself or to others) in contrast to “natural” virtues such as cheerfulness, modesty, dignity or affability (which are agreeable in themselves).¹⁷ Hume is also an *emotivist*. That is, moral judgments merely express human sentiments.¹⁸ Thus, even though Hume states that what promotes happiness among our fellow humans “is good” and “what tends to their misery is evil, without any farther regard or consideration,”¹⁹ good and evil do not refer to anything outside human sentiments. J. Baird Callicott writes,

[O]bjective qualities . . . are, in Hume’s terms, neither “matters of fact” nor “real relations” *among objects*. We find them rather “in our own breast”; they are

¹⁴Penelhum, *David Hume*, p. 136.

¹⁵For Locke (in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* [1717]), *primary* qualities are utterly inseparable from bodies and really exist in them (e.g., solidity, extension, figure and motion or mobility). *Secondary* qualities, on the other hand, are simply power to produce various sensations in *us* (e.g., color, odor, sound, warmth and smell).

¹⁶Penelhum, *David Hume*, p. 151. Cp. Nicholas Capaldi, *Hume’s Place in Moral Philosophy* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), p. 151.

¹⁷For a discussion on these distinctions, see S. L. Vodraska, “Hume’s Moral *Enquiry*: An Analysis of Its Catalogue,” in *David Hume: Critical Assessments*, ed. Stanley Tweyman, vol. 4: *Ethics, Passions, Sympathy, “Is” and “Ought”* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 12–40.

¹⁸Penelhum, *David Hume*, p. 137. Hume writes, “The very *feeling* constitutes our praise or admiration” (THN 3.1.2, p. 471).

¹⁹Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 5.2, pp. 37–38.

feelings of approbation or disapprobation, warm approval or repugnance, which spontaneously arise in us upon the contemplation of some action or object.²⁰

Fourth, *through detached contemplation, what humans generally approve is “virtuous” and what they disapprove is “vicious.”* Hume emphasizes that we feel pleasure at the contemplation of a virtuous character. True, we do love persons whose characters may be seriously deficient (e.g., an alcoholic relative), but Hume stresses how stepping back, surveying, and contemplating a character “in general”—setting personal interests aside—“causes such a feeling or sentiment as denominates it morally good or evil” (THN 3.1.2, p. 472).

Fifth, *obligation* (ought) *can never be logically derived from observation* (is), *and, despite Hume’s purported universal “science of human nature,” radical ethical egoism cannot be avoided as an implication of Hume’s sentimentalist theory.* For Hume, there is a great chasm between nature and moral obligation: nature does not in itself contain moral entailments. Moral oughtness does not demonstratively follow from an empirical statement, or even a host of them. This principle, which has come to be known as “Hume’s law” (or the “naturalistic fallacy”) states that it is impossible to derive *ought* from *is*. Any attempt at such a derivation is a surreptitious smuggling in of an illegitimate conclusion.

Hume’s attempt to avoid a Hobbesian egoism fails here. If a person follows her own sentiments, she cannot, by Hume’s own logic, be accused of moral wrongdoing—even if her actions fly in the face of culture’s conventions and expectations. After all, there is no logical reason to “prefer the destruction of the world to the scratching of my finger.” What compelling reason could be given not to choose “my total ruin, to prevent the least uneasiness of an *Indian* or person wholly unknown to me”? (THN 2.3.3, p. 416). Hume assumed, with most of his contemporary philosophers, that there was a common, fixed human nature; that there was a universal, descriptive ethic based upon “general causal laws of human moral psychology.”²¹ But what prevents individual human beings from preferring their own ruin? The theory of ethical egoism, of course, suffers from many a problem: it is unable to universalize itself as a

²⁰J. Baird Callicott, “Hume’s *Is/Ought* Dichotomy and the Relation of Ecology to Leopold’s Land Ethic,” in *In Defense of the Land Ethic: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York, 1989), p. 120; emphasis in the original.

²¹Arthur F. Holmes, *Fact, Value, and God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 113.

principle; it leads others to doubt constantly the advice of the egoist; it arbitrarily limits *all* ethical considerations to an isolated individual's concerns; and so on. Thus egoism should be rejected.

Sixth, *Hume's epistemology and moral theory are deeply intertwined*.²² Reason, for Hume, is not an independent faculty, "in possession of the throne, prescribing laws, and imposing maxims with an absolute sway and authority" (THN 4.1, p. 186). Reason is embedded in the passions, desires, habits and sentiments of mind,²³ and it is, as we have seen, a slave of the passions. By this Hume does not mean that reason is wholly impotent, but simply limited.²⁴ Reason does not move us to act; the passions do. Reason may be involved in resisting evil, but our passions—"the general appetite to good and the aversion to evil"—serve as the basis for action (THN 2.3.3, p. 417).

As with reason, morality and virtue are rooted in the same cause-and-effect "science of man." Both are rooted in the perceptions, which are divided into *impressions* and the less-vivid *ideas*. Indeed, all mental events are simply "successive perceptions" that "constitute the mind" (THN 1.4.6, p. 256).

As we shall discuss below, we rightly hold certain rational and moral beliefs that arise out of our experience with a *prima facie* plausibility or likelihood (noninferred or underived or properly basic beliefs). In the absence of any defeaters for them, there is no reason to deny such beliefs, which include moral intuitions (e.g., we ought to be kind, unselfish, truthful; we ought not rape, murder, torture for fun). They appear obvious to us. Yet Hume's science of human nature disqualifies rational or moral beliefs that we can justifiably call "knowledge"—which may simply be highly plausible or likely and does not need to rise to the level of Cartesian certainty. For Hume, human morality is strictly rooted in nature, and any divinely implanted "moral sense" is out of the question; morality cannot be separated from psychology but indeed is reduced to it. Given Hume's gap between *is* and *ought*, moral realism is eliminated from his system; any argument for God's existence based upon objective morality or intrinsic human dignity is discounted by Hume.

²²This is contra K. B. Price, "Does Hume's Theory of Knowledge Determine His Ethical Theory?" in *David Hume: Critical Assessments*, ed. Stanley Tweyman, vol. 4: *Ethics, Passions, Sympathy, "Is" and "Ought"* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 3-11.

²³Paul Stanistreet, *Hume's Skepticism and the Science of Human Nature* (Hants, U.K.: Ashgate, 2002), p. 214.

