

Morality and The Three-fold Existence of God

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ABSTRACT

Arguments about the existence of a being who is infinite and perfect involve claims about a being who must appear in all the orders and dimensions of reality. Anything else implies finitude. Ideas about goodness seem inseparable from arguments about the existence of God and Kant's claim that such arguments ultimately belong to moral theology seems plausible. The claim that we can rely on the postulates of pure practical reason is stronger than many suppose. But one must show that a being who is infinite and perfect is even possible, and any such being must be present in the physical world as well as in what Pascal called the orders of the intellect and morality (which he called the order of charity). Indeed, locating God in the various orders without creating conflicts is problematic. Such arguments are necessarily difficult and sometimes self-defeating but I argue in this paper that there is a promising path.

Arguments about the existence of a being who is infinite and perfect involve claims about a being who must appear in all the orders and dimensions of reality. Anything else implies finitude. Ideas about goodness are no doubt central in the sense that a universe which exhibits divinity in the Judeo-Christian and many other traditions must somehow be suffused with goodness. Thus Kant's claim that arguments about the existence of such a being ultimately belong to moral theology seems plausible. His case for the postulates of pure practical reason, I would argue, is stronger than is often thought. Yet such a being equally cannot fit any restrictive classification. Anselm thought such a being must exist *in intellectu* and *in rebus*. But he might have generalized further. One must be able to find such a god in *whatever* domain is open to knowledge. Pascal spoke of orders, the intellectual, the physical and what he called the order of "charity," the moral order. Such a god must both be imaginable—so that we know what

we are looking for—and objectively there wherever we are able to specify a domain.

To look at it another way, one can see at once that a god who is supposed to be the orientation point for our lives must challenge deeply held distinctions. Such a being must be related—and very closely—to our existence as subjects but must also exist objectively. Furthermore, if a god is related to morality it is because the nature of such a being forms us into a community of co-operating agents. The idea of a beatific vision is the idea of a direct *sharing* in the mind of god. Thus, at least, the mind of such a god must include an idea and a true understanding of each and every sentient being. If, as has been argued—I think correctly—the possibility of a such a god is morally necessary then morality itself gives us a basis for claiming that a god exists. Yet morality seems to imply a measure of independence. If a god holds us by puppet strings, we are not, after all, moral beings.

It is not surprising, then, that all arguments for the existence of such a god are troubling. Indeed, if successful, looked at from traditional perspectives, some arguments might seem to be their own undoing. A “necessary being,” if by that one means a particular existent, must exist in every possible world and so must be compatible with whatever worlds there could be. One can easily imagine a world which seems quite incompatible with the supposed aims of, say, the Christian God who seems to favour high grade minds, souls, or spirits capable of enjoying the beatific vision. And even worlds which could be conducive to such final enjoyment might also contain unspeakable amounts of evil. I will explore such notions and their puzzles as I go along, but from the beginning it seems that issues about morality and the good are always in sight and invariably challenging. Indeed, the central point of this paper is that it is only when (or if) one finds that the existence of god is somehow *morally* necessary that any of the arguments could grip us.

On the face of it, there are promising arguments for the existence of a god that not only prove puzzling but undo themselves. Suppose one accepts the principle of sufficient reason in the negative form in which it entails that if something doesn't exist there must be some reason why it doesn't exist. That means that whatever is possible will exist unless something gets in its way. Lions do not roam about in Ottawa where I am writing this because the climate is very bad for such beasts and evolutionary history shows no sign of a suitable line of development which includes anything like a modern lion with climate adaptations suitable for Ottawa. But if a god—the kind of god we are talking about—is missing from Ottawa no explanation of this kind will suffice. Nothing can get in

the way of an omnipotent being. James Ross has reminded us, though, that one of his teachers said that if the principle of sufficient reason entailed the existence of god he would simply give up the principle.¹ That is to say, belief in the premises may be weakened if the conclusion seems sufficiently improbable.² Unless the rejection involves a contradiction, rejecting the premises is an option. The rejection of the negative form of the principle of sufficient reason has, of course, considerable consequences. It means that all conditions necessary, say, for the existence of successful corn crops might be met, but the farmer could come up empty handed. If you have good seed, plenty of fertilizer, lots of water and sunlight falling on known fertile soil, and nothing grows, the answer from your local agricultural college will not be “well, sometimes all the conditions are met and nothing grows.” It will be “something must have gone wrong.” A deadly corn virus might do. A mere nothing won’t. What can prevent the existence of an infinite being? Presumably nothing. The conditions for such existence are always met. But in fact the case of an infinite god is tricky. Are we sure the concept is coherent? Do we really know that such a god is *possible*?

The argument about sufficient reason and god, however, reminds us that some arguments which may seem logically compelling leave us with a sense that such demonstrations are too easy, or, despite their credentials in the history of philosophical theology, lead us to the wrong *kind* of thing. Part of the difficulty is that purely conceptual arguments suggest a god who is to be found only in what Pascal thought of as the order of the intellect whereas, as he thought, a god worth knowing about must also exist in the physical realm, which he understood as the order of bodily things, and above all in the moral order.³ If we do find arguments which interest us in respect of each of these orders, we must find some way of putting them together. How would someone who thought Kant’s arguments from the postulates of pure practical reason persuasive fit his conclusion together with an argument which might then be mounted from an examination of the logic of the concept of god to the state of the physical world? At the

1. James F. Ross, “Being Certain About the Existence of God,” in *God and Argument / Dieu et argumentation philosophique*, ed. William Sweet (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1999), 28–29.

