

Does Morality Depend on Religion?

The Good consists in always doing what God wills at any particular moment.
Emil Brunner, *The Divine Imperative* (1947)

I respect deities. I do not rely upon them.
Musashi Miyamoto, at Ichijohi Temple (CA. 1608)

1. The Presumed Connection between Morality and Religion

In 1987 Governor Mario Cuomo of New York announced that he would appoint a special panel to advise him on ethical issues. The governor pointed out that “Like it or not, we are increasingly involved in life-and-death matters.” As examples, he mentioned abortion, the problem of handicapped babies, the right to die, and assisted reproduction. The purpose of the panel would be to provide the governor with “expert assistance” in thinking about the moral dimensions of these and other matters.

But who, exactly, would sit on such a panel? The answer tells us a lot about who, in this country, is thought to speak for morality. The answer is: representatives of organized religion. According to the *New York Times*, “Mr. Cuomo, in an appearance at St. Francis College in Brooklyn, said he had invited Roman Catholic, Protestant and Jewish leaders to join the group.”

Few people, at least in the United States, would find this remarkable. Among western democracies, the U.S. is an unusually religious country. Nine out of ten Americans say they believe in a personal God; in Denmark and Sweden, the figure is only one in five. It is not unusual for priests and ministers to be treated as moral experts. Most hospitals, for example, have ethics committees, and these committees usually include three types of members: healthcare professionals to advise about technical matters, lawyers to handle legal issues, and religious representatives to address the moral questions. When newspapers want comments about the ethical dimensions of a story, they call upon the clergy, and the clergy are happy to oblige. Priests and ministers are assumed to be wise counselors who will give sound moral advice when it is needed.

Why are clergymen regarded this way? The reason is not that they have proven to be better or wiser than other people—as a group, they seem to be neither better nor worse than the rest of us. There is a deeper reason why they are regarded as having special moral insight. In popular thinking, morality and religion are inseparable: People commonly believe that morality can be understood only in the context of religion. So because the clergymen are the spokesmen for religion, it is assumed that they must be spokesmen for morality as well.

It is not hard to see why people think this. When viewed from a nonreligious perspective, the universe seems to be a cold, meaningless place, devoid of value and purpose. In his essay "A Free Man's Worship," written in 1902, Bertrand Russell expressed what he called the "scientific" view of the world:

That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.

From a religious perspective, however, things look very different. Judaism and Christianity teach that the world was created by a loving, all-powerful God to provide a home for us. We, in turn, were created in his image, to be his children. Thus the world is not devoid of meaning and purpose. It is, instead, the arena in which God's plans and purposes are realized. What could be more natural, then, than to think that "morality" is a part of the religious view of the world, whereas the atheist's world has no place for values?

2. The Divine Command Theory

In the major theistic traditions, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, God is conceived as a lawgiver who has laid down rules that we are to obey. He does not compel us to obey them. We were created as free agents, so we may choose to accept or to reject his commandments. But if we are to live as we should live, we must follow God's laws. This conception has been elaborated by some theologians into a theory about the nature of right and wrong known as the Divine Command Theory. Essentially, this theory says that "morally right" means "commanded by God" and "morally wrong" means "forbidden by God."

This theory has a number of attractive features. It immediately solves the old problem about the objectivity of ethics. Ethics is not merely a matter of personal feeling or social custom. Whether something is right or wrong is perfectly objective: It is right if God commands it, wrong if God forbids it. Moreover, the Divine Command Theory suggests an answer to the perennial question of why anyone should bother with morality. Why not forget about "ethics" and just look out for oneself? If immorality is the violation of God's commandments, there is an easy answer: On the day of final reckoning, you will be held accountable.

There are, however, serious problems for the theory. Of course, atheists would not accept it, because they do not believe that God exists. But there are

difficulties even for believers. The main problem was first noted by Plato, the Greek Philosopher who lived 400 years before the birth of Jesus.

Plato's writings were in the form of dialogues, usually between Socrates and one or more interlocutors. In one of these dialogues, the *Euthyphro*, there is a discussion concerning whether "right" can be defined as "that which the gods command." Socrates is skeptical and asks: Is conduct right because the gods command it, or do the gods command it because it is right? This is one of the most famous questions in the history of philosophy. The British philosopher Antony Flew suggests that "one good test of a person's aptitude for philosophy is to discover whether he can grasp its force and point."

