

# **Do Objective Ethical Norms Need Theistic Grounding?**

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Recent Christian reflection on the relation of religion and ethics has focused a great deal on establishing a conception of ethics in which God plays a central role. The numerous attempts to respond to Plato's "Euthyphro Dilemma" and the various defenses of the divine command theory provide two examples of this phenomenon. But much of this ethical reflection has gone on in a way that is largely "defensive." That is, those engaged in such discussions typically describe an ethical theory which provides God with a central role, and then seek to deflect potentially fatal objections. While there is surely a place for this sort of defensive reflection, these discussions fail to address a deeper and perhaps more pressing question, namely: what positive reasons are there for preferring a religiously grounded ethical theory to the non-religious competitors. Are there argument or considerations, we might wonder, that can explain just why grounding an ethical theory in theism is superior to grounding it non-theistically? And if there are, what would such arguments or considerations look like?

In general, such arguments would identify some central ethical feature and argue that this feature can best or only be explained by appeal to theism. "Moral arguments" for theism, which have enjoyed varying degrees of popularity in intellectual history, work in just this way. In general, arguments for God's existence point to some feature of the world that can only be explained, or can best explained, by appeal to the existence and/or

activities of God. Correspondingly, moral arguments for theism typically make the claim that some fact about the moral life or about objective moral normativity is just such feature. But there is no need to look for something as blunt as an argument for theism from ethics. We could simply rest content with a defense of the claim that certain ethical features are suggestive of theistic grounds in some way.

Whether one pursues a more robust argument for theism from ethics or merely proposes that ethical truths are suggestive of theism, such arguments will typically have one of two foci. These two foci center on two key questions in ethical theorizing: what makes moral claims true and what can serve to motivate moral behavior. On the "truthmaking" side we can fairly ask what grounds or provides the truthmaker for moral truths. If no *natural* grounds are adequate to the task, then we will need to invoke *supernature*, perhaps *theistic supernature*. I will call arguments of this sort "theoretical arguments." On the motivation side, we can ask whether or not we can explain the motivational force that ethical claims seem to have for us in a world without supernatural intervention or design. If not, then we will have reason to think supernaturalism or theism true (or at least to think that it is best to believe them to be true). I will call arguments of this sort "practical arguments." In this paper I want to make a brief survey of some of the candidate theoretical and practical arguments for theistic ethics and briefly assess their assets and liabilities. I will consider these arguments separately and, in each category, I will consider them, in what I regard as increasing order of plausibility.

Let me state at the beginning that I will assume in this paper that anti-realist and non-cognitivist ethical theories are false. Thus, I will set aside theories which hold, for example, that moral principles are simply internalized heuristics that have proven

evolutionarily adaptive.<sup>1</sup> This view, commonly accepted by sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists seeking to "explain ethics," succeeds in explaining only by denying that there really are ethical norms that are *true*.<sup>2</sup> On the non-cognitivist side, I will dismiss, for example, emotivist theories which hold that ethical claims are merely veiled descriptions of some of our affective states. If any of these anti-realist or non-cognitivist positions is true, then the question of grounding ethics in a supernatural reality immediately collapses.

## II. THEORETICAL ARGUMENTS

### *A. Laws imply a law-giver*

Many Christians are fond of an argument, often cast in the form of a slogan, declaring that since all laws require lawgivers, *moral* laws imply the existence of a *moral* law-giver. Surely, the argument continues, moral law-givers are intentional, deliberate agents. Thus, some intentional, deliberate moral agent exists, and is the font of objective moral normativity.

This slogan-argument had a number of more sophisticated defenders through the first half of the twentieth century. One such defender, H.P. Owen, argues as follows:

The words 'obligation', 'duty', 'claim' always imply a *personal* constraint whenever they refer to an object within the finite world. . . . A personal reference is especially clear in 'law' when this is taken to signify 'command.' It is impossible to think of a command without also thinking of a commander. The analogy with positive law makes this plain. Of any such law it can be asked: 'what is its source and authority?' While the source may

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<sup>1</sup> There are a wide variety of stories that are told here. Sometimes adaptiveness is understood in terms of fitness for the organism. Others appeal to group fitness or reciprocal altruism as more plausible ways of explaining ethical (by which these thinkers usually mean "altruistic") behavior.