2. One line of argument I shall explore suggests that the existence of God is highly probable but, if asked, I think most well-educated people in the 21st century would say that *a priori* the existence of a god is highly improbable.

3. There are more extended discussions of the issues about Pascal in Leslie Armour, *Infini Rien: Pascal’s Wager and the Human Paradox*, Carbondale, IL (Southern Illinois University Press for the *Journal of the History of Philosophy* monograph series: 1993; South Bend IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2006.). The views about Pascal in this essay are defended there.

end of the first *Critique* Kant himself decided that this was a problem for moral theology.⁴

In this paper I want to sketch a series of arguments which might address these concerns. The complaint might still be that the whole structure is too complicated and perhaps too hard to assess, especially in relation to the way its components fit together. My solution will be a plea of “moral necessity.” Kant himself suggests that it is certain that something ought to exist though, being Kant, he approaches such claims carefully and adds caveats. He begins with “if” and speaks of “a certain determinate condition” which “can be absolutely necessary.” He ends by saying “if there are moral laws” (he thinks there are) they “must necessarily presuppose the existence of any being as a condition of the possibility of their obligatory power.”⁵ Finally, though in a little essay elsewhere, he *does* insist that our claims to the existence of such a god are “not inferior to any knowledge.”⁶

But “not inferior” suggests something “as good as” but not “knowledge.” And this clearly raises problems. To understand this, one must look first at the structure of non-ethical arguments for the existence of such a god, for one must see more clearly just why ethical arguments might be needed and how they get their purchase. The *non-moral* arguments Kant rejected now seem to most people weak, yet we should still look carefully at arguments which rely on issues of logic and semantics. For doing so must at least clear our minds.

Consider: the expression “god” might appear in the universe of discourse in two ways. The way that we naturally think of at once is this: The name might refer to an individual who might appear somewhere, perhaps in Galilee, at some time, say around the beginning of the current era, and might appear again in London or Ottawa in the near future and have

4. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A631, 813, B659, 841. All translations by Norman Kemp Smith: Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Macmillan, 1929).

5. A634, B662.

6. See Gabriele Rabel translation of *What Does it Mean: To Orient Oneself in Thinking?* In Gabriele Rabel, *Kant: A Study* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963), 169. The text reads “As regards the degree of certainty, it is not inferior to any knowledge.” For the German text see Immanuel Kant, *Was heißt: Sich im Denken Orientieren?*, in *Kant’s Werke: Band VIII: Abhandlungen nach 1781*, vol. 8 of *Kant’s Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: W. de Gruyter 1923. Reprinted Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter 1969), 131–147. Kant wrote this little work in 1786 between the two editions of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In *The Critique of Practical Reason* itself, trans. by Lewis White Beck (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1956), Kant seems to go further still. On p. 120 [126 of the translation] he says “in the combination of pure speculative with pure practical reason in one cognition, the latter has primacy.”

a telephone number and a postal code. But such a god could not appear exactly or completely *as the Christian God*. For what is intended is also a being, as Pascal says, who is everywhere all the time. The idea of a being who is everywhere is very puzzling and does not fit well with our usual rules for deciding when we have identified something or someone. It is hard to know where and when we have found such a god. This did not worry Pascal who thought his god was hidden and hidden on purpose so that we would not be compelled to believe in him. Of course, this god was everywhere and so “hidden in plain sight” but not recognized, and another Incarnation might well be missed.

Equally, however, every referring expression has more than one referent or, more exactly, more than one *kind* of referent. To say that something exists and is red is to say that it is a determinate of the determinable coloredness and coloredness in turn is a determinate form of the determinable space-occupying things.⁷ So every term refers to a *place* in a hierarchy of determinates and determinables. A red thing is also located in the class of visible things. One can go on expanding the hierarchy, but eventually one must come to the most general determinable, the highest order determinable, a very complex property. First of all it is the property of being something or other. But it must also be the property in terms of which everything is ordered and therefore the property through which everything becomes intelligible. Concepts function by marking things out, including some, excluding others. The descriptions function as a kind of map. Intelligibility results from the map and depends on both the inclusion and the exclusion reference. The highest order determinable includes everything, but it also refers to its own determinates. The whole system must be interlocking for it to work. If it were not such as to preside over a set of determinates which themselves become determinants of still others it could not be the highest order determinable.

As such it seems to be the *logos* of Philo,⁸ the “word” which appears in the opening sentence of the Fourth Gospel. Is that not divinity?

One might think not. One can think that what is referred to is just the

7. The expressions “determinate and determinable” are to be understood in the sense of Part I, Chapter XI of William Ernst Johnson, *Logic* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1921).