²⁴Penelhum, *David Hume*, p. 144.

A RESPONSE TO HUME'S MORAL THEORY

Though he has been accused of overstatement, Reid does have a point when he asserts that Hume's approach "overturns all philosophy, all religion and virtue, and all common sense."²⁵ Indeed, it is inadequate to account sufficiently for the following features of our experience: certain basic moral intuitions; moral obligations; the trustworthiness of our capacities to perceive, to reason and to form moral beliefs; our conviction—expressed or implicit—about human dignity or worth and about moral responsibility and punishment; the important correlation or "fit" between philosophical moral theory and its application. These are the sorts of features a theistic moral realism is better able to ground and ones we could readily expect given theism.

First, *Hume's empiricistic methodology itself appears to be incoherent*. Reid writes, "I am persuaded, that the unjust *live by faith* as well as the *just*."²⁶ And Hume is no exception. Well known are Hume's contemptuous remarks regarding any volume of "divinity or school metaphysics," which should be consigned to the flames since "it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion."²⁷ His epistemology is dogmatically *empiricistic*—not simply *empirical*: "'tis still certain we cannot go beyond experience" (THN p. xxi). But Hume's own starting points and assumptions themselves are questionable and thus hardly philosophically axiomatic. Hume's empiricism eliminates from the outset the possibility of knowing that substances (as opposed to bundles of properties), the human ego/self or objective moral values exist. Thus, Hume himself *goes beyond* what experience (i.e., the empirical) can show by asserting we cannot go beyond it. Just as Kant's declaration that we cannot know things in themselves (*noumena*) is knowledge of something in itself, so Hume's declaration that we can only know what is empirical cannot itself be empirically discerned. This is a philosophical assumption, not a scientific discovery.

Thus, Hume's nascent logical positivism falls prey to the same kinds of criticisms launched against the Vienna Circle and its verificationist principle: *Hume's own empiricistic approach cannot be empirically shown to be the only justifiable basis for knowledge*.²⁸ For example, that divine revela-

²⁵Reid, "Dedication," in *Inquiry into the Human Mind*, p. 5.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 4; emphasis in the original.

²⁷Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (reprint, Oxford: Clarendon, 1951), 7.3, p. 165.

²⁸For a recent response to attempted *post-mortem* defenses of the verificationist principle, see

tion is dismissed from consideration before the philosophical fight begins is arbitrary, even arrogant. Thus, in Hume's own attempt to formulate a quasi-Newtonian science of human nature,²⁹ he makes dogmatic statements that go well beyond scientific study. Precisely because science is not the domain for recognizing whether a self (an "I") exists, Hume's claim that we cannot know whether it exists is a question-begging enterprise. Hume's very methodology assumes the existence of a knowing self—that it is more than just a bundle of properties. Moreover, Hume's system, by mere fiat, restricts explanations for human actions to deterministic causation, prohibiting teleological explanations (and even dismissing them as nothing more than the mere imposition of human minds upon naturalistic processes). However, it is not the domain of science to exclude the possibility of knowing essences, cause and effect, objective moral values, and libertarian free will. Hume's "complete" scientific systematization of human nature is laden with philosophical assumptions, many of which are dubious.

Hume's famous "fork"—distinguishing between "relations of ideas" (e.g., "three times five is half of thirty") and "matters of fact" (whose negation is conceivable)—presents problems of self-referential incoherence. As with the logical positivists who came after him, Hume's own assertion that only what is analytically true (relations of ideas) or empirically true (matters of fact) is meaningful (or true) is itself not true by definition or in any other way necessarily true, nor is this the result of empirical discovery.³⁰ Hume's fork is either false or meaningless, or cannot be justifiably believed. It is self-referentially incoherent, and thus we are justified in rejecting it.

Thus, Hume goes well beyond the purview of the "science" he claims to espouse. His inchoate verificationism cannot escape the charge of incoherence since Hume is making a philosophical assertion *about* the empirical, not simply furnishing the results *of* empirical observation.

Second, *Hume's skeptical methodology, which bears upon his moral theory, is an epistemic tar baby; Hume must first bracket or deny skepticism in order to generate his skeptical conclusions.* Penelhum claims that Hume's view of our beliefs, in which instincts invest our perceptions with meanings

William P. Alston, "Religious Language and Verificationism," in *The Rationality of Theism*, ed. Paul Copan and Paul K. Moser (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 17-34.

²⁹Terence Penelhum, "Hume's Moral Psychology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, ed. David Fate Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 122.

³⁰See Douglas Groothuis, "Questioning Hume's Theory of Meaning," *Kenesis* 18 (1992): 27-38.

that are useful and adaptive, “is essentially a Darwinian view.”³¹ Following this claim to its logical conclusion leads to an ultimate skepticism about our beliefs. Even Charles Darwin wondered how his cognitive faculties could be trusted:

With me the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man’s mind, which has been developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would any one trust in the convictions of a monkey’s mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?³²

Yet like Darwin, Hume *unskeptically* presumes that his cognitive faculties are trustworthy as he works toward his skeptical conclusions. He assumes his capacities of ratiocination are reliable and not in doubt.³³ As Reid would argue, our capacity to reason properly is a *first principle*; to deny it as a first principle is to utilize it. As we shall see, first principles also exist in the moral realm.

Because Hume is purportedly following a strictly empirical methodology, he sees reason as the mere capacity to analyze and neutrally describe. He rejects a priori that reasoning has a teleological orientation (in which reason must function toward a certain end—say, in proceeding syllogistically from sound premises to a correct conclusion). Yet, ironically, the refusal to accept a teleological account of reason results in an epistemic trap. Says John Rist, “If we refuse to move to a more teleological account of reason, we are left in the hole where Hume has dumped us.”³⁴ We can merely describe how we *do* think, not assert how we *ought* to think or that we have arrived at *true* conclusions. The fundamental problem with such a view is that we can no

³¹Penelhum, “Hume’s Moral Psychology,” p. 124. Also, James Reichmann observes that Darwin’s underlying epistemology is “decidedly Humean.” *Evolution, Animal “Rights,” and the Environment*, p. 160.

³²Letter to William Graham Down, July 3, 1881, in *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin Including an Autobiographical Chapter*, ed. Francis Darwin (London: John Murray, Abermarle Street, 1887), 1:315-16.