<sup>2</sup> A pair of notable examples are E.O. Wilson in *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*. (New York: Knopf, 1998), chapter 11, and Paul Ehrlich in *Human Natures: Genes, Cultures, and the Human Prospect* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2000), chapter 13).

lie in a remote and unrecorded past, the present authority must be a person or group of persons who act as its interpreters—the Sovereign, Parliament, the judiciary.<sup>3</sup>

The problem with the argument, of course, is that the underlying premise (or slogan) is either false or question-begging. There are all sorts of normative principles that seemingly have no need of a law-giver to make them true. Natural and mathematical laws provide two ready examples. One might claim that even laws of these sorts require law-givers. Yet while most theists would be happy to hold that the laws of nature that obtain do so in virtue of an act of the divine will, few or none will be willing to say the same about metaphysically necessary norms such as mathematical laws. As a result, without much more refining, this common argument is unhelpful.

#### *B. Necessary truths require necessary being*

A number of theists have argued that moral claims are necessary truths and as such require some non-natural entities as their truthmakers. Since the constituents of nature exist contingently and are arranged as they are contingently, they cannot serve to ground necessary truths. The same is true of God's free choices and any consequence of those choices. On this view, moral goodness cannot be grounded in divine command without further qualification. Thus, all necessary truths, moral truths included, require supernatural truthmakers.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> H.P Owen, *The Moral Argument for Theism* (London: George Allen and Unwin 1965), p.49. Owen goes on to couple this ordinary language argument with another argument that will be taken up in the following section.

<sup>4</sup> Contemporary defenses of this view have been offered by Richard Swinburne “Duty and the Will of God,” in *Divine Commands and Morality*, Paul Helm (editor), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp.120-134, and C. Stephen Layman *The Shape of the Good* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991, pp.44-52.

Historically, numerous Christian thinkers have found this view attractive. Gottfried Leibniz, for example, often defends the claims that moral truths are necessary and that they must thus have truthmakers of the same sort as other necessary truths, namely, necessary states of the divine intellect. In rejecting the extreme voluntarism of one of his intellectual opponents, Samuel von Pufendorf, Leibniz writes,

Neither the norms of conduct itself nor the essence of justice depends on God's free [God's] choice, but rather on eternal truths, or objects of the divine intellect. . . .Justice follows certain rules of equality and proportion which are no less grounded in the immutable nature of things and in the divine ideas than are the principles of arithmetic and geometry.<sup>5</sup>

This argument rests on a number of assumptions, some more controversial than others. It is at least moderately controversial that necessary truths require non-natural truthmakers. More controversial is the claim that moral truths are necessary. Most significant, however, is that even if the premises of the argument are granted, they merely show that moral truths must be grounded in some non-natural, necessarily existing reality. Platonic forms or subsisting universals would surely suffice to provide such grounds. Thus, without some overriding reason to think that Platonism is insufficient, we are left without a reason for invoking theism to ground moral normativity.

### *C. Good requires an obtaining paradigmatic standard of goodness*

Among medieval and modern philosophers it was common to argue that any property which could be predicated of substances in greater or lesser degree must have an exemplar which *is* that property or which *exemplifies* that property in maximal fashion and which is in turn a partial cause of the existence of less than maximal token instances. Since *moral goodness* is exemplified to greater or less degrees by actions and/or moral

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<sup>5</sup> In *Opera Omnia*, Ludovici Dutens, editor, (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1989), IV, iii, 275.

agents, there must be something which is or exemplifies maximal goodness. Aquinas, for example, famously argues for this view in one of the "Five Ways":

The fourth way is taken from the gradation to be found in things. Among beings there are some more and some less good, true, noble and the like. But "more" and "less" are predicated of different things, according as they resemble in their different ways something which is the maximum, as a thing is said to be hotter according as it more nearly resembles that which is hottest; so that there is something which is truest, something best, something noblest and, consequently, something which is uttermost being; for those things that are greatest in truth are greatest in being. . . . Now the maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus; as fire, which is the maximum heat, is the cause of all hot things. Therefore there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call God.<sup>6</sup>

Such arguments have proven notoriously difficult to defend, relying on a number of premises which are widely rejected. But it is worth noticing that even if we accept the premises of Aquinas argument, at best we can conclude that there is "something which is the maximum" with respect to goodness. Unfortunately, there is nothing in the argument to lead us to the conclusion that this "something" is itself a person or even an individual. The existence of Platonic-style archetypes is the most we will be able to extract from such arguments.<sup>7</sup>

H.P. Owen, mentioned above as a defender of the law-requires-law-giver argument, provides an argument that might prove helpful to the Thomistic cause. Owen supplements his law-giver argument with another argument according to which goodness requires a standard of good that is both supernatural *and* personal. Owens' brief argument goes as follow:

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<sup>6</sup> *Summa Theologica* I Q.2, a.3, resp.