8. Philo’s many discussions of the *logos* are complex but he wrote that “the Logos of the living God is the bond of everything, holding all things together and binding all the parts, and prevents them from being dissolved and separated.” Philo, *De fuga et inventione*, 112.1–3. Transl. by Gerald Friedlander, in Gerald Friedlander, *Hellenism and Christianity* (London: P. Vallentine & Sons, 1912), 114–15. The title of the work is given by Friedlander, according to the custom of the era, as *De Profugis*.

structure of the reference frame, the arrangement which makes it possible for referring expressions to pick something out. This is close to what Anselm suggests in *Proslogion* IV.⁹ It enables us to see how the fool can truthfully say in his heart “there is no God” if what he means is that there is no distinct entity “in the world” of objects which has the properties of God. Can the Anselmian God who is everywhere always and whose being is manifested in everything that there is be a distinct entity in the world? One can understand the Christian insistence on the Trinity and Anselm’s question: “Why did God become man?” For the God who is referred to in Anselm’s argument may well be the highest order determinable. One who accepted such an argument could, though, go on to ask whether such a being must also be manifest as another person in the trinity who might be referred to in some other way.

Such an argument is not the one usually ascribed to Anselm and it is available to those who disdain the traditional “ontological” arguments. But an argument from the structure of references is another which draws on what seem to be thin materials. It deserves serious attention, but while it looks easy it may not satisfy. Certainly, if it is possible to talk sense in and about the world—and it must be possible if we are to have any discussion worth having about anything at all¹⁰—then the structures of meaning and reference do have a place in reality and, what is more, that place influences anything we may think to be true of reality. But the suggestion of the argument is that the logic of these structures somehow *mirrors* reality and it is hard to know how we are to be sure about that.

We can try yet another argument: If we agree that we can speak about the world in a way which makes sense, then there must be some concept which figures as a necessary condition for that activity. For such a world must be capable of bearing true propositions. So we necessarily need the concept which the mediaevals beginning with Philip the Chancellor¹¹ called “transcendental truth,” simply the manifestation of being which enables entities to be described by true propositions. That concept is necessary to any system which purports to enable us to speak of what

9. For a full account of an argument in this form and its relation to Anselm, see Leslie Armour, “Anselm’s Proof and Some Problems of Meaning and Reference,” in Sweet, *God and Argument*, 97–114.

10. This argument is pursued in L. Armour, *The Rational and the Real* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1962).

11. Nicolas Wicki, ed., *Philippi Cancellarii Summa De Bono* (Berne: Francke, 1985). Philip was the chancellor of the diocese of Paris from 1217, probably until his death in 1236.

there is. It must apply to everything. Things about which there are truths have what, in Platonic terms, might be called “genuine forms.”¹² In more contemporary terms they have what McTaggart called exclusive and sufficient descriptions or, minimally, what Russell called definite descriptions. Each thing has a description which identifies it uniquely. That transcendental truth is a property of everything is a necessary condition of the world’s being intelligible at all. This does not make for a final unanalyzable atomistic pluralism, for we have seen that things must be linked in a system, but it does make for individuals in an intelligible sense.

There can be no contradictions in the expressions which properly describe the world, and they form a unity. If there are gaps which could not be summed by any expression of the truth, there would be something, namely these gaps, about which there would be neither truth nor falsity. This implies that everything is linked by a single form of intelligibility. Such a form is, again, a central feature of the highest order determinable to which I referred earlier. If the highest order determinable orders everything in a way which makes for intelligibility, then we have a notion of god insofar as “god” is regarded as the source of intelligibility and unity.

Put this way one need not worry about whether or not “existence” is a proper predicate, for whatever is the case about *that* the property of “being necessary to any system that purports to enable us to talk about ‘what there is’ ” is, clearly, a predicate. Even the metaphysical minimalist Professor Quine believed firmly that one must be able to talk about “what there is.”

The mediaevals, led by Philip, thought that the “transcendentals”—truth, goodness, and being—went together and were properties of the Christian God who bestowed them on things. Indeed, the property of being necessary in any system purporting to enable us to speak about reality is, in its turn, the property of being necessary for existence. For if it were not there could be no connection of between language and reality—and this is what is at issue.

Necessity as it figures in the highest order determinable, however, is a necessity about how things are organised. It does not imply the necessity of a particular entity like the God of the “religions of the book.” But it does imply that there is an opening for such a being, if other conditions are right. It can be seen as a distinction of the kind Christian Trinitarians make between the originating structure of deity (the ‘Father’) and its emergence in ‘the Son’ and the ‘Holy Spirit’ who are said, respectively to

12. I am assuming here that Platonic forms must be capable of *informing* something.

be ‘begotten’ and to ‘proceed from’ the first person. There can thus be an originating being and (somehow) in addition a *particular* being with divine characteristics in space and time as well an immanent directing spirit. But then it seems that one has an argument for the existence of a theistic property which is associated with what must exist as a condition for the existence of anything else.

This still may have the air of an intellectual game. The being one reveals through it must be at least a close relative of Descartes’s God—and Pascal found Descartes “useless, uncertain, and troublesome.” But Anselm’s ‘intellect’ is not ‘the mind’. Its contents are not works of the subjective imagination. The intellect is the reality in which numbers and logical possibilities exist.¹³ We are talking about what we need to have in order to understand or even speak about the world, any world. This is one kind of relation between what exists *in intellectu* and what is to be found *in rebus*.

