

Metaphysics and the Good

*Themes from the Philosophy
of Robert Merrihew Adams*

EDITED BY

Samuel Newlands and Larry M. Jorgensen

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Contents

Introduction	I
<i>Samuel Newlands and Larry M. Jorgensen</i>	
1. A Philosophical Autobiography	16
<i>Robert Merrihew Adams</i>	
2. Yet Another Anti-Molinist Argument	33
<i>Dean Zimmerman</i>	
3. The Contingency of Existence	95
<i>Michael Nelson</i>	
4. Consciousness and Introspective Inaccuracy	156
<i>Derk Pereboom</i>	
5. Kant on Apriority and the Spontaneity of Cognition	188
<i>Houston Smit</i>	
6. Moral Necessity in Leibniz's Account of Human Freedom	252
<i>R. C. Sleight, Jr.</i>	
7. Leibniz on Final Causation	272
<i>Marleen Rozemond</i>	
8. Does Efficient Causation Presuppose Final Causation?	
Aquinas vs. Early Modern Mechanism	295
<i>Paul Hoffman</i>	
9. Herder and Kant on History: Their Enlightenment Faith	313
<i>Allen Wood</i>	
10. Moral Obligations and Social Commands	343
<i>Susan Wolf</i>	
11. Adams on the Nature of Obligation	368
<i>Jeffrey Stout</i>	
12. The Grasshopper, Aristotle, Bob Adams, and Me	388
<i>Shelly Kagan</i>	
<i>Bibliography of Robert Merrihew Adams</i>	405
<i>Index</i>	413

Introduction

SAMUEL NEWLANDS AND LARRY M. JORGENSEN

When several of Robert Merrihew Adams's colleagues and students organized a conference at Yale University in honor of his retirement, we faced what proved to be a daunting question. What turn of phrase best encapsulates Adams's seminal work in so many different areas of philosophy—metaphysics, philosophy of religion, history of philosophy, and ethics? As inspiration proved elusive, despair set in. In the end, we settled for mere description and named the gathering 'Metaphysics, History, Ethics: A Conference in Honor of Robert Merrihew Adams'. Some of the papers in this volume were presented at that conference in the spring of 2005; others were solicited and added later. But all of the papers appear in print here for the first time, and all pursue the conference's original goal of honoring Adams by exploring and sometimes challenging the themes and topics that have animated his philosophical life.

But while we think the present volume's title is catchier, the more significant question behind our original naming dilemma remains. What thematically and systematically connects Adams's work on ontology, modality, identity, existence, idealism, arguments for the existence of God, the problem of evil, divine knowledge, faith, love, metaethics, virtue theory, divine-command theory, as well as on historical figures such as Leibniz, Descartes, Berkeley, Kant, Kierkegaard, and Schleiermacher? Having learned our lesson, we turned directly to the source this time and asked Adams what *he* thought tied together his philosophical interests and achievements. His reply constitutes the first essay in this volume, 'A Philosophical Autobiography' (Chapter 1).

In that essay, Adams is reluctant to enforce complete thematic unity on his own views. He does not, for instance, appeal to an original insight as

the wellspring for all of his subsequent philosophical projects. And rightly so—as he tells the story, his interest in some of the fields in which he made his most prominent contributions was kindled by very contingent factors, like teaching demands at early jobs. Nor does Adams provide a neat and comprehensive retrospective framework within which all his views neatly fit. This too seems right, especially given the ways his interests and contributions continue to evolve, expanding into his ongoing work on virtues, sexual ethics, and the nature of existence, to name a few.

The essays in this volume, summarized below, explore facets of many of Adams's conclusions in all of the most significant categories of his work. But, before turning to the essays themselves, we want to draw our readers' attention to several broader, interconnected themes that inform Adams's approach to philosophy itself. This is partly to summarize some of the more sweeping conclusions Adams makes in Chapter 1. But these broader themes also deeply informed our decisions about creating and editing this volume. We hope that by understanding a bit more about Adams's views on philosophy, readers will better understand what to expect in this collection.

In his autobiographical essay, Adams narrates his 'falling in love with philosophy', and this is no mere *façon de parler*. Love plays an important role in Adams's work in metaethics—for example, the loving character of God conditions what his divine-command theorist will accept as ethically binding. But the place of love in Adams's thought extends well beyond ethics and informs his view of the practice of philosophy itself. For Adams, the objects of philosophical reflection are objects accepting of and, more importantly, worthy of love. As she was for Plato, the philosopher for Adams is not paradigmatically a thinker, or a theoretician, or an experimenter, or an inventor, or even an admirer. She is a lover.