The point is that if we accept the theological conception of right and wrong, we are caught in a dilemma. Socrates's question asks us to clarify what we mean. There are two things we might mean, and both lead to trouble.

1. First, we might mean that *right conduct is right because God commands it*. For example, according to Exodus 20:16, God commands us to be truthful. On this option, the reason we should be truthful is simply that God requires it. Apart from the divine command, truth telling is neither good nor bad. It is God's command that *makes* truthfulness right.

But this leads to trouble, for it represents God's commands as arbitrary. It means that God could have given different commands just as easily. He could have commanded us to be liars, and then lying, not truthfulness, would be right. (You may be tempted to reply: "But God would never command us to lie." But why not? If he did endorse lying, God would not be commanding us to do wrong, because his command would make it right.) Remember that on this view, honesty was not right before God commanded it. Therefore, he could have had no more reason to command it than its opposite; and so, from a moral point of view, his command is arbitrary.

Another problem is that, on this view, the doctrine of the goodness of God is reduced to nonsense. It is important to religious believers that God is not only all-powerful and all-knowing, but that he is also good; yet if we accept the idea that good and bad are defined by reference to God's will, this notion is deprived of any meaning. What could it mean to say that God's commands are good? If "X is good" means "X is commanded by God" then "God's commands are good" would mean only "God's commands are commanded by God," an empty truism. In 1686, Leibniz observed in his *Discourse on Metaphysics*:

So in saying that things are not good by any rule of goodness, but sheerly by the will of God, it seems to me that one destroys, without realizing it, all the love of God and all his glory. For why praise him for what he has done if he would be equally praiseworthy in doing exactly the contrary?

Thus if we choose the first of Socrates's two options, we seem to be stuck with consequences that even the most religious people would find unacceptable.

2. There is a way to avoid these troublesome consequences. We can take the second of Socrates's options. We need not say that right conduct is right because God commands it. Instead, we may say that God commands us to do certain things *because they are right*. God, who is infinitely wise, realizes that truthfulness is better than deceitfulness, and so he commands us to be truthful; he sees that killing is wrong, and so he commands us not to kill; and so on for all the moral rules.

If we take this option, we avoid the troublesome consequences that spoiled the first alternative. God's commands are not arbitrary; they are the result of his wisdom in knowing what is best. And the doctrine of the goodness of God is preserved: To say that his commands are good means that he commands only what, in his perfect wisdom, he sees to be best.

Unfortunately, however, this second option leads to a different problem, which is equally troublesome. In taking this option, we have abandoned the theological conception of right and wrong—when we say that God commands us to be truthful because truthfulness is right, we are acknowledging a standard of right and wrong that is independent of God's will. The rightness exists prior to and independent of God's command, and it is the reason for the command. Thus, if we want to know why we should be truthful, the reply "Because God commands it" does not really tell us, for we may still ask "But why does God command it?" and the answer to *that* question will provide the underlying reason why truthfulness is a good thing.

All this may be summarized in the following argument:

- (1) Suppose God commands us to do what is right. Then either (a) the right actions are right because he commands them or (b) he commands them because they are right.
- (2) If we take option (a), the God's commands are, from a moral point of view, arbitrary; moreover, the doctrine of the goodness of God is rendered meaningless.
- (3) If we take option (b), then we will have acknowledged a standard of right and wrong that is independent of God's will. We will have, in effect, given up the theological conception of right and wrong.
- (4) Therefore, we must either regard God's commands as arbitrary, and give up the doctrine of the goodness of God, or admit that there is a standard of right and wrong that is independent of his will, and give up the theological conception of right and wrong.
- (5) From a religious point of view, it is unacceptable to regard God's commands as arbitrary or to give up the doctrine of the goodness of God.
- (6) Therefore, even from a religious point of view, a standard of right and wrong that is independent of God's will must be accepted.