Everything ordered by the highest order determinable merely shares in—but it *does* share in—the property of the highest order determinable. The god in question is supposed to be everywhere. But such a god is not *an* entity in any clear sense.

Can one press the argument further? It may seem easy to suppose that a universe that is intelligible is suffused with intelligence, but the connection is far from clear. Without something like the supposition that the world manifests intelligence, we cannot claim that the highest order determinable manifests itself as a specific determinate being.¹⁴ This is tricky, yet we seem to have a glimpse of a universe in which a god is *possible*.

One way of proceeding further is to ask whether the highest order determinable can be regarded as what many idealist philosophers have called a “concrete universal.” The highest order determinable is clearly a universal though what it orders is necessarily the order of all reality since all other determinables fall under it. The “order of reality” is itself a concrete entity. The term “concrete universal” seems to be a contradiction, but when we think of the order of all reality as something clearly real we may get an idea of what is involved.

One can think of a human life as a concrete universal. Every event in a life is a particular, an actual part of reality, but the “person” can only

13. Mathematical “realism” is, of course, disputatious, but no one supposes that those (like some ancient Greeks) who did not like irrational square roots could simply dispose of the number 2. In that sense it is “there” and must be reckoned with.

14. In “Anselm’s Proof” essay (see above) I suggest that some richness can be added to this argument by considering what Anselm says in *De Grammatico*, but following this complication here seems out of place.

be disclosed in a long series of such events. If a god were manifested as a concrete universal every event in the universe would have to be a manifestation of a single unity. The universe is such a unity if a *very* strong form of pantheism is true but not if there are entities such as human persons who are genuinely independent, autonomous organisms in their own right. One reading of Hegel suggests that one can regard all the sentient individuals as manifestations of a universal “spirit,” something doubted by pluralist idealists like McTaggart, I think on the grounds that sentience itself presupposes distinct points of view. The choice is not between the strong form of pantheism and outright pluralism. Such theistic arguments may more likely imply a shared subjectivity—the divine spark said to be in all of us so that my experiences are mine but are also directly experienced—though *as* my experiences—by a god.

If all this still seems unsatisfying—as I suppose it must—one might want to turn to probability theory. If we accept that we live in a universe that is determinate and ordered we can ask how a god might fit into such a structure.

The arguments all suggest a god as a necessary being, but, as I said at the beginning, we have to be careful about necessity in the strict sense. For if anything is necessary it must be compatible with every possible state of affairs. Could there be a god who was compatible with a very bad world, one for example in which no one could behave well or be saved? If the god we have been talking about exists, this surely seems not to be possible. But unless a god were both good and necessarily good, in a way which made it impossible for anything which was not compatible with optimal goodness to happen, then there could be such a being.

It needs to be shown that it is not possible, for such a case is even worse than Calvin’s world in which the (as he thought) Augustinian God created people whom he knew from the beginning of time to be damned, for in this case God could not save anyone. So the necessity of the existence of a god we could take seriously would have to be accompanied by the necessity of a world with a certain measure of goodness. Arguments such as the one from the highest order determinable, however, show the necessity of a structure which might be open to a wide variety of states of affairs and moral outcomes.

There are tempting arguments which use probability in a way that is morally neutral. If we just ask about probabilities, the outcome seems certain but clearly unsatisfying. An infinite being thought of as an entity *in intellectu* can exist in any “thought-universe” universe and has an infinite number of chances of turning up there, while a die can only exist in a three-

dimensional space and will turn up in such a space only if the conditions for cubic solids of a certain kind are met. But the moral order is another matter and there are very complex conditions for the existence of a moral god.

A god who has no place in the moral realm or, more precisely perhaps, cannot be referred to using the language of morality or identified as manifesting goodness, is not god in any ordinary understanding of Western post-classical religious theorizing, but something quite different. He might be Descartes' evil genie.

Pascal wagered that the Christian God did exist. But he supposed his wager to be *good* in more than one sense and thought any acceptable argument must draw morality into itself. Pascal thought belief in God was a good bet not just because it cost little and had an infinite payoff, but, because it involved moral behavior. Believing in God was not a mere intellectual exercise. The sense in which it cost little was according to Pascal the sense in which believing consisted in behaving well and, therefore, the *incremental* cost was zero, for one should behave well, anyway. Specifically, to believe in god in his view was to act in a certain way, namely treating everyone as if they were saved, and this must be good for them. I am convinced he thought the bet was also good in a third way. The Christian God had promised to return but could not do so if the world had not changed, for we would kill him once again. If we all behaved according to the Pascalian rule, he *could* return. He might not. Pascal was no Pelagian. But it would be possible. He did not offer an "argument from morality," for he conceded that, in the eyes of a rational bettor, god might *not* exist. The argument merely showed us that it was good to bet that he *did* exist.

Pascal did not think he was confronting strong reasons to suppose that one should believe that there is no being like the Christian God. But once one brings morality into the debate it appears that there is a reason to doubt the existence of such a God: The world is very bad.