³³Plantinga calls this “the scandal of skepticism”: “[I]f I *argue* to skepticism, then of course I rely on the very cognitive faculties whose unreliability is the conclusion of my skeptical argument.” Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 219 n. For further elaboration, see Alvin Plantinga’s *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 216-37. For additional refinements of Plantinga’s evolutionary argument against naturalism see “Reply to Beilby’s Cohorts,” in *Naturalism Defeated?* ed. James Beilby (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 204-75 (esp. pp. 269-71 on Hume); Victor Reppert, *C. S. Lewis’s Dangerous Idea* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

³⁴John Rist, *Real Ethics: Rethinking the Foundations of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 144.

longer claim to have knowledge, since *truth* is an essential component of knowledge.³⁵

Without a teleological account, there is no place for discerning moral truth either. Penelhum summarizes: "While Hume's analysis of the nature of moral judgments does indeed allow for rational dispute about them, it is not clear that it can provide for moral truth and falsity, as opposed to moral coincidence or dissonance within one social unit."³⁶ Hume's method is *descriptive* of how humans happen to form moral judgments (enabling us to discern only whether one set of moral beliefs coincides or clashes with another) rather than *prescriptive* (how humans ought to think morally). Thus Hume omits the teleological and intentional components of moral knowledge requisite for discrimination between true moral judgments and false ones.

Hume's strictly sentimentalist (and thus reductionistic) account of morality negates the possibility of making *objective moral claims*. Moreover, given that Hume's methodology leads to skeptical conclusions about beliefs in general (despite his confidence in his own belief-forming processes), the same pertains to his beliefs about morality as well. If Hume is correct, then it is by sheer accident that he is correct, since anyone's beliefs just are what they are.

Third, *Hume is guilty of an unnecessary and unwarranted reductionism, in which morality is shrunk down to simple feeling or instinct*. While no one denies that feelings and desires usually accompany moral judgment, we must question whether moral judgments can be reduced to them. Reid argues that what Hume described as "the pleasing sentiment of approbation"³⁷ involves not feeling alone, but both a judgment of what is right (or wrong) and a feeling.³⁸ So the order of explanation is paramount here: are the sentiments the source of our motivations (as Hume argues), or are they simply a manifestation of our recognizing certain rational requirements in our motives?³⁹ While certain pleasant feelings, say, may accompany a virtuous judgment, it is a non sequitur to say the judgment is reducible to those feelings.

³⁵See Dallas Willard's essay "Knowledge and Naturalism," in *Naturalism: A Critical Analysis*, ed. J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 24-48.

³⁶Penelhum, *David Hume*, p. 153.

³⁷David Hume, "Appendix I: Concerning Moral Sentiment," in *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed., Charles W. Hendel Jr. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927), p. 241; cited without original italics.

³⁸Keith Lehrer, *Thomas Reid* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 242.

³⁹Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 108.

From the vantage point of everyday human experience, Hume jumps too far in his conclusions about the relationship of reason and passions. Hume's claim that it is "not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger" (THN 2.3.3) brings us to "one of Hume's worst arguments," according to Penelhum.⁴⁰ Hume wrongly assumes that desires cannot be reasonable or unreasonable. I may be enraged at a supposed injury, and this rage may be reasonable if I believe someone has deeply wronged me. Even if I happen to realize I am wrong and my rage dissolves, it would not have been unreasonable while I felt anger.⁴¹ Thus, while sentiments or feelings are associated with moral judgments, this is hardly the same as making sentiments the basis for moral judgments. *An act can be moral regardless of feelings associated with it.* The object of a moral judgment is distinct from the feelings of the one making the judgment.

Fourth, *one could argue that the sentiments shared by morally sensitive human beings actually reflect an objective moral order.* As noted earlier, we can simply shift the vantage point by asserting that feelings of approbation accompanying virtuous action reflect a transcendent moral order and that we have been designed by a Creator to function properly when aligning ourselves with that moral order.

Think of Feuerbach's attempt to explain away theistic realism with his theory of human projection of the divine—humans creating God in their image to get through the harsh realities of life. But it may actually be that our longing for the transcendent has actually been placed in us by God himself, that God has set eternity in our hearts (Eccles 3:11),⁴² and that our hearts are restless until they find rest in him.⁴³ Loving and trusting in God are part of what it means to be functioning properly.

Likewise, when we are functioning according to the divine design plan, then these common human sentiments that well up "in our breast" serve as pointers beyond themselves to a transcendent moral order. Rather than psychologizing (away) moral intuitions, we can actually turn Hume's reduction-

⁴⁰Penelhum, *David Hume*, p. 143.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, pp. 143-44.

⁴²In Ecclesiastes, Qohelet (the "Teacher") appears to have a cynical, pessimistic view of God—one which needs correcting at the very end of the book (12:13-14). In 3:11, Qohelet (incorrectly) suggests that God has given humans the drive to know matters of purpose and destiny but without ever satisfying this longing. See Tremper Longman III's excellent commentary, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

⁴³Augustine *Confessions* 1.1.

ism on its head. We can posit the normative function of moral intuitions as reflecting an objective moral order. In fact, Hume's own commitment to the stability of human nature "in all nations and ages" reinforces this point.

Fifth, *Hume's epistemology is counterintuitive and practically unlivable, which serves to undermine Hume's position.* Hume frankly admitted that he was "confounded" by questions about identity and existence and life after death, producing a "philosophical melancholy and delirium." But "relaxing this bent of mind" or undertaking some avocation such as backgammon or dining with friends, Hume claims, would cure this affliction of philosophitis and thus "obliterate all these chimeras" (THN 1.4.7, p. 269).