Many religious people believe that they must accept a theological conception of right and wrong because it would be impious not to do so. They feel, somehow, that if they believe in God, they should say that right and wrong

are to be defined in terms of his will. But this argument suggests otherwise: It suggests that, on the contrary, the Divine Command Theory itself leads to impious results, so that a devout person should not accept it. And in fact, some of the greatest theologians, such as St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), rejected the theory for just this reason. Thinkers such as Aquinas connect morality with religion in a different way.

3. The Theory of Natural Law

In the history of Christian thought, the dominant theory of ethics is not the Divine Command Theory. That honor goes to the Theory of Natural Law. This theory has three main parts.

1. The Theory of Natural Law rests upon a certain view of what the world is like. On this view, the world is a rational order with values and purposes built into its very nature. This conception derives from the Greeks, whose way of understanding the world dominated Western thinking for over 1,700 years. A central feature of this conception was the idea that *everything in nature has a purpose*.

Aristotle incorporated this idea into his system of thought around 350 B.C. when he said that, in order to understand anything, four questions must be asked: What is it? What is it made of? How did it come to exist? And what is it for? (The answers might be: This is a knife, it is made of metal, it was made by a craftsman, and it is used for cutting.) Aristotle assumed that the last question – what is it for? – could sensibly be asked of anything whatever. “Nature,” he said, “belongs to the class of causes which act for the sake of something.”

It seems obvious that artifacts such as knives have purposes, because craftsmen have a purpose in mind when they make them. But what about natural objects that we do not make? Aristotle believed that they have purposes too. One of his examples was that we have teeth so that we can chew. Such biological examples are quite persuasive; each part of our bodies does seem, intuitively, to have a special purpose – eyes are for seeing, the heart is for pumping blood, and so on. But Aristotle’s claim was not limited to organic beings. According to him, *everything* has a purpose. He thought, to take a different sort of example, that rain falls so that plants can grow. As odd as it may seem to a modern reader, Aristotle was perfectly serious about this. He considered other alternatives, such as that the rain falls “of necessity” and that this helps the plants only by “coincidence,” and rejected them.

The world, therefore, is an orderly, rational system, with each thing having its own proper place and serving its own special purpose. There is a neat hierarchy: The rain exists for the sake of the plants, the plants exist for the sake of the animals, and the animals exist—of course—for the sake of people, whose well-being is the point of the whole arrangement.

[W]e must believe, first that plants exist for the sake of animals, second that all other animals exist for the sake of man, tame animals for the use he can

make of them as well as for the food they provide; and as for wild animals, most though not all of these can be used for food or are useful in other ways; clothing and instruments can be made out of them. If then we are right in believing that nature makes nothing without some end in view, nothing to no purpose, it must be that nature has made all things specifically for the sake of man.

This seems stunningly anthropocentric. Aristotle may be forgiven, however, when we consider that virtually every important thinker in our history has entertained some such thought. Humans are a remarkably vain species.

The Christian thinkers who came later found this view of the world to be perfectly congenial. Only one thing was missing: God was needed to make the picture complete. (Aristotle has denied that God was a necessary part of the picture. For him, the worldview we have outlined was not religious; it was simply a description of how things are.) Thus the Christian thinkers said that the rain falls to help the plants *because that is what the Creator intended*, and the animals are for human use because *that is what God made them for*. Values and purposes were, therefore, conceived to be a fundamental part of the nature of things, because the world was believed to have been created according to a divine plan.

2. A corollary of this way of thinking is that “the laws of nature” not only describe how things *are*, they specify how things *ought to be* as well. Things are as they ought to be when they are serving their natural purposes. When they do not, or cannot, serve those purposes, things have gone wrong. Eyes that cannot see are defective, and drought is a natural evil; the badness of both is explained by reference to natural law. But there are also implications for human conduct. Moral rules are not viewed as deriving from the laws of nature. Some ways of behaving are said to be “natural,” while other are “unnatural”; and “unnatural” acts are said to be morally wrong.

Consider, for example, the duty of beneficence. We are morally required to be concerned for our neighbor’s welfare as we are for our own. Why? According to the Theory of Natural Law, beneficence is natural for us, considering the kind of creatures we are. We are by our nature social creatures who want and need the company of other people. It is also part of our natural makeup that we care about others. Someone who does not care at all for others—who really does not care, through and through—is seen as deranged, in the terms of modern psychology, a sociopath. A malicious personality is defective, just as eyes are defective if they cannot see. And, it may be added, this is true because we were created by God, with a specific “human” nature, as part of his overall plan for the world.