Certainly on some conceptions of philosophy, Adams's claim initially sounds incredible. If, for instance, one thought that the objects of philosophical study are primarily problems or confusions, such things may well seem hardly worthy of our love. Philosophy would be characterized by activities like solving and dissolving, not the pursuit and treasuring apropos to the lover. What is it about the objects of philosophical reflection that makes them even candidates for our love?

In another echo of Plato, Adams describes the realm of philosophy as 'full of objects of great beauty'. There is a beauty, Adams thinks, to the ways philosophers have raised, clarified, and engaged philosophical questions.

But though formal work in philosophy may invoke the sense of beauty akin to an elegant mathematical proof, it may be more difficult to see the beauty in, say, competing theories of direct reference or new interpretations of Aristotle's *De Anima*. So if it is the alleged beauty of philosophical objects that attracts our attention and affection qua philosophical lovers, what could explain the beauty of, for example, reflection dedicated to exhaustively and correctly completing the sentence, '*S knows that p iff* _____'?

Once again, Plato is not far from Adams's reply, as we ascend the ladder from beautiful things to beauty itself. The practice of philosophy is, Adams summarizes, a 'way of loving the Good'. The beauty of philosophical objects that attracts our love is grounded in their being reflections—some dimmer than others, no doubt—of the Good itself. So not only does philosophical activity turn out to be a way of pursuing beautiful objects, it is more fundamentally a loving that is directed, perhaps unaware, at the ultimate source of such beauty and goodness.

However sympathetic one may be towards these Platonic metaphors, it may still be easy to lose a grip on how such lofty imagery connects up to the actual and unwieldy collection of work that the profession has churned out over the last half-century and to which Adams himself has contributed significantly. Here it will be helpful to shift from Plato to another of Adams's philosophical soulmates: Leibniz. Leibniz famously believed that modal truths, propositions about the way the world actually is, might have been, or must be, are ultimately grounded in God's intellect. Surveying the structure and content of possible worlds is surveying, in a sense, divine real estate. In fact, Leibniz himself thought that one could validly reason from the existence of necessary truths to the existence of God. Whether or not he thinks such an argument ought to *persuade* anyone, Adams is deeply attracted to this broadly Leibnizian picture, according to which accounts of the ways the world might be are in fact tracing structures grounded in the Divine mind. Add in the further claim that philosophical theories are attempts to articulate the ways the world is, or might have been, or must be, and we begin to understand why Adams would describe philosophical activity as a way of loving the Good and the Beautiful. Philosophical reflection, at bottom, is a form of religious devotion. (As Adams emphasizes, of course, philosophy need not proceed or even understand itself explicitly within any such religious framework to be successful. Philosophy is also 'worth loving for its own sake', he affirms.)

It is here, hovering between Plato and Leibniz, that many of Adams's most pervasive philosophical commitments also coalesce: Christian theism, Neoplatonism, moral realism, and metaphysical idealism.

While not outright skeptical,¹ Adams doubts that philosophy has succeeded in definitively answering many of the questions that it has posed to itself about the contours of the world. The perennial openness of many of philosophy's central questions surely supports this doubt. On the other hand, Adams thinks philosophers have made significant progress in what he describes as 'exploring possible ways of thinking, giving us a clearer, deeper, and fuller understanding of them'. In fact, Adams adds that the flourishing of analytic philosophy along this dimension may be unmatched since the high Scholastic period in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. He notes, however, that such flourishing usually comes when we are engaged in systematic inquiries—or inquiries about the systematic inquiries of others. 'Philosophy resists piecemeal treatment . . . Philosophical theses tend to be fragments of actual or potential systems, and to look quite different in different systematic contexts'. This becomes most clear when we critically engage the systematic thoughts of others, an activity Adams likens to 'pulling a string here to see what moves over there, so to speak'.