Life may also be coming to an end at least on this planet through our own folly, though Teilhard de Chardin thought that in the end the divine plan would overcome even that. How bad does the world have to be to make it unacceptable to the Christian God or any moral god? If any god exists, he or she recently tolerated a war in Vietnam in which children were burned alive with jellied gasoline, and before that allowed Hitler and his Holocaust.¹⁵ Unspeakable horrors have a long history, some associ-

15. If, as Aquinas thought, will and intellect are not separate in the Christian God, then such a God cannot just sit back and watch. He must either permit or oppose.

ated with the Judeo-Christian God, going back to the fall of Jericho or beyond. One can certainly argue as C. E. M. Joad did that there cannot be great evil with some great good.¹⁶ There is no paradigm of “perfect evil” if only because any paradigm is a way of putting intelligible order on things and intelligible order itself contains a glimmer of the good. Evil is always the lack of something. Some of it may be uneliminable as Edgar Sheffield Brightman maintained.¹⁷ But the question still remains. How much evil can there be if there is a god who is good and powerful?

Pascal knew all about the badness of the world. He knew that it was an obstacle to the appearance of his God in our world and he also believed that his God had to be an element in the physical realm which we think of as our world. Like many others, he tended to see badness as moral failure. Physical events like earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, and huge mudslides simply challenge our ingenuity and technology. Death troubled him because it brings with it an end to one’s chances to improve one’s behaviour.

The interesting question is: Would a universe which has a moral realm have to have a god? There is a line of thought which runs from Pascal to Sartre and which suggests that our very being is associated with acts of self-creativity. In the *Pensées* the wager fragment begins with the words “Infini rien” on one line by themselves.¹⁸ We are nothing, but we can reach the infinite in some creative process.

The very possibility of morality is bound up with the possibility of this choice which, since it is wholly unstructured, is open and empty. Pascal is not the only philosopher to have looked into this void. Some have concluded that morality is something we simply make up. We fill it with what we have in the absence of facts, our feelings or whatever. Such theories have gone by many names—“emotive theory of value” is a common one—but it implies something about emotions which is not true, namely that they too come out of some source which deprives them of claims to truth and knowledge and are thus without significant connection to any reality.

16. See C. E. M. Joad, *God and Evil* (London: Faber and Faber, 1942).

17. Edgar Sheffield Brightman, *A Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1947).

18. Pascal spells “infini” “infinity.” In the newest and best English edition, edited by Roger Ariew, Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2005), the fragment appears as the first item in Section 45, “The Discourse on the Machine,” p. 211. I will not, here, review the issues about the various manuscript texts of the *Pensées* and their translations. Ariew’s translation is based on the Sellier edition which is becoming standard. John Warrington’s Everyman edition, Blaise Pascal, *Pensées: Notes on Religion and Other Subjects* (London: Dent; New York: Dutton, 1960), the most widely available, uses the Lafuma Delmas numbering in which the “wage fragment” is 343.

“Emotions” are not just raw “feelings.” They are stories we tell ourselves and they have roots in our relations to the world.

Pascal saw the moral realm as an order of reality. The moral realm seemed to him open to our efforts as we struggled to rise from nothing to infinity, but it did not seem unstructured. He was imbued with a strain of Neoplatonism and never educated in the prevailing Aristotelian schools but he also did not see the world as a ready-made structure filled with and by God as, in different ways, his contemporaries, Yves de Paris¹⁹ and Spinoza saw it. Understanding this may lead us to conclude that the existence of god is morally necessary. I shall argue that the very possibility of morality entails that existence. Pascal knew that the moral realm requires some action from us, but also that it would be foolish to think that the propositions which structure it are simply descriptions of moral behavior. The heart and reason supplement one another.

Yves de Paris and Spinoza can help us to see this. Both believed in a god who fully structured the world.²⁰ For Yves the goodness of the Christian God—seen through a Neo-Platonic lens—permeated everything because it was the nature of the good, embodied in God, to suffuse everything.²¹

It seems to me that we can reach Yves’ destination with an argument (not entirely his) which goes like this: We know that there is a form of the good. For this it would be enough to know that there is a *possibility* of truth about morality, for such a possibility gives us the logical structure of the form of the good. The possibility is given if we can formulate non-contradictory sentences about it. Yves de Paris’s notion is one surely familiar to the idealists who followed Hegel: The form of the good is a unity within which the widest array of values is given its richest expression brought to consciousness in a community of shared experience:²² Ex-

19. Yves de Paris (Charles de la Rue before he joined the Capucins) was born in 1588, the son of a Paris bookseller. He studied in Italy and became a Neoplatonist before he joined the friars. At the time when Descartes was rising to fame he was probably the most popular philosopher in Paris. He died in 1678. His major works are his *La Théologie naturelle*, Paris: Buon, 1633, and *Digestium Sapientiae*, Paris: Thierry, 1648–54.

20. In some sense Spinoza’s God was the structure of the world and to a Spinozist there is a way of looking at the world from which this is simply true, but one must not press this so that Spinoza becomes, in effect, an atheist.

21. Yves thought that the universe was comprised of a seamless chain. Nature abhors a vacuum. Pascal, of course, questioned this with good reason. But that is an issue quite distinct from the nature of the divine good which, as one of the transcendentals, must suffuse everything.