The endorsement of beneficence is relatively uncontroversial. Natural law theory has also been used, however, to support moral views that are more contentious. Religious thinkers have traditionally condemned “deviant” sexual practices, and the theoretical justification of their opposition has come more often than not from theory of natural law. If everything has a purpose, what is the purpose of sex? The obvious answer is procreation. Sexual activity that is not connected with making babies can therefore be viewed as “unnatural,” and so

such practices as masturbation and oral sex—not to mention gay sex—can be condemned for this reason. This way of thinking about sex dates back to at least to St. Augustine in the fourth century, and it is explicit in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas. The moral theology of the Catholic Church is based on natural law theory. This line of thought lies behind its whole sexual ethic.

Outside the Catholic Church, the Theory of Natural Law has few advocates today. It is generally rejected for two reasons. First, it seems to involve a confusion of “is” and “ought.” In the 18th century David Hume pointed out that *what is the case* and *what ought to be the case* are logically different notions, and no conclusion about one follows from the other. We can say that people are naturally disposed to be beneficent, but it does not follow that they should be beneficent. Similarly, it may be that sex does produce babies, but it does not follow that sex ought or ought not to be engaged in only for that purpose. Facts are one thing; values are another. The Theory of Natural Law seems to conflate them.

Second, the Theory of Natural Law has gone out of fashion (although that does not, of course, prove it is false) because the view of the world on which it rests is out of keeping with modern science. The world as described by Galileo, Newton, and Darwin has no place for “facts” about right and wrong. Their explanations of natural phenomena make no reference to values or purposes. What happens just happens, fortuitously, in the consequence of the laws of cause and effect. If the rain benefits the plants, it is only because the plants have evolved by the laws of natural selection in a rainy climate.

Thus modern science gives us a picture of the world as a realm of facts, where the only “natural laws” are the laws of physics, chemistry, and biology, working blindly and without purpose. Whatever values may be, they are not part of the natural order. As for the idea that “nature has made all things specifically for the sake of man,” that is only human vanity. To the extent that one accepts the worldview of modern science, then, one will be skeptical of the Theory of Natural Law. It is no accident that the theory was a product, not of modern thought, but of the Middle Ages.

3. The third part of the theory addresses the question of moral knowledge. How are we to go about determining what is right and what is wrong? The Divine Command Theory says that we must consult God’s commandments. The Theory of Natural Law gives a different answer. The “natural laws” that specify what we should do are laws of reason, which we are able to grasp because God, the author of the natural order, has made us rational beings with the power to understand that order. Therefore, the Theory of Natural Law endorses the familiar idea that the right thing to do is whatever course of conduct has the best reasons on its side. To use the traditional terminology, moral judgments are “dictates of reason.” St. Thomas Aquinas, the greatest of the natural-law theorists, wrote in his masterpiece the *Summa Theologica* that “To disparage the dictate of reason is equivalent to condemning the command of God.”

This means that the religious believer has no special access to moral truth. The believer and the nonbeliever are in the same position. God has given both the same powers of reasoning; and so believer and nonbeliever alike may listen to reason and follow its directives. They function as moral agents in the same way, even though the nonbelievers' lack of faith prevents them from realizing that God is the author of the rational order in which they participate and which their moral judgments express.

In an important sense, this leaves morality independent of religion. Religious belief does not affect the calculation of what is best, and the results of moral inquiry are religiously "neutral." In this way, even though they may disagree about religion, believers and nonbelievers inhabit the same moral universe.

4. Religion and Particular Moral Issues

Some religious people will find the preceding discussion unsatisfying. It will seem too abstract to have any bearing on their actual moral lives. For them, the connection between morality and religion is an immediate, practical matter that centers on particular moral issues. It doesn't matter whether right and wrong are "defined" in terms of God's will or whether moral laws are laws of nature: Whatever the merits of such theories, there are still the moral teachings of one's religion about particular issues. The teachings of the Scriptures and the church are regarded as authoritative, determining the moral positions one must take. To mention only one example, many Christians think that they have no choice but to oppose abortion because it is condemned both by the church and (they assume) by the Scriptures.