<sup>7</sup> Non-archetypal universals would not do the trick, of course, since such universals would not *be* a token of their type, e.g., redness would not be red.

A clear choice faces us. Either we take moral claims to be self-explanatory modes of *impersonal* existence or we explain them in terms of a personal God. . . . The idea that [moral] claims can exist without a personal ground is not, perhaps, a contradiction . . . . But we can say that if the transcendent and visible orders of morality are not continuous on this vital point—if the *modus essendi* of the claims in themselves is totally different from their *modus essendi* when empirically embodied—the moral life is unintelligible.<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately, Owen is just not clear about what the supposed unintelligibility consists in. Why is it that objective goodness, understood as a universal or Platonic archetype, cannot coherently ground moral facts? His concern about the "total difference" between the *grounds of goodness* and the *nature of good persons or actions* appears to rely on a general principle that a type and a token of that type must not be radically different in kind. Thus, Owen thinks that there must be some sort of robust *resemblance* between the standard of goodness and its token instances. If that is what Owen has in mind the view confronts at least two difficulties. First, few Platonists would insist generally on such resemblance between tokens and types. Second, even if such resemblance is required, why can't Platonic-style archetypes suffice? Such archetypes *do* resemble token instances in just the way Owen seems to require.<sup>9</sup> Thus we are again left to wonder exactly why grounding moral norms requires a *personal* standard of goodness.

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<sup>8</sup> Owen 1965, p.50. Similar arguments are offered by A.R. Vidler, *Christian Belief* (London: SCM Press 1950) pp.20-1 and G.F. Woods, *Theological Explanation* (London: J. Nisbet Welwyn 1958) pp.190-2.

<sup>9</sup> Perhaps Owen would object to such an archetypal theory on the grounds that an archetype of a feature such as moral goodness is going to have to exhibit further characteristics as well. By analogy, if there were an archetype for hairiness, the archetype would itself be hairy. But one might think that the archetype of hairiness is going to have other features as well: it will have a three dimensional surface, and so on. One might think that the collateral properties required for something to count as an archetype for goodness is going to require that the archetype be a person. The suggestion is worth pursuing further. But we have already gone far beyond what Owen's own argument directly suggests.

Robert Adams has recently defended an argument which would serve to fill the sort of gap left by Aquinas and Owens. Adams defends a realist view of ethics according to which “excellence” generally and “moral excellence” specifically are relational properties consisting in resemblance to something which is maximally or paradigmatically excellent.<sup>10</sup> Adams' argument is too intricate to set out in detail here. Briefly put, Adams claims that the semantics and metaphysics of value are best understood and explained in terms of such a relational property of resemblance. My interest in Adams does not focus on this part of the view however, but rather on that part where he aims to explain why such a view requires that the maximal good be *personal*. Adams argues as follows:

Theists have sometimes tried to infer the personality of the supreme Good from the premise that persons, as such, are the most excellent things that we know, from which it is claimed to follow that the supremely excellent being must be of that sort. A more cautious line of argument begins with the premise, harder to deny, that most of the excellences that are most important to us, and of whose value we are most confident, are excellences of persons or of qualities or actions or works or lives or stories of persons. So if excellence consists in resembling or imaging a being that is the Good itself, nothing is more important to the role of the Good itself than that persons and their properties should be able to resemble or image it. That is obviously likelier to be possible if the Good itself is a person or importantly like a person.<sup>11</sup>

We can think of Adam's argument as an attempt to fill out Owen's sketchy claim that the grounds of moral goodness must be similar to individual instances of goodness. Adams agrees that moral goodness is ultimately grounded in

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods* Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1999. This component of the view is primarily defended in the first section of the book, pages 13-130. As one might expect, since resemblance is such a slippery affair Adams needs to, and does, provide a more refined view. In particular, he holds that moral excellence is a species of “value excellence” generally where the latter is to be understood as “resembling God in a way that could serve God as a reason for loving the thing.” (p. 36).