When one's philosophy is fundamentally unlivable and flies in the face of commonsense or everyday experience, an adjustment in philosophy is needed—not just a game of backgammon. For example, Hume admits that there is no logical reason to "prefer the destruction of the world to the scratching of my finger," but why would *any* human actually prefer this?⁴⁴ Such a statement is, to echo Nicholas Rescher's judgment, "clearly strange stuff."⁴⁵ Reid rightly remarks:

If there are certain principles, as I think there are, which the constitution of our nature leads us to believe, and which we are under a necessity to take for granted in the common concerns of life, without being able to give a reason for them; these are what we call the principles of common sense; and what is manifestly contrary to them, is what we call absurd.⁴⁶

Hume's empiricism leads to reductionism, which means that Hume cannot practice what he preaches. Hume certainly *acts* as though the external world exists, that it is not five minutes old, that other minds exist, that his rational faculties are reliable, and he admits that the philosopher must live as the "vulgar" do if he is to get through life. But in making such a claim, he sides with the theist, who can trust such faculties precisely because human beings are made in the image of a rational and truthful God.⁴⁷ Because Hume's praxis is constantly at odds with his philosophy, perhaps we should

⁴⁴Hume makes another statement (cited earlier) that is, in Penelhum's words, "so clearly false" that Hume, not surprisingly, does not repeat it or offer a substitute for it in the *Enquiry* (Penelhum, *David Hume*, p. 144): "When I am angry, I am actually possessed with the passion, and in that emotion have no more a reference to any other object, than when I am thirsty, or sick, or more than five foot high" (THN 2.3.2, p. 416).

⁴⁵Nicholas Rescher, *Objectivity: The Obligations of Impersonal Reason* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), p. 177.

⁴⁶Reid, *Inquiry into the Human Mind*, 2.6.9-13, p. 33.

⁴⁷See Plantinga's discussion in *Warranted Christian Belief*, pp. 222-27.

look elsewhere for a better match between theory and practice.

We could go further. If Hume is correct that we act benevolently or mercifully according to a moral impulse or instinct rather than reason, one wonders how Hume could criticize the one who lives according to the Darwinist mantras of “survival of the fittest” or “nature, red in tooth and claw.”⁴⁸ Even if we recognize that humans tend to act benevolently toward others in society, why *ought* we be compelled to act that way if we can get away with not doing so? In other words, if there is no objective moral order, there is no reason why those “in the know”—who see the Noble Lie for what it is—*ought* to be benevolent rather than take advantage of the “vulgar” herd of fools and suckers.⁴⁹

Thankfully, we have no need of Hume’s hypothesis. A more plausible one is at hand. Because we are God’s image-bearers who are designed to function properly and thrive when we live morally and rationally, we can reject the ineluctable counterintuitive dissonance into which Hume’s position leads us.

OBJECTIVE MORAL VALUES AND THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Why think theism presents the most plausible hypothesis to account for human moral experience? First, *objective moral values are properly basic and undeniable; those who reject them are failing to function properly.* There are some beliefs that (a) we are justified in holding (we are doing our epistemic duty with respect to these beliefs) and (b) are not based on or inferred from other beliefs (e.g., via sense experience or memory beliefs, such as my having had breakfast this morning).⁵⁰ To reject such basic beliefs would do serious damage to our noetic structure.⁵¹ Such beliefs are properly basic.

Thomas Reid argued that some moral beliefs are included among the properly basic. We intuitively—noninferentially, prephilosophically—recog-

⁴⁸ Alfred Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam A. H. H.* 56.15.

⁴⁹ Rist, *Real Ethics*, p. 160.

⁵⁰ This is consistent with the soft/modest (particularistic) foundationalism of Reformed Epistemology—as opposed to a hard (methodological) Cartesian one, which, if followed, would lead to the rejection of many beliefs that are very plausibly true, though not self-evident, evident to the senses, or incorrigible. See David K. Clark’s discussion, “Faith and Foundationalism,” in *The Rationality of Theism*, ed. Paul Copan and Paul K. Moser (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 35-54.

⁵¹ Alvin Plantinga, “Reason and Belief in God,” in *Faith and Rationality*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), p. 60.

nize the existence of some basic moral values and first principles of morality that arise naturally out of our own experience (e.g., treating others as we would want to be treated). To reject these beliefs would do serious damage to our belief structure and how we come to form moral beliefs. While such beliefs are not infallible or indefeasible, we justifiably believe them in the absence of any overriding considerations or undercutting defeaters. They are innocent until proved guilty (Reid's credulity principle).

Philosopher Martin Heidegger said of Hitler, "He alone is the German reality of today, and of the future, and of its law." But when the Germans were defeated in World War II, the French confiscated Heidegger's property because of his Nazi sympathies. In response, he wrote an indignant letter to the commander of the French forces: "What justice there is in treating me in this unheard of way is inconceivable to me."⁵² To Heidegger's mind, there was not a "German morality" and a different "French morality." Despite being mesmerized by Hitler, he was assuming some universal standard of justice that even the French could understand.

As C. S. Lewis has documented in *The Abolition of Man*,⁵³ the same sorts of moral standards—don't murder, don't take another's property, don't defraud, etc.—continually surface across civilizations and cultures and throughout history. We need not look far to find commonalities. Such moral principles are *discovered*, not *invented*. Even if gray areas exist in the moral realm, we can still get the basics right. In making moral judgments, we must begin with the clear and move to the unclear, not vice versa. Just because moral uncertainty or ambiguity exists, this doesn't eclipse the morally obvious. As Dr. Samuel Johnson put it, "The fact that there is such a thing as twilight does not mean that we cannot distinguish between day and night."

Atheist philosopher Kai Nielsen comments on the vileness of child abuse and wife-beating:

It is more reasonable to believe such elemental things to be evil than to believe any skeptical theory that tells us we cannot know or reasonably believe any of these things to be evil. . . . I firmly believe that this is bedrock and right and that anyone who does not believe it cannot have probed deeply enough into the grounds of his moral beliefs.⁵⁴

⁵²"Mit welchem Rechtsgrund ich mit einem solchen unerhörten Vorgehen betroffen werde, ist mir unerfindlich." Cited in Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger: Unterwegs zu seiner Biographie* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1988), p. 296.

⁵³*The Abolition of Man* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001), appendix.

⁵⁴Kai Nielsen, *Ethics Without God*, rev. ed. (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1990), pp. 10-11.