Are there, in fact, distinctively religious positions on major moral issues, which believers are bound to accept? If so, are those positions different from the views that other people might reach simply by trying to reason out the best thing to do? The rhetoric of the pulpit suggests that the answer to both questions is yes. But there are several reasons to think otherwise.

In the first place, it is often difficult to find specific moral guidance in the Scriptures. Our problems are not the same as the problems faced by the Jews and the early Christians many centuries ago; thus, it is not surprising that the Scriptures might be silent about moral issues that seem urgent to us. The Bible contains a number of general precepts, such as the injunctions to love one's neighbor and to treat others as one would wish to be treated oneself, that might be thought relevant to a variety of issues. But worthy as those precepts are, they do not yield definite answers about exactly what position one should take concerning the rights of workers, the extinction of species, the funding of medical research, and so on.

Another problem is that in many instances the Scriptures and church tradition are ambiguous. Authorities disagree, leaving the believer in the awkward position of having to choose which element of the tradition to accept and which authority to believe. Read plainly, for example, the New Testament condemns being rich, and there is a long tradition of self-denial and charitable giving that affirms this teaching. But there is also an obscure Old Testament figure named Jabez who asked God to “enlarge my territories” (I Chronicles 4:10), and God did. A recent book urging Christians to adopt Jabez as their model became a best-seller.

Thus when people say that their moral views are derived from their religious commitments, they are often mistaken. In reality, something very different is going on. They are making up their minds about the moral issues first and then interpreting the Scriptures, or church tradition, in such a way as to support the moral conclusion they have already reached. Of course this does not happen in every case, but it seems fair to say that it happens often. The question of riches is one example; abortion is another.

In the debate over abortion, religious issues are never far from the center of discussion. Religious conservatives hold that the fetus is a human being from the moment of conception, and so they say killing it is really a form of murder. They do not believe it should be the mother’s choice whether to have an abortion, because that would be like saying she is free to commit murder.

The key premise in the conservative argument is that the fetus is a human being from the moment of conception. The fertilized ovum is not merely a potential human being but an actual human being with a full-fledged right to life. Liberals, of course, deny this—they say that, at least during the early weeks of pregnancy, the embryo is something less than a full human being.

The debate over the humanity of the fetus is enormously complicated, but here we are concerned with just one small part of it. Conservative Christians sometimes say that, regardless of how secular thought might view the fetus, the Christian view is that the fetus is a human being from its very beginning. But is this view mandatory for Christians? What evidence might be offered to show this? One might appeal to the Scriptures or to church tradition.

The Scriptures. It is difficult to derive a prohibition of abortion from either the Jewish or the Christian Scriptures. The Bible does not speak plainly on the matter. There are certain passages, however, that are often quoted by conservatives because they seem to suggest that fetuses have full human status. One of the most frequently cited passages is from the first chapter of Jeremiah, in which God is quoted as saying: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you.” These words are presented as though they were God’s endorsement of the conservative positions: They are taken to mean that the unborn, as well as the born, are “consecrated” to God.

In context, however, these words obviously mean something quite different. Suppose we read the whole passage in which they occur:

Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." But the Lord said to me,

"Do not say 'I am only a youth' for to all to whom I send you you shall go, and whatever I command you you shall speak. Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you," says the Lord.

Neither abortion, the sanctity of fetal life, nor anything else of the kind is being discussed in this passage. Instead, Jeremiah is asserting his authority as a prophet. He is saying, in effect, "God authorized me to speak for him; even though I resisted, he commanded me to speak." But Jeremiah puts the point more poetically; he has God saying that God had intended him to be a prophet even before Jeremiah was born.

This often happens when the Scriptures are cited in connection with controversial moral issues. A few words are lifted from a passage that is concerned with something entirely different from the issue at hand, and those words are then construed in a way that supports a favored moral position. When this happens, is it accurate to say that the person is "following the moral teachings of the Bible?" Or is it more accurate to say the he or she is searching the Scriptures for support of a moral view he or she already happens to think is right, and reading the desired conclusion into the Scriptures? If the latter, it suggests an especially impious attitude—an attitude that assumes God himself must share one's own moral opinions. In the case of the passage from Jeremiah, it is hard to see how an impartial reader could think the words have anything to do with abortion, even by implication.