22. Jacques Maritain seems to share this view of the vision, see *The Range of Reason* (New York: Scribner, 1952), 64.

ploration of the possibility gives us the idea of the concrete reality. This is, in short, a universalist version of the beatific vision. This is not a contradictory notion. Three elements enter into the form: The intrinsic value of the objects that do or can enter into reality, the awareness of those values, and its sharing among possible conscious beings. One can reason this way: There is no value to anything—say the Mona Lisa—if there is no one to perceive it, and value is increased as the perceivers are multiplied. Thus I am proposing that the form of the good must include all positive values, the awareness of them, and the sharing of that awareness by the largest community. If we know that this is possible we have a duty to bring it about. Morality then consists of acting so as to bring about the realisation of the unity of all things and awareness of it among all sentient creatures. Hence Pascal’s “treat everyone as if they were saved,”²³ Kant’s “act always as if you were a member of the kingdom of ends” and the pursuit of self realisation in a community urged by 19th century idealists like George Holmes Howison and John Watson.²⁴

Thus, *if* this is the right account of morality, then morality consists of acting in ways which if successful would bring about a state of affairs in which a god would be manifest. Such a “god” would be Watson’s god, a being understood as the essence of the ultimate community, a being whose nature is expressed through the common experience. In this sense insofar as there *is* a moral realm, such a god is central to it. This centrality would destroy the community if a god were simply a dominant being radiating goodness and over-riding the subjectivity of the others. But it is possible if the divinity is expressed through the others. The Christian notion of the Incarnation suggests exactly this. Of this concept, then, there is a kind of moral certainty, not “moral certainty” as that term is sometimes used, to denote a kind of inner certainty which is not objective, but certainty about what the moral realm, if it exists, entails. And we do have a moral realm, for we know we have duties.

But we must connect the realms.

We have seen that for the whole of reality there must be a form—an organising property—which organises all the other forms. If we know that there is a good which binds us and that its expression is something like

23. For an extended discussion of this see Lucien Goldman, *Le Dieu caché* (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), 322.

24. Cf. John Wright Buckham and George Malcolm Stratton, *George Holmes Howison, Philosopher and Teacher: A Selection from His Writings with a Biographical Sketch* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1934), and J. Watson, *Christianity and Idealism* (New York: Macmillan, 1897).

the achievement of a community of mutual understanding like the Kantian “kingdom of ends,” then evidently what we want to achieve is something like the beatific vision. What more do we have to know?

Suppose now we accept that we have some relevant knowledge: We know that morality is possible; we know that we face infinite possibilities for self-actualisation at least in the world over which our minds range, and that the possibility of creating meaningful lives and filling them with literature, art, music and knowledge is real. We know that the plausible principles laid down by Kant or Pascal or Yves de Paris can be a guide to such a life but we also know these are mere skeletons around which to build and we are not even sure that these skeletal principles are sufficient for their purpose. Still, we will have duties. If it is possible that we could complete these skeletons and have actual moral knowledge then, since moral knowledge is possible, it is our duty to make or to try to make correct moral judgements. If we could have found the moral truth and didn't we would be remiss. If someone else could have done so and we stood in their way, we would be remiss. This involves a variety of duties—seeing to it that people are kept alive, able to think clearly, are as well educated as possible and live in social and political conditions which permit moral communities. Our duties to other sentient creatures will vary with their capacities.

But one must still insist that these duties are not binding if it is not possible to fulfill them. One does not have a duty to write the great book on Sanskrit grammar if one has an I.Q. of 88, or to make beautiful music on the violin if one one's hands are arthritic. “Ought” implies “can” or, to put it more precisely, one is absolved from doing what, otherwise, one ought to do if it can be shown that one *could not* have fulfilled what would have been one's duty.

Kant thought that the fact that we have duties guarantees that there is something beneath the appearances, indeed, in the end that it is guaranteed that there is a god. Bear in mind that the fact that we have duties is a fact about the world, the fact that we live at a point of intersection of a moral order where duties prescribe actions and the order in which actions take place. The “postulates of pure practical reason” assure us, then, that this guarantees that the conditions for fulfilling our duties are met. Kant insists on this because one ends with a contradiction if one denies the conclusion, and this explains why he says that our grasp of the postulates of pure practical reason is “not inferior to any knowledge,” at any rate “as regards the degree of certainty.”²⁵

This passage is not usually given the weight that it deserves. But one

can put the matter differently. It seems that we live in a moral arena and that our very existence as moral agents depends on recognizing this. For, indeed, to be a moral agent one must act in the recognition that our choices have a moral dimension. One who does not recognize this is disordered, a sociopath or psychopath, and not ordinarily held responsible as a moral agent. If we really believe that there is a moral arena and that we live in it then we should believe that it has existence in its own right but equally that it cannot exist without the other realms.²⁶

It cannot simply be reduced to something else. We know it is not an element of the intellectual realm. Things in the intellectual realm require nothing of us beyond honest recognition. Morality requires action. We know that this moral arena is not a feature of the physical realm. For, as Pascal has it, we are only dust and thin reeds there. Atoms have no moral dimension either as agents or as objects of our actions. Yet the moral arena requires the orderly world in which people can talk sense, the world that has appeared in our other attempts to find a footing for claims about the existence of a god.