Likewise, Nicholas Rescher notes, “If [members of a particular tribe] think that it is acceptable to engage in practices like the sacrifice of first-born children, then their grasp on the conception of morality is somewhere between inadequate and nonexistent.”⁵⁵

Contrary to Hume’s assertions, factual knowledge does not always depend upon causal inferences or beliefs arising from constant conjunction. Reid is correct to assert that some beliefs are simply basic, spontaneous and natural—*first principles* from which we begin reasoning or inferring. To deny the basicity of these first principles, which are “*the common sense of mankind*,” is “what we call *absurd*.”⁵⁶ It flies in the face of how we have been constituted by the Almighty. Indeed, the strength of these principles is that they make good sense, “which is often found in those who are not acute in reasoning.”⁵⁷ To deviate from such common sense by metaphysical arguments is “metaphysical lunacy.”⁵⁸ Thus, as J. L. Mackie notes, Reid “abandons the attempt to introduce moral features by demonstration” since the first principles of moral reasoning are self-evident.⁵⁹

As with sense perception, so also with moral awareness. Those without these self-evident, basic moral sensitivities are like the colorblind. As with reliable perception of color patches, to have a decently operating conscience is normal for rightly functioning human beings (cf. Rom 2:14-15; Amos 1 and 2). Basic moral principles (e.g., the mandate to treat others as we wish to be treated)⁶⁰ are universally self-evident to those mature in char-

⁵⁵Nicholas Rescher, *Moral Absolutes: An Essay on the Nature and Rationale of Morality*, Studies in Moral Philosophy 2 (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), p. 43.

⁵⁶Reid, *Inquiry into the Human Mind*, p. 215, emphasis in the original.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 216; Reid’s emphasis.

⁵⁹Mackie, *Hume’s Moral Theory*, p. 139. See also Paul Stanistreet’s *Hume’s Skepticism and the Science of Human Nature*, esp. chap. 6. Stanistreet observes that Reid believed that “the whole basis of Hume’s philosophy was the theory of ideas” (p. 183). Reid rejected these ideas or mental representations or images. They are “not *objects* of perception, but *acts* or *operations* of the mind through which we *directly* perceive external objects”; so Reid proposed replacing the theory of ideas with his philosophy of common sense (p. 184). So while we cannot rationally prove that, say, the universe exists, it is self-evident and prephilosophical.

⁶⁰Reid offers this rudimentary principle: “Every man knows certainly, that what he approves in other men he ought to do in like circumstances, and that he ought not to do what he condemns in other men.” Dugald Stewart, ed., *Works of Thomas Reid*, 3 vols. (New York: Bangs and Mason, 1822), 2:381. “If the rules of virtue were left to be discovered by demonstrative reasoning, or by reasoning of any kind, sad would be the condition of the far greater part of men, who have not the means of cultivating the power of reasoning. As virtue is the business of all men, the first principles of it are written in their hearts, in characters so legible, that no man can pretend ignorance of them, or of his obligation to practise them.” Ibid.

acter and possessing a properly functioning mind. By virtue of our very constitution (which Hume admits is universal), we recognize moral duties apart from social contracts, human conventions or social usefulness.⁶¹

The way out of the Humean swamp is theism, in which we have been divinely designed to function when we align ourselves with God's purposes in this moral universe. As Reid puts it,

The sceptic asks me, Why do you believe the existence of the external object which you perceive? This belief, sir, is none of my manufacture; it came from the mint of Nature; it bears her image and superscription; and, if it is not right, the fault is not mine. I ever took it upon trust, and without suspicion.⁶²

As with science, morality begins with certain first principles. First principles are self-evident to the person who has not hardened his conscience. Reid said that the law of God is written in our hearts (conscience), and to reject its fundamental inclinations is to act unnaturally.⁶³ The reason the atheist can recognize the same moral truths as the theist is that "the faculty [is] given him by God." Both are made in the same divine image. If God had not bestowed this faculty upon man, "he would not be a moral and accountable being."⁶⁴

Moreover, if a person does not recognize his moral obligations, Reid remarks, "I know not what reasoning, either probable or demonstrative, I could use to convince him of any moral duty."⁶⁵ Such a person does not need improved reasoning powers (he may be a self-deceived or hard-hearted sophist), as these basic principles are readily accessible to all morally sensitive human beings. Rather, such a person needs psychological and spiritual help.

As we discussed earlier, the *credulity principle* (we should reasonably believe what is apparent or obvious to us unless there are overriding reasons to the contrary) is appropriate with regard to our *sense* perceptions, our *reasoning* faculty and our *moral* intuitions. They are innocent until proved guilty. Furthermore, if a trustworthy God has created our noetic structure,

⁶¹Lehrer, *Thomas Reid*, pp. 245-46.

⁶²Keith Lehrer and Ronald E. Beanblossom, eds., *Thomas Reid's Inquiry and Essays* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975), pp. 84-85.

⁶³Thomas Reid, "Of the First Principles of Morals," Essay 3 in *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind*, intro. Baruch A. Brody (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1969), pp. 364-67.

⁶⁴Thomas Reid, "Whether Morality Be Demonstrable," Essay 7 in *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, in *Works of Thomas Reid*, 2:381.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 2:380.

then we have all the more reason for generally trusting these faculties or capacities rather than constantly doubting their reliability (even though, here and there, we may get things wrong). Indeed, we have been designed to trust our faculties, and constantly failing to trust them is a sign of cognitive malfunction.⁶⁶ This pertains to the moral realm as well as the perceptual and analytical. Calling into question the properly basic belief in human dignity and objective moral values will lead to the kinds of Humean inconsistencies produced by an empiricistic philosophy that meshes poorly with practical living.

While Hume could theoretically be correct in his inconsistency (and while theism could be both consistent and false), this Humean dissonance disallows a consistent or “complete” science of human nature. The practical must be cordoned off from the philosophical. But perhaps a richer, more consistent and comprehensive science of human nature (which we can expect) under theism points us to what is the more adequate worldview. Perhaps the human longing for an “eco-niche”—a good fit between mind and reality, between theory and practice—is an indication of a true science of human nature, whereas discord is not.⁶⁷ Under theism, we have the benefit of rightly expecting consistency between worldview and everyday living. So long as Hume’s “science” neglects to factor in the “concord” element, to that degree it remains “incomplete.”

Second, *the is-ought gap stems from an arbitrary (and reductionistic) limitation to merely scientific ones; all objective axiological categories are eliminated ab initio—not to mention many important metaphysical ones.* Philosopher John Searle admits to having a common intuition: we know “we could have done something else” and that human freedom is “just a fact of experience.”⁶⁸ However, because of his “bottom-up” view of the world (like Hume), he rejects libertarian freedom since we would have to postulate a self that could potentially interfere with “the causal order of nature.”⁶⁹ Similarly, despite the commonsense intuitions we have about human rights and moral obligations, Hume’s bottom-up approach would never admit them into his worldview. But, in keeping with the principle of credulity, we

⁶⁶Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 185.