The scriptural passage that comes closest to making a specific judgment about the moral status of fetuses occurs in the 21st chapter of Exodus. This chapter is part of a detailed description of the law of the ancient Israelites. Here the penalty for murder is said to be death; however, it is also said that if a pregnant woman is caused to have a miscarriage, the penalty is only a fine, to be paid by her husband. Murder was not a category that included fetuses. The Law of Israel apparently regarded fetuses as something less than full human beings.

Church Tradition. Even if there is little scriptural basis for it, the contemporary church's stand is strongly antiabortion. The typical churchgoer will hear ministers, priests, and bishops denouncing abortion in the strongest terms. It is no wonder, then, that many people feel that their religious commitment binds them to oppose abortion.

But it is worth noting that the church has not always taken this view. In fact, the idea that the fetus is a human being "from the moment of conception" is a relatively new idea, even within the Christian church. St. Thomas Aquinas held that an embryo does not have a soul until several weeks into the pregnancy.

Aquinas accepted Aristotle's view that the soul is the "substantial form" of man. We need not go into this somewhat technical notion, except to note that one implication is that one cannot have a human soul until one's body has a recognizably human shape. Aquinas knew that a human embryo does not have a human shape "from the moment of conception," and he drew the indicated conclusion. Aquinas's view of the matter was officially accepted by the church at the Council of Vienne in 1312, and to this day it has never been officially repudiated.

However, in the 17th century, a curious view of fetal development came to be accepted, and this has unexpected consequences for the church's view of abortion. Peering through primitive microscopes at fertilized ova, some scientists imagined that they saw tiny, perfectly formed people. They called the little person a "homunculus," and the idea took hold that from the very beginning the human embryo is a fully formed creature that needs only to get bigger and bigger until it is ready to be born.

If the embryo has a human shape from the moment of conception, then it follows, according to Aristotle's and Aquinas's philosophy, that it can have a human soul from the moment of conception. The church drew this conclusion and embraced the conservative view of abortion. The "homunculus," it said, is clearly a human being, and so it is wrong to kill it.

However, as our understanding of human biology progressed, scientists began to realize that this view of fetal development was wrong. There is no homunculus; that was a mistake. Today we know that Aquinas's original thought was right—embryos start out as a cluster of cells; "human form" comes later. But when the biological error was corrected, the church's moral view did not revert to the older position. Having adopted the theory that the fetus is a human being "from the moment of conception," the church did not let it go and held fast to the conservative view of abortion. The council of Vienne notwithstanding, it has held that view to this day.

Because the church did not traditionally regard abortion as a serious moral issue, Western law (which developed under the church's influence) did not traditionally treat abortion as a crime. Under the English common law, abortion was tolerated even if performed late in the pregnancy. In the United States, there were no laws prohibiting it until well into the 19th century. Thus when the U.S. Supreme Court declared the absolute prohibition of abortion to be unconstitutional in 1973, the Court was not overturning a long tradition of moral and legal opinion. It was only restoring a legal situation that had always existed until quite recently.

The purpose of reviewing this history is not to suggest that the contemporary church's position is wrong. For all that has been said here, its view may be right. I only want to make a point about the relation between religious authority and moral judgment. Church tradition, like Scripture, is reinterpreted by every generation to support its favored moral views. Abortion is just an example of this. We could just as easily have used shifting moral and religious

views about slavery, or the status of women, or capital punishment, as our example. In each instance, people's moral convictions are not so much derived from their religion as superimposed on it.

The various arguments in this chapter point to a common conclusion. Right and wrong are not to be defined in terms of God's will; morality is a matter of reason and conscience, not religious faith; and in any case, religious considerations do not provide definitive solutions to the specific moral problems that confront us. Morality and religion are, in a word, different. Because this conclusion is contrary to conventional wisdom, it may strike some readers as antireligious. Therefore, it should be emphasized that this conclusion has not been reached by questioning the validity of religion. The arguments we have considered do not assume that Christianity or any other theological system is false; these arguments merely show that even if such a system is true, morality remains an independent matter.