<sup>11</sup> Adams, p.42.

something which is or has *Paradigmatic Goodness* (PG). He goes on to argue that since the greater part of the most important varieties of goodness are *person-relative*, it seems plausible that PG is, or is essentially grounded in, a reality which is itself personal.

Adams is clear he is not arguing that resemblance to this personal PG is a *sufficient* condition for something exhibiting excellence in some respect (moral or otherwise).<sup>12</sup> But he does defend the claim that such resemblance is necessary. One might think that this claim fits uneasily with the claim that *personal* goods are somehow more central to PG than other types of good. The reason is that Adams wants “good” meals and “good” caricatures to count as good in virtue of their resemblance of paradigm goodness as well. But he does not take this to imply that PG must then be or be grounded in an *edible* or an *artistic* reality. Making the account work, as Adams recognizes, thus leaves us with the task of explaining how the central PG, which is something personal, can be such that it can be resembled (univocally or, preferably, in some analogical sense) by good meals and good caricatures.

These difficulties attend Adams view only if we take it as providing a theory of Goodness or Excellence *simpliciter* rather than of distinctively moral goodness. And if we stick with the latter, the account seems more plausible. Thus, if we are willing to accept an account according to which goodness is a relational property where the relata are persons or agents and a paradigm of *moral*

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<sup>12</sup> As noted in an earlier note, the respect in which a thing resembles God must be one that gives God reason to love the thing.

goodness, we have some good reason (not apodictic for sure) for regarding PG as personal, and thus as something like the God of theism.

*D. Moral Obligation requires (personal) imperatives*

I have claimed that if the above arguments establish anything at all, it is that objective ethical norms require some non-natural and/or perhaps necessarily existing grounds. We have seen one argument from Adams which contends that these ethical grounds must be personal, thus leading us closer to a need to ground norms on something like theism.

William Alston has mounted a different argument for the claim that a purely Platonist ground of goodness is insufficient. For Alston, the worry is not that impersonal grounds for the goodness of some act (or morally salient feature of persons) are insufficient. Rather, Alston argues that even if the Platonism could ground goodness, it could not ground facts about *obligation*. Since the *good* and the *obligatory* are not identical, courses of action can fail to be obligatory for me. Thus, we will need something more to ground truths concerning moral obligation. Alston argues as follows;

CHECK: But what about obligation, duty, or the moral ought? . . . By virtue of what am I required to act in [good] ways? . . . If and only if some basis for [obligations] is needed over and above the goodness of these modes of behavior, can one who recognizes God as the supreme standard of goodness take divine commands to be constitutive of moral obligation.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> William Alston, "What Euthyphro Should Have Said," in William Lane Craig (editor), *Philosophy of Religion* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002, p.295.

Alston thus claims that some further fact must be introduced to explain why certain good courses of action count as obligatory. This further fact is a divine command that such-and-such an act is obligatory for me.

Not everyone will be willing to admit the need to supply grounds for an actions *being obligatory* which goes beyond the grounds of its goodness. But if we do admit the need for these further grounds, why think that the role must be filled by *divine command*? In fairness, Alston is not trying to make a case for the necessity of divine commands for obligation in the essay, he is rather pointing out a role for obligation to play in a complete divine command theory which also aims to ground goodness in the divine nature. But we can nonetheless ask whether or not “divine command” can or must play the role Alston assigns to it.

Perhaps Alston means to suppose, in a fashion similar to Owen earlier, that the notion of obligation is unintelligible outside of a personal context. Yet, we have seen no one present an overriding case for this claim. What we need to make Alston’s argument work is a clearer idea of what distinguishes *goodness* and *the obligatory* and then ask whether or not an appeal to divine command is a fair way to account for the distinction. The relevant distinction, according to Alston, appears in at least two ways. First, there are many activities that might be good in some intrinsic way, but which I am still not obliged to do here and now. Painting might be a good thing to do. But I am surely not obliged to paint. Second, there is a distinction between the obligatory and the supererogatory which just is a distinction between good acts we are obliged to do and good acts that transcend the obligatory. While these distinctions must be accounted for, it seems that there are a number of ways to ground the distinctions without appeal to

personal, supernatural command. Thus, unless there are reasons for thinking that only theism can ground these distinctions, this argument seems to come up short.