⁶⁷Huston Smith, “The Religious Significance of Postmodernism: A Rejoinder,” *Faith and Philosophy* 12 (1995): 415.

⁶⁸John Searle, *Minds, Brains, and Science* (reprint, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 87-88.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 92.

should accept such commonsense intuitions and work out how objective moral values (or human freedom) harmonize with nature—something for which theism has ample room. The burden of proof is upon the one who would deny these.

A rigid empiricism has no room for axiological considerations. Hume's causal, mechanistic view of human action implies that moral praise or blame cannot be applied on the ground that someone has chosen a course of action that she need not have chosen. Because of his pursuit of a predictable science of human behavior, Hume must—and indeed does—deny that praise and blame are relevant categories.⁷⁰ But Hume's science cannot account for moral praiseworthiness or blameworthiness, nor can it offer any objective, nonutilitarian basis for punishing rapists or murderers.⁷¹ As with the substantial self, human freedom or essences, the existence of value and the dignity of human beings cannot be discerned by the constricting empirical method alone. Hume needs to open his metaphysical tent more widely to better account for fundamental features of human existence. If (a) objective moral values, moral obligations, human dignity and freedom are properly basic, and if (b) a Humean account of morality eliminates these as features of the world, then we must look elsewhere for an alternative worldview that can better accommodate them.

Third, *a theistic explanation for objective moral values and human dignity is superior to a naturalistic one*. Ironically, we live in a time when many claim everything is *relative*, yet they believe they have *rights*. But if morality is just the product of naturalistic evolution or cultural development, fiat or personal choice, then rights in any objective sense do not exist. As we saw, Hume's naturalism does not inspire confidence in our belief-forming mechanisms, whether moral or epistemic. Indeed, naturalism has the potential to undermine our conviction that rationality and objective moral values exist. If our beliefs are merely survival-enhancing byproducts of Darwinistic evolution, why think that we actually *have* dignity, rights and obligations, or even that we are thinking rationally? For instance, an

⁷⁰Penelhum, "Hume's Moral Psychology," p. 132.

⁷¹See Gordon Graham, *Evil and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 135-36. According to Graham, Hume's reductionistic view of morality renders Jeffrey Dahmer or Charles Manson to be mere statistical aberrations. There is nothing "wrong" with multiple murderers or serial killers. They are only highly individualistic or perhaps "mal-functioning"—not "evil."

animal may be extremely skittish, incorrectly believing danger to be at every turn and in every tree. While this skittishness may enhance survival (better safe than sorry), the animal is incorrect a good percentage of the time. A theistic worldview, on the other hand, does assure us that we can know moral (and epistemic) truths, even if they do not necessarily contribute one whit to our survival.

Against Hume, we have seen that moral values are basic and that we generally take for granted that human persons truly have value in and of themselves—regardless of what their culture or the high priests of scientism say. But if this is so, then what is the *basis* for this value? Did this intrinsic value come from impersonal, nonconscious, unguided, valueless processes over time? Unlike Hume, some naturalists claim that objective moral values *do* exist but that they emerge naturalistically—that moral properties supervene upon nonmoral ones (say, when the brain and nervous system arrive at a certain level of complexity through the evolutionary process).⁷²

Unfortunately for the naturalistic moral realist, the contextual fit is not a good one.⁷³ Objective values are out of place. The more natural context for moral values and human dignity is the theistic one: We have been made by a personal, self-aware, purposeful, good God to resemble him in certain important ways. Naturalism is hard-pressed to account for what most of us take for granted: that personal, self-aware, valuable, morally responsible persons exist. There are at least three reasons for thinking that theism presents a better fit for objective moral values than does naturalism.

Reason #1: There is a more natural fit between God's existence and objective moral values or human dignity than between valueless processes that produce such value and dignity. There is a smooth transition between a good, supremely valuable God and objective moral values or human dignity. This is not so with naturalism, in which we move from valueless processes to valuable beings, from *is* to *ought*. Given the naturalistic context,

⁷²For example, David O. Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Michael Martin, *Atheism, Morality, and Meaning* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus, 2002). I respond in more detail to naturalistic moral realism in my essay "The Moral Argument," in *The Rationality of Theism*, ed. Paul Copan and Paul K. Moser (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 149-74.

⁷³I do not here address Eastern monism (e.g., of the Advaita Vedanta school of Hinduism), which claims that no ultimate distinction between good and evil exists—an outlook that serves to support relativism.

moral values and human dignity could hardly be predicted as emerging from the materialistic, unguided processes that preceded them. Because of this natural-fit criterion, we have good reason to affirm theism's superiority over naturalism as an explanation of morality.

Reason #2: The theistic grounding for objective moral values and human dignity is a more basic and less ad hoc explanation than is a purported naturalistic grounding. Some naturalistic moral realists will argue that moral values and human dignity exist and that we must take them as basic. Full stop. But what if one theory goes beyond the full stop to a more basic level of explanation or offers a metaphysical framework to account for objective moral values and human dignity unavailable in competing theories? When moving from the overarching theory (theism vs. naturalism) to the entity in question (objective moral values, human dignity), a merely ad hoc explanation will be inferior to the more basic, less-contrived one. Naturalistic moral realism becomes increasingly ad hoc by virtue of its embracing the massive additional assumption that a valueless context can somehow produce valuable personal beings.

Theism requires no such additional, background-defying assumptions and is thus more basic. Human persons derive naturally from a valuable divine personal Being. No context-defying measures are necessary for such an outcome.⁷⁴ Just as consciousness makes better sense in a world in which a supremely self-aware Being exists,⁷⁵ so objective moral values make better sense in a world in which a supremely good Being exists. Just as the attempt to explain the emergence of consciousness naturalistically is plagued with gaps and conundrums,⁷⁶ so is the attempt to move from valuelessness to value—a point a good number of nontheists themselves have had to admit.⁷⁷ As Del Ratzsch notes, “When a value is produced by a long, tricky, precari-

⁷⁴For an excellent essay on the oddity of moral obligation given naturalism, see George I. Mavrodes, “Religion and the Queerness of Morality,” in *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment*, ed. Robert Audi and William Wainwright (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 213-26.