If we can talk about a moral realm, it must at least confront us as a region of discourse in which there are expressions which make sense, expressions which refer to choices which actually can be made. The choices must matter, and there must be some obligation to make one choice rather than another. The references in this realm are to choices, values, and obligations. This discourse must give rise to true and false propositions.

If a god exists in such a realm, then that god gives a distinct character to choices, values and obligations. "Values" refers to whatever spans good and evil. It includes the worthy, the worthwhile, the worthless, and whatever negates the worthy and the worthwhile.

The relation between the moral order and the physical order becomes critical when we talk of choices and it is choices that form the central problem in finding an integration. A god might appear in one or more of several ways—as the embodiment of the highest order value, as the guarantor of the reality of the genuine openness of whatever choices are necessary to make a moral realm possible, and perhaps, as Kant thought, as the source of assurance that obligations can be carried out. Of these, the first and the

25. See, again the Gabriele Rabel translation of Kant's *What Does it Mean: To Orient Oneself in Thinking?*, 169; and *The Critique of Practical Reason Itself*, 120, where Kant adds "in the combination of pure speculative with pure practical reason in one cognition, the latter has primacy . . ."

26. Kant's insistence on reconciling *happiness* with duty invokes a whole further debate into which I cannot enter here.

third, are most often talked about, but the second is, I think, crucial for an argument about the existence of a god. In a sense since god is expressed through the community of autonomous beings, there is a perspective from which god just *is* that community so that whatever shows that the conditions for such a community are met shows that the conditions for the existence of god are met.

It has, however, often enough been suggested that the existence of god makes real choices impossible. For the God who figures in the “religions of the book” has been offered as a being who is both omnipotent and *omniscient*. Such a god already seems to know everything which will happen as well as everything which is happening and has happened, and that includes what people—and any other moral agents—will do. In any case, since he is omnipotent, he can arrange the world as he wants. Whatever happens, he is either the author or the permitter. Nothing could happen unless he approved it. Such a god makes a mockery of the moral order. This reading of omniscience is, however, arguably a misunderstanding.

For among the things a god who knows “everything” knows are the truths of disjunctive propositions. Thus it may be true that at 7 o’clock I will either go on writing or stop for dinner. And if there is a god who knows everything in a world in which there are beings with “free will,” that god knows the truth of that disjunctive statement. He could not know which I will choose, for then I could not choose. To avoid some otiose debates for a moment we can describe this situation in something like the terms I have ascribed to Spinoza.²⁷ God has an idea of me but his idea of me is the idea of a being who has an idea of himself and of a being whose idea of himself may differ from God’s idea.

We know that the reality of these choices is not guaranteed if *all* that exists is the physical world. For in that world events can readily be divided into those that are determined by physical laws and those that occur by chance. The line can be drawn at the level of organisms which show a measure of autonomy. A dead bird dropped from an aeroplane will land in a predictable place. A live bird may end up anywhere, and the explanation is surely not chance. But wherever such autonomy can be established, whether with people or with lobsters, the moral realm is evident. Autonomy requires at least a kind of sentience. It does not matter if you smash an atom or break a rock; it does, *I* think, certainly matter if you boil a live

27. See Leslie Armour, *Being and Idea: Developments of Some Themes in Spinoza and Hegel* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1992), 152. Spinoza certainly thinks his God has ideas of each of us. He also thinks we have ideas of ourselves which are subject to correction. The God he speaks of could not fail to have ideas of our ideas.

lobster and everyone I know thinks there is a moral issue if you boil a cat alive.

If there are not real choices there is no morality. Those who think otherwise suppose that we might have the same moral rules even if we did not think we could really choose. For perhaps having rules is one of the “causes” of behavior and people behave better if rules are imposed on them. But these then are no longer moral choices but prudential ones.

We can unite the moral and physical realms only if the connections between things are governed both by physical laws and by their place in a moral order. It is this connection which can only be provided by a being whose nature is not merely physical and who permeates the whole system. And if we know both realms are real we know this condition must be met.

There must be a precise balance, however. It could only be achieved in a world with enough regularity to make the outcomes of choices generally predictable and enough latitude to make the choices real. The autonomy which belongs to organisms in our world seems to permit this. But if this is not merely an illusion which we will see through when we are finally able to reduce psychology to physiology and physiology to physics, then there must be a balance which permits a real moral order. The “miracles” described in the New Testament have suggested to Christians the possibility of a world where what happens is what *ought* to happen, where the moral law takes precedence over the physical law. But this is not generally what happens. Morality requires that there is an attainable realm in which this *can* happen.

The idea that the Christian God might again appear among us if we behaved according to the moral law suggests how the two might come together. The argument here is that if we know that there is a moral order and we know that there are physical and intellectual orders, then we are entitled to infer that the god who might make this possible is embedded in the order of things.

To know that this is even possible, however, we need a clearer idea of it. Kant’s “kingdom of ends,” a realm in which people are treated as ends in themselves, ideally a realm in which everyone is seen to be necessary to the whole, offers us the socio-political structure of this realm. The argument for its relation to reality is not the strictly Kantian one that happiness and duty must coalesce in the *bonum consummatum*. But if ought implies can and what we ought to do is to bring about the “kingdom of ends”—the realm where all are treated as ends in themselves—then there must be possible community where this is achieved.