Adams's own work on the history of philosophy exemplifies this approach. When he engages Leibniz, it is neither as a deferential apologist nor as an unsympathetic critic. He prods Leibniz's views and tries to stretch them, sometimes in new and uncomfortable directions, but always with the hope of shedding fresh light back on Leibniz's original views. It is through such experimental poking that we gain a greater understanding of not only Leibniz but also the ways in which philosophical concerns and questions hang—or fall—together. This kind of interpretive engagement with the systems of others reminds us, Adams writes, of 'the intrinsic systematicity of the subject matter, the interrelatedness of the problems of philosophy'.

And although Adams's work on figures in modern philosophy shows his giftedness for such philosophical interpretation, his work also contains some system-building of its own. And so, in this volume, we propose to

¹ Though Adams has identified himself as a 'skeptical realist' in philosophical theology (Robert M. Adams, *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 5).

explore Adams's systematic views in the very way in which he commends us to approach the systems of others—namely, with a good deal of poking and prodding (metaphorically speaking, of course). Instead of merely summarizing or reflecting on Adams's views, contributors were asked to honor Adams by engaging his views in this more exploratory way. Some take as a starting-point a conclusion of Adams's and run with it in new directions. Others attempt to replace a key idea of Adams's and explore the consequences of such a modification. Yet others attempt to insert Adams's views into a new context of discussion to see what light may be shed on both the context and Adams's original views. In all cases, we believe that the benefits of what Adams himself has done to others are earned here as well. Not only do we gain a greater understanding of possible ways of thinking about a range of philosophical topics, we also gain a greater understanding of the contours of and connections within Adams's thought. And that, we believe, is both a rewarding and intrinsically excellent advance.

Dean Zimmerman begins this exploration in his essay 'Yet Another Anti-Molinist Argument' (Chapter 2) by continuing one of Adams's own philosophical projects. To set the context, we begin with a small historical note: although mainstream philosophy may be, in at least some quarters, growing friendlier to theistic belief, Adams's work in the 1960s and 70s occurred in an environment in which philosophical theology was regarded with considerable suspicion if not outright hostility. Indeed, it was the work of well-trained analytic philosophers like Adams that helped earn philosophy of religion at least a grudging respectability. This rebirth of philosophy of religion in Anglo-American philosophy witnessed, among other things, a rebirth of one of the more hotly debated controversies in sixteenth-century philosophical theology. The controversy surrounded the range of God's knowledge. In the sixteenth-century version, which simmered down only after Papal intervention, almost everyone agreed that propositions describing future free actions of creatures have a truth-value that is known by God. (One recent development in analytic philosophy of religion has been the emergence of a wide range of voices challenging this point of agreement.) The controversy concerned propositions stating what creatures *would* freely do independently of and logically prior to God's creation of the actual world (now often called 'counterfactuals of freedom' (henceforth CFs)). So, if I had slept in yesterday, would I have freely eaten

breakfast at noon? As Adams colorfully replied, ‘God only knows.’ *Dramatic pause*. ‘Or does He?’²

Adams has led the charge against those who would answer affirmatively, those known as ‘Molinists’ (so named after the sixteenth-century Jesuit Luis de Molina). The great allure of Molinism is a way of reconciling God’s risk-free, sovereign control over the world with creaturely libertarian freedom. Adams and others have argued repeatedly that this attempted reconciliation fails. As part of his most influential criticism of Molinism, Adams argues that the truth-values of CFs would have to be groundless or *brutely* true or false. In reply, modern-day Molinists have generally accepted the brute nature of CFs and have focused on showing that this admission does not entail any untoward consequences. In his essay, Zimmerman counters that the Molinist concession to Adams and others about the bruteness of CFs forces Molinists to concede also a surprising possibility: it is possible that an omnipotent God couldn’t have created free creatures in the first place. There are possible worlds in which the CFs line up in such a way that God would have freedom-undermining manipulative control over the outcome of such worlds. Molinists should admit, in other words, that it is metaphysically possible that the proposed Molinist reconciliation of divine sovereignty and human freedom fails. And, Zimmerman argues, admitting that *this* is a metaphysical possibility is unacceptable for both Molinists and non-Molinists alike.

In his ‘The Contingency of Existence’ (Chapter 3) Michael Nelson begins by considering the technical and more broadly philosophical problems of rejecting necessitarianism, the thesis that the actual world is the only possible world. Despite the fact that most of us have strong intuitions that the world might have gone differently, it is notoriously hard to cash out in both formal and metaphysical ways the claims that the actual world could have contained fewer or more objects than it actually does. After establishing both the formal and metaphysical pressures towards necessitarianism, Nelson discusses a number of different disarming strategies aimed at preserving our intuitions of contingent existence. As Nelson describes the most plausible responses, all claim that the apparent threat of necessitarianism rests on an equivocation; different respondents disagree on what they diagnose as the fundamental confusion. Does the threat of necessitarianism

² Adams, ‘Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil’, *ibid.*, 77.

rest on a confusion between (a) modally discriminating and modally promiscuous natures (anti-essentialism); (b) ways of being versus ways of existing (Meinongianism); (c) contingent concreteness and contingent existence (Linsky and Zalta); (d) actually existing objects and non-actually existing objects (Lewisian possibilism); (e) unexemplified and exemplified Platonic essences (Plantinga); or (f) the way things are *in* a possible world and the way things are *at* a possible world (Adams, et al.)? Nelson argues that although each of these options has more plausibility than their critics, including Adams, admit, all but one are burdened with unnecessarily high theoretical and ontological costs. The winner, Nelson argues, is a version of Adams's own Aristotelian actualist solution, which has the further advantage of motivating a plausible solution to the technical concerns of non-necessitarianism as well.

In 'Consciousness and Introspective Inaccuracy' (Chapter 4) Derk Pereboom offers a broadly Kantian response to Frank Jackson's knowledge argument, and he argues that such a response can mitigate the challenge the knowledge argument poses to physicalism. Adams, in his 'Flavors, Colors, and God',³ has argued that there is an explanatory gap between physical and phenomenal properties, and the prospects of closing the gap are very slim. If there is a distinction between the phenomenal qualities, like the sensation of red, and physical qualities, we can always raise the question why these phenomenal qualities are correlated with the particular underlying physical qualities. Why aren't the physical states correlated with a *different* phenomenal property, or none at all? In response to this challenge, Pereboom argues that there is an unexplored open possibility—namely, that introspection is inaccurate, that certain phenomenal properties are not represented accurately via introspection. If this is true, then there may be no gap between the *accurate* representation of phenomenal properties and the physical properties with which they are correlated.

Pereboom argues that a causal account of introspective representation would support this thesis. In a way analogous to sensory representation, where our knowledge of external objects is mediated by sensory representations that are caused by them, Pereboom argues (along Kantian lines) that the introspective representation of phenomenal properties is similarly mediated. Given this mediation, it is an open possibility that the introspective

³ Adams, 'Flavors, Colors, and God', *ibid.*, 243–62.

representations represent phenomenal properties inaccurately (i.e., ‘as having a qualitative nature that they really lack’). This epistemic possibility allows Pereboom to give the following response to the knowledge argument: Mary’s complete physical knowledge provides her with all she needs to represent accurately the real nature of the new phenomenal state that she encounters on leaving the room (i.e., her representation of a tomato as red). The phenomenal property represented introspectively as seeing red may not be as it is introspectively represented. So, on Pereboom’s open possibility the following disjunction would apply to Mary: either (a) there is no phenomenal property represented by Mary’s introspective representation of red, and so all Mary acquires in leaving the room is a false belief, the belief that there is such a phenomenal property, and so she comes to know nothing new, or (b) there *is* a phenomenal property represented by Mary’s introspective representation of red, but that property is not *accurately* represented; the full and accurate representation is included in what Mary already knew while in the room, and so again she comes to know nothing new.

Whereas Pereboom has offered a broadly Kantian account of introspection, Houston Smit explores the concept of the a priori in Kant in ‘Kant on Apriority and the Spontaneity of Cognition’ (Chapter 5). In his book on Leibniz, Adams points out that the notions of a priori and a posteriori proof underwent a transition in the early modern period. Originally, ‘a priori’ and ‘a posteriori’ proofs were proofs ‘from the cause’ and ‘from the effects’, respectively,⁴ and it is this sense that can still be found in the *Port Royal Logic*, for example. But at some point in the early modern period a transition was made from these notions of a priori and a posteriori proof to a new sense in which ‘a priori’ simply meant ‘non-empirical’. Adams goes on to suggest that ‘Leibniz played a crucial role in the transformation of the meaning of “a priori”.’⁵

However, Smit argues that the earlier notion of ‘a priori’, what he calls the ‘from-grounds’ notion, can be found in Kant as well, and that the transition from this notion of a priority to the newer sense is a consequence of Kant’s system. Smit offers substantial evidence in favor of his thesis that Kant was operating with the ‘from-grounds’ notion of the a priori,

⁴ Adams, *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 109–10.

⁵ *Ibid.*

which he thinks clarifies Kant's project in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In addition to this, Smit's argument provides a nice way of sharpening the differences between Leibniz and Kant. If both are operating from similar notions of the a priori—namely, the 'from-grounds' notion—how is it that they come to rather different conclusions? Smit argues that, given Kant's account of cognition, the 'non-empirical' notion of the a priori is entailed by the 'from-grounds' notion of the a priori, though there are no concepts of singular things by which one (perhaps with a sufficiently expansive mind) could come to know singular things a priori. That is, unlike for Leibniz, the a priori for Kant does not give us any grip on the things-in-themselves. Smit argues that Kant's account of the genesis of a priori thought is illuminated by the recognition that he is working not with a simply 'non-empirical' notion of the a priori, but with the 'from-grounds' notion of the a priori.

Robert Sleight joins Adams in challenging recent scholarship on Leibniz's account of moral necessity in his essay 'Moral Necessity in Leibniz's Account of Human Freedom' (Chapter 6). Some have argued that Leibniz is operating with a concept of moral necessity derived from that found in earlier Spanish Jesuit philosophies. According to the Jesuit theory of moral necessity, Sleight says, whenever a human agent makes a choice, this choice is *morally*, but not *metaphysically* necessary. This means, roughly, that the agent has the power to choose otherwise, that making a different choice in the same circumstances would not be contradictory nor miraculous, and that God nevertheless knows infallibly what the agent would choose were the circumstances to obtain.

Sleight argues that this view is inconsistent with Leibniz's view that all properties of a substance are intrinsic to that substance (the 'doctrine of superintrinsicness') and that all future states are caused by the prior internal states of the substance alone (the 'principle of spontaneity'). Similarly, the principle of spontaneity works against this theory of moral necessity, Sleight says. The moral necessitarians used the locution 'inclines without necessitating' to mark those free actions that rational agents make, and which would not apply to non-rational agents. Sleight argues instead that Leibniz intends the locution to apply equally to non-rational agents. According to Sleight, Leibniz means simply to say that when some particular state of affairs obtains, it is *causally*, but not *metaphysically*, necessary that the effect obtains as well (causation understood relative to the appropriate domain). And, given the principle of spontaneity, *all* effects are causally

necessitated by a being's prior states alone (miracles aside), and so, for Leibniz, moral necessity extends much further than the earlier moral necessitarians intended.

In 'Leibniz on Final Causation' (Chapter 7) Marleen Rozemond develops an account of Leibniz's theory of causation that differs from the one Sleight offers at the end of his essay. Rozemond argues that despite Leibniz's apparent separation of efficient and final causation to two separate domains (efficient causation operating at the level of bodies, final causation operating at the level of monads), Leibniz in fact allowed *both* efficient and final causation at the level of monads. This is in the spirit of an argument of Adams's that what is denied at the monadic level is not efficient causation, but merely *mechanical* causation. Rozemond situates Leibniz's theory of causation against the background of scholastic theories of causation, a necessary step if one is to understand Leibniz's revival of substantial forms and the final causes that are unique to them.

One objection to final causation that was prominent even among certain scholastics is that final causation requires knowledge of the end, and so final causation requires a mental substance. By reviving the notion of substantial forms, Leibniz at the same time revived the possibility of final causation. However, given the requirement of mentality for final causation, it could operate only on the level of simple substances. And so, given that bodies are not simple, Leibniz separates the domains of final and efficient causation, a separation that would have been foreign to the Aristotelians. But Rozemond goes on to argue that the separation is not complete. She identifies texts that suggest a sort of efficient causation even at the monadic level. What distinguishes the two realms is not an *absence* of efficient causation at the level of monads, rather it is the *presence* of final causes. But if this is so, how do we make sense of Leibniz's frequent claims about the divisions of the realms of final and efficient causation? Rozemond believes that beyond the basic causal story, the two realms are more *intelligible* through their respective forms of causation—bodily motion is made intelligible through efficient mechanical causes, and mental activity is made intelligible through intentions and volitions, the *ends* towards which the activity is directed.

In his 'Does Efficient Causation Presuppose Final Causation?: Aquinas vs