⁷⁵See J. P. Moreland's contribution in chapter 13 of the present volume.

⁷⁶Naturalist philosopher Colin McGinn admits: “How is it possible for conscious states to depend upon brain states? How can technicolour phenomenology arise from soggy grey matter? . . . How could the aggregation of millions of individually insentient neurons generate subjective awareness? We know that brains are the *de facto* causal basis of consciousness, but we have, it seems, no understanding of how this can be so. It strikes us as miraculous, eerie, even faintly comic.” *The Problem of Consciousness* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 10-11.

⁷⁷One could list the likes of Bertrand Russell, Jean-Paul Sartre, J. L. Mackie, Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Jonathan Glover, Steven Weinberg, Peter Singer, etc.

ous process, when it is generated and preserved by some breathtaking complexity, when it is realized against all odds, then intent—even design—suddenly becomes a live and reasonable question.”⁷⁸

Reason #3: The capacity of theism to unify certain phenomena more adeptly than its rivals gives it greater—and thus preferential—explanatory power. When we consider important phenomena and processes in the world (moral, metaphysical, cosmological, astrophysical, biological, chemical, etc.) against the backdrop of theism (God’s will, character and activity) and of naturalism (numerous, disparate processes), theism offers a more unified explanation than naturalism. Consider table 10.1.

To claim, as some naturalists do, that naturalism is the simpler explanation just because it invokes fewer entities (i.e., a nontheistic world is more pared down than a theistic one) is not much help here. Spontaneous generation or abiogenesis is quite a simple explanation (no intermediate mechanism between life and nonlife), but it is clearly inadequate. Something more is obviously needed.

Getting back to the question raised at the outset of this section (why theism presents the most plausible account of human moral experience), we can note, fourth, that *the intrinsic connection between God’s existence and objective moral values has been noted by even nontheistic thinkers of all stripes, and if objective moral values exist (as appears obvious), this fact would serve as a pointer to God’s existence.* Atheists have been made in the image of God and can therefore recognize the same sorts of moral values Christians can. Atheists don’t need the Bible to recognize basic objective moral values. They have been created or constituted to be able to recognize them—even if they disbelieve. All humans are hard-wired the same way: they are made to function properly when living morally. This moral awareness is part of God’s general self-revelation. We see something of God in the moral order of the universe.

Atheist Michael Martin asks: “why would the nonexistence of God adversely affect the goodness of mercy, compassion, and justice? . . . One could affirm the objective immorality of rape and deny the existence of God with perfect consistency,”⁷⁹ that is, that even if God didn’t exist, we could

⁷⁸Del Ratzsch, *Nature, Design, and Science* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 68. On the very live option of intelligent design, see William A. Dembski, *The Design Revolution* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

⁷⁹Michael Martin, “Atheism, Christian Theism, and Rape (1997),” available online at <www.infidels.org/library/modern/michael_martin/rape.html>.

Table 10.1

Phenomena We Recognize/ Observe/Assume	Theistic Context	Naturalistic Context
(Self-)consciousness exists.	God is supremely self-aware/conscious .	The universe was produced by mindless, nonconscious processes.
Personal beings exist.	God is a personal Being.	The universe was produced by impersonal processes.
We believe we make free personal decisions/choices .	God is spirit and a free Being , who can freely choose to act (e.g., to create or not).	We have emerged by material, deterministic processes and forces beyond our control.
We trust our senses and rational faculties as generally reliable in producing true beliefs.	A God of truth and rationality exists.	Because of our impulse to survive and reproduce, our beliefs would only help us survive, but a number of these could be completely false .
Human beings have intrinsic value/dignity and rights .	God is the supremely valuable Being.	Human beings were produced by valueless processes.
Objective moral values exist.	God's character is the source of goodness/moral values .	The universe was produced by nonmoral processes.
First life emerged.	God is a living , active Being.	Life somehow emerged from nonliving matter.
Beauty exists (e.g., not only in landscapes and sunsets but also in "elegant" or "beautiful" scientific theories).	God is beautiful (Ps 27:4) and capable of creating beautiful things according to his pleasure.	Beauty in the natural world is superabundant and in many cases superfluous (often not linked to survival).
The universe (all matter, energy, space, time) began to exist a finite time ago.	A powerful, personal Being , God, caused the universe to exist , creating it out of nothing.	The universe popped into existence, uncaused out of nothing (or possibly self-caused). Being emerged from non-being .
The universe is finely tuned for human life (known as "the Goldilocks effect"—the universe is "just right" for life).	God is a wise, intelligent Designer .	All the cosmic constants just happened to be right ; given enough time and/or many possible worlds, a finely tuned world eventually emerged.
Real evils —both moral and natural—exist/take place in the world.	Genuine evil assumes (a) some design plan (of how things <i>ought</i> to be but are not) or even (b) a standard of goodness (a corruption or absence of goodness, by which we judge something to be evil). (a) God is the Intelligent Designer of the universe. (b) God's good character provides a moral standard or moral context to discern evil.	Atrocities, pain and suffering just happen . This is just how things are —with no "plan" or standard of goodness to which things <i>ought</i> to conform.

still know that objective morality exists. The Christian will cite the same reasons as the atheist about the wrongness of rape: "It violates the victims rights and offends her dignity. It also contributes to the destruction of society." The atheist appears to be vindicated. He can say to the theist: "See? Your reasons didn't even appeal to God's existence. The very reasons you give are the ones I give."

This is too hasty. We must distinguish between knowing and being—and get clear on which is more fundamental. At one level (knowing), Martin's argument appears to make sense. Because human beings have been made in God's image as intrinsically valuable (endowed with rights, dignity, conscience, moral responsibility and the basic capacity to recognize right and wrong), we should not be surprised that an atheist holds similar beliefs about human rights, dignity and obligation. They do not have to believe in God to know right from wrong.