One might guess that people will be happy with that vision. Its expe-

rienced content is surely the beatific vision. But are the two consistent? The kingdom of ends is undoubtedly pluralistic. The beatific vision has been understood in various ways, sometimes as a mystical union in which self-awareness is obliterated in awareness of the whole. In other accounts, as in Dante's *Paradiso*, it is a community in which St. Thomas is still St. Thomas and Sieger of Brabant is still Sieger.²⁸ St. Thomas in his own writings thought that the beatific vision was a work of the intellect²⁹ though, unlike Averroes, he thought there were many agent intellects. Duns Scotus thought the final vision was a matter of intuition not intellection and that the Christian God presented himself directly to the will.³⁰ Some Franciscans did and still do think it an affair of the will. So both sides would retain a measure of individuality. It may be that what we do will bring us to the vision, but the vision itself must surely be a moment of understanding like grasping the solution to a quadratic equation, and not a willful act, so one may suspect St. Thomas was right. What is most important however is that direct insight into the mind of god must be a sharing of the contents of that mind, a mind which is a unity within which each and every sentient creature features completely, sharing its subjectivity as well as the objects of its awareness.

But would sharing in this vision satisfy us as the outcome of moral endeavor? This is literally Pascal's seeing everyone as if they were saved and Kant's treating the knowers as ends in themselves. There is an infinity of things to do—knowing all the others in an infinite universe—in this projected world. And it is still a vision if individual identities are maintained. One would not see everything steadily *sub specie aeternitatis* as the God in such a story must, for we are finite, and one might think that we might wander pleasantly through an infinity of options with our chosen companions. Perhaps there could even be a duty to wander and enjoy.

This is how the argument seems to go. We know that we have duties. We know that fulfilling them would bring us to the community of the beatific vision. We also know that there are arguments which seem to

28. Dante did not find out whether Sieger had recanted his Averroist views. If he had not he might have thought himself absorbed into the one, true intellect.

29. *Summa Theologica, Prima Pars*, Question 12, Art. 2, reply to objections.

30. *Quaestiones quodlibetales* 6.1. Interestingly Scotus takes this position because he insists that even in heaven the saints must be free. So the relation between the beatific vision and the idea of a community of continuing individuals is quite clear. But it would seem wrong to discount the role of the intellect, for surely real choice requires knowledge, not simply acceptance. For a discussion, see Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), appendix.

situate a god in the “intellectual realm” and that a god is even possible in the physical realm.

But all such arguments face in the 21st Century a common faith in a kind of “naturalism” that suggests ours is an intrinsically meaningless world. Meanings are something that we add. For many people such meaning as can be found is added by rock stars, football players, tabloid writers, and politicians. Rock stars often seem to have short lives which leave their friends empty and baffled. Politicians make grander journeys from Oxbridge to Highgate Cemetery, Grandes Écoles to Père Lachaise, or Harvard to Arlington, but too often seem helpless in a world plunging into chaos. A minority find their meanings in the work of the great poets, playwrights, and novelists of the present and past, but though much that tradition reveres as intrinsically valuable is intertwined with religious beliefs and attitudes, quite a few of the admirers of “high art” regard religious elements as something best ignored and would insist the meanings they find in these works are human inventions. Indeed, that very fact that they are human works is part of what makes them amazing to us.

Can our argument be persuasive? Pascal would have wondered if reason could move the heart. Hume said no. They may know now.

But we need to take the argument one stage further. There is a kind of dialectic behind the difference of visions.³¹ Failure to grasp it must make the argument I have been following seem weaker than it is. The “objective world,” devoid of all values, which many people suppose to be the world described by the sciences, is the outcome of a set of beliefs which include the belief that the world is intelligible, that it is so formed as to be the bearer of true propositions combined with morally self-denying ordinances which have led investigators to give up beliefs which seemed comforting or even useful. If those ideas are abandoned the system quickly deconstructs itself. In fact, there is a way of looking at the world which excludes everything that belongs to the moral order, and a way of looking at the world which excludes the knowing subject and its activities. But there is also a way of looking at the world which includes only the knowing subjects, their subjective visions, and their moral concerns. For, after all, everything we know about the world described by the sciences can be reduced to the experiences of the investigators, the premises they have chosen to adopt and the moral choices involved in those decisions.

31. For an explanation of this dialectic in detail and in technical terms, see Leslie Armour, *Logic and Reality* (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum; Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1972).

Different visions of the world can be seen as involved in a dialectic in which their relations to one another begin to develop. But the argument of this paper has been that what seem to be the contradictions between them can be overcome if we see that what is involved is a body of agents struggling toward something like the beatific vision and we understand the conditions for its attainment.

The paradox may seem to be that, if there is a god, the world should have been created so that it began as it is supposed to end with everyone fully aware of the final vision. But, of course, if what is required is a community of individuals bound by mutual awareness and finally, as McTaggart and his Christian opponents agreed, by love, then it must begin in separation, for love requires plurality and the conditions for separation require a world which must be faced and overcome on the way to the final unity.

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