Time limits preclude a discussion of the various ways in which this pair of distinctions might be grounded without appeal to divine command. Given the initial difficulties with making the obligation-supererogation distinction for utilitarians and Kantians, and given the rising popularity of versions of Aristotelian moral theory among Christian philosophers, I will consider the prospects for grounding these distinctions via appeal to morally relevant facts about human nature. On such an account we can argue that many good courses of action are not obligatory because 1) in light of facts about human nature they fail to advance individual or collective human well-being, or 2) given the types of beings we are, the goodness they secure would come at the expense of other goods which are necessary or perhaps more central for human well-being, or finally 3) because they would require greater expenditure of effort than human nature permits or requires.

Can appeals to human nature ground such morally weighty distinctions? In a recent essay, J. Budziewski argues that facts about human nature are always insufficient to ground moral norms unless human beings exist and have the nature they do as a result of divine creative activity.<sup>14</sup> Budziewski offers four distinct reasons why these Aristotelian accounts require a theistic background. I will mention just two of them here.<sup>15</sup> First, since human nature can change through succeeding generations, the moral

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<sup>14</sup> J. Budziewski, "The Second Tablet Project," *First Things*, number 124 (June/July 2002).

<sup>15</sup> The two reasons I bypass are the following. First, Budziewski asserts but does not defend the claim that absent theism, human natures could only sustain prudential norms, not distinctively moral ones. Second, Budziewski claims that absent theism we would

claims that spring from our nature have only a contingent grip on us. Given our powers, for example, to engineer the genetic character of our offspring, we can ultimately bring it about that they have entirely different natures from us. And thus, while we might be bound to refrain from pointless killing and sexual assault, perhaps our trans-natured descendents would not be. But doesn't this contingency about natures show us that they alone don't have deep enough roots to sustain the fabric of moral norms? Budziszewski argues that unless we also have reason to think that human beings have a nature which is both good and intended for us (by a Creator), that our natures cannot serve to properly ground moral obligation.<sup>16</sup>

Second Budziszewski argues that if we regard the relation between human natures and norms of obligation as mere brute facts, then we have no reason to assume that the universe makes ultimate moral sense. The appeal here is not to some sort of Kantian argument that we have no guarantee that virtue and happiness will ultimately be proportional. Rather, the argument is that the very grounds of goodness may not hang together if they are not grounded in a perfect and rational reality. Even if we appeal to a mindless realm of Platonic forms to ground norms of goodness and obligation, what reason do we have for assuming that the moral norms springing from the forms will themselves cohere? What guarantees that they will not give rise ultimately to irreconcilable moral norms, rendering the moral life ultimately absurd?

I find Budziszewski's suspicions about a naturalist theory of ethical normativity grounded in nature compelling. They aim to show that one popular attempt to ground the

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be able to succeed in deceiving ourselves about the moral truth, knowing that there is no one who ultimately stands to see that morally upright behavior and ultimate happiness coincide.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-5.

relevant distinction we were looking for fails. This does not complete the case that would need to be made to flesh out Alston's argument. But it does provide us with some reason for thinking that Alston's challenge might not be easily met without appeal to theism.

### III. PRACTICAL ARGUMENTS

Since Kant, philosophers have also presented practical arguments for theism. The practical arguments differ in significant ways, but they share in common the feature that the proper moral motivation requires the truth of theism or at least a *belief* that theism is true.

Many are familiar with Kant's argument in the *Critique of Practical Reason* that our obligation to pursue the highest good (the *summum bonum*) requires us to postulate the existence of a God who makes the realization of this good possible. This is a theoretical argument. But elsewhere Kant seems to argue in a more practical way that the possibility of living the moral life would be diminished or extinguished unless we were to accept belief in theism.<sup>17</sup> Robert Adams summarizes the argument as follows:

- (1) It would be demoralizing not to believe in that there is a moral order of the universe, for then we would have to regard it as very likely that the history of the universe will not be good on the whole, no matter what we do.
- (2) Demoralization is morally undesirable.
- (3) Therefore, there is a moral advantage in believing that there is a moral order of the universe.
- (4) Theism provides the most adequate theory of a moral order of the universe.
- (5) Therefore, there is a moral advantage to accepting theism.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Such arguments seem to be at work in Kant's *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone* (New York: Harper Torchbooks 1960), pp.5-7.

<sup>18</sup> Robert M. Adams, "Moral Arguments for Theistic Belief," in *The Virtue of Faith*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 151.