Thus Martin's defense of objective morality only works at this level of knowing.⁸⁰ The more fundamental level of being—that is, the actual ground or basis (which makes moral knowledge possible)—is inadequate.⁸¹ One could also add that leaving God out of one's metaphysic will diminish or obliterate certain important virtues: contentment (which springs from God's wisely, sovereignly directing history) rather than worry, gratitude to God instead of murmuring, forgiveness as a reflection of divine grace, trust in God instead of a self-sufficient spirit, and the like. Theism offers us greater moral richness and depth than atheism.⁸²

If the naturalist claims that intrinsic dignity somehow emerges when an organism is sufficiently neurologically complex, the problem of accounting for the emergence of value or dignity remains. As Kant argued regarding the actual infinite,⁸³ so can we regarding human worth: *dignity cannot be formed by successive addition*. Intrinsic value must be given at the outset; otherwise, it doesn't matter how many nonpersonal and nonvaluable components we happen to stack up. From valuelessness, valuelessness comes.

⁸⁰For further support of this thesis, see Paul Copan, "The Moral Argument," pp. 149-74.

⁸¹See Paul Copan, "Is Michael Martin a Moral Realist? *Sic et Non*," *Philosophia Christi*, n.s. 1 (1999): 45-72; "Atheistic Goodness Revisited: A Personal Reply to Michael Martin," *Philosophia Christi*, n.s. 1 (2000): 91-104. Martin offers an online response that, very strangely, actually brings up charges and issues already addressed in the aforementioned essays. "Copan's Critique of Atheistic Objective Morality" <http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/michael_martin/copan.html>. For a partial response, see Copan, "The Moral Argument."

⁸²See Charles Taliaferro, "The Intensity of Theism," *Sophia* 31 (1992): 61-73.

⁸³Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's, 1965), A 426 / B 454.

I would argue that a personal Creator, who made human persons in his image, serves as the ontological basis for the existence of objective moral values, moral obligation, human dignity and rights. Without the existence of a personal God, there would be no persons at all; and if no persons existed, then no moral properties would be instantiated in our world. Thus, God is necessary to ground the instantiation of moral properties; his own existence as a personal Being instantiates these properties, and by virtue of our creation in God's image, we human persons are further instantiations of these properties. Moral categories (right/wrong, good/bad, praiseworthy/blame-worthy) get to the essence of who we fundamentally are. They apply to us *as persons*, who have been made to reflect the divine image.⁸⁴

The atheistic moral realist claims that the proposition *Murder is wrong* would hold true even if God does not exist. Let me offer the following responses. First, even if we grant that moral facts are just brute givens and necessarily true (just as logical laws are), the huge cosmic coincidence of the correspondence between these moral facts and the eventual evolutionary development of self-reflective moral beings who are obligated to them and recognize them begs for explanation. These moral facts, it appears, were anticipating our emergence.⁸⁵ A less ad hoc explanation is that a good God made valuable human beings in his image.

Second, the necessity of moral truths does not diminish their need for grounding in the character of a personal God. God necessarily exists in all possible worlds, and God can be the source of necessary moral truths that stand in asymmetrical relation to God's necessity.⁸⁶ So God would still be explanatorily prior to these moral values. We just noted above that moral properties are instantiated through personhood (which is ontologically rooted in God's personhood). It just is not obvious that an independent Platonic realm (or its naturalistic equivalent) containing forms of Justice and Goodness exists.⁸⁷ As Douglas Groothuis argues, "God's objective character supplies a different category of external explanation that does not reduce rationality to non-

⁸⁴David S. Oderberg, *Moral Theory: A Non-Consequentialist Approach* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 2000), p. 1.

⁸⁵See Copan, "Atheistic Goodness Revisited," and Gregory E. Ganssle, "Necessary Moral Truths," *Philosophia Christi*, n.s. 2, no. 1 (2000): 105-12.

⁸⁶See William Lane Craig's discussion in *Does God Exist? The Craig-Flew Debate*, ed. Stan W. Wallace (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 168-73.

⁸⁷See Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, *Creation Out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical, and Scientific Exploration* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), pp. 167-95. See also Craig, *Does God Exist?* pp. 170-71.

rational factors or reduce morality to nonmoral factors.”⁸⁸ Besides, even if this Platonism is true, there is still no good reason to think that valuable, morally responsible human beings should emerge from valueless processes.⁸⁹

So the reason theism makes better sense of human dignity and objective moral values is that morality and personhood are necessarily connected. That is, moral values are rooted in personhood, as persons are intrinsically value-bearing beings. The moral argument points to a personal, good Being to whom we are responsible. Only if God exists can moral properties be realized or instantiated. The naturalistic assumption that objective moral values can exist without God is, as John Rist suggests, an “ethical hangover from a more homogeneous Christian past.”⁹⁰

CONCLUSION

David Hume’s powerful influence is certainly being felt today in moral theory. But we have reason to question Hume’s empiricistic and reductionistic approach to knowledge and ethics, which leads to a vicious circle when it comes to knowledge claims. Human dignity, moral responsibility and moral obligations are properly basic (we assume these constantly in our personal lives and in the public square). Rightly functioning human beings will recognize these bottom-line, intuitive moral principles. If moral values, human dignity and personal responsibility exist, it seems that theism has ample resources to account for these facts (being made in the image of a good, personal God). Without such a personal, good God, there would be no moral values because there would be no persons, in whom value resides.⁹¹

Of course, a successful moral argument does not reveal that the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jesus exists—a full-blown theism. This argument does, however, reveal a supreme personal moral Being (1) who is worthy of worship, (2) who has made us with dignity and worth, (3) to whom we are personally accountable and (4) who may reasonably be called “God.”⁹²

⁸⁸Douglas Groothuis, “Thomas Nagel’s ‘Last Word’ on the Metaphysics of Rationality and Morality,” *Philosophia Christi*, n.s. 1 (1999): 119.

⁸⁹Some may wish to interject the Euthyphro dilemma at this point (is something good because God commands it or does God command it because it is good?). I have argued elsewhere that this is a red herring. See Copan, “The Moral Argument.”

⁹⁰Rist, *Real Ethics*, p. 2.

⁹¹On the implications of the meaning of life without God, see Thomas V. Morris, *Making Sense of It All: Pascal and the Meaning of Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992); J. P. Moreland, “Reflections on Meaning in Life Without God,” *Trinity Journal*, n.s. 9 (spring 1988): 3-18.

⁹²Thanks to Doug Groothuis, James Sennett and Charles Taliaferro for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.