Adams goes on to claim that there are two species of this argument, springing from two different understandings of the "moral order" described in first premise. On the first, "universalistic" reading, moral order would include the universe being such that "morally good actions will probably contribute to a good world-history."<sup>19</sup> On the second "individualistic" reading, moral order would involve the universe being such that virtue and self interest or happiness ultimately coincide.

The first reading has some force. That is, if I believe that my performing a right action ultimately contributes to the overall goodness of the universe, then right action takes on a greater measure of importance. Further, if I believe that things will ultimately turn out badly no matter what I do, or that the long term effects of my action are as likely to secure bad as results as they are to secure good ones, then this will contribute towards demoralization and ambivalence about right action.

Still, as Adams points out, it is not clear that the connection between belief in a universal moral order and the motivation for moral action is really as tight as the argument claims. First, it appears that we can, at most, say that the belief in an absence of moral order would merely *tend* to lead to such demoralization. Second, one might think that considerations of "global moral order" might have minimal practical weight for most people. In addition, this Kantian argument fails to take account of the fact that the universe might exhibit a moral order even without any theistic God. For example, one could hold that an impersonal system of karmic management might suffice, as many Hindus and Buddhists hold.

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p.151.

The second reading might seem to have greater force since it plays on the more practically relevant concern of one's own self-interest. But there is something strange about bringing myself to believe that acting morally is in my interest *simply in order to motivate my doing it* (that is, to motivate myself to do it in the face of contrary desires). This is strange for the simple reason that if I *have* an overriding reason to think that acting morally is a good thing for me to do, then this alone should suffice to provide proper motivation in the face of temptation to do otherwise. And if I *lack* an overriding reason to think that acting morally is good for me, there is simply no good reason to go about adopting beliefs (such as that acting morally is ultimately in my self interest) simply to get myself to act morally (that is, simply to get myself to act in a way that I have no overriding reason to act).

Adams uses this second reading to suggest still a third motivational argument which he sketches as follows:

It is widely thought that moral judgments have an action- and preference-guiding force that they could not have unless everyone had reason to follow them in his actions and preferences. But there has also been widespread dissatisfaction with arguments purporting to show that everyone does have reason always to be moral. . . . It is plausibly assumed, however, that virtually everyone has a deep and strong desire for his own happiness. So if happiness will in the long run be strictly proportioned to moral goodness, that explains how virtually everyone does have an important reason to want to be good.

The argument concludes by affirming that since this common claim concerning moral norms is more likely to be true if theism is true than not, this feature of morality provides a reason to believe in theism.

This argument has a few controversial premises. First, it seems to depend on an undefended rejection of internalism (that is, that ethical prescriptions have a motivational force quite apart from any connection they might have to securing any resulting

outcomes, including my own happiness). But more importantly for my purposes, it seems to fall prey to the objection we have considered before, namely, that while this feature of morality might require appeal to something beyond what we ordinarily take nature to contain, this does not necessarily require an appeal to *theism*. So, again, it appears that appeal to any of the Asian religions which posit a system of karmic management will fit the bill just as well as theism.<sup>20</sup>

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In this paper we have taken a brief tour of a variety of arguments aiming to show that ethics requires or is best explained by theism. While some of the arguments are suggestive merely of supernaturalism, others come closer to requiring something like theism. Still, each of these arguments seems in need of further support from their respective defenders.

It's worth noting in closing that aside from the first theoretical argument, the other arguments are all independent of one another. Thus one might claim that the arguments taken together provide a weighty cumulative case for the need for theism in grounding ethics—a case which cannot be made by appeal to the individual arguments. So, if ethical normativity requires a personal, necessary existence which maintains universal and/or individual moral order, we seem to have need of a ground of morality which looks much closer to the God of theism. Of course, whether such a cumulative case can be

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<sup>20</sup> It is worth noting, however, that many have argued that these systems of karmic management themselves are incoherent unless they involve appeal to some sort of organizing mind. Thus, appeals to karmic management might plausibly end up requiring something quite like theism in the end as well. See, for example, Robin Collins, "Eastern Religions," in *Reason for the Hope Within*, Michael Murray, editor. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Press, 1999, p.206-8.

made depends on the plausibility of its parts. And, as we have seen, more work needs to be done in defense of the parts before the cumulative argument can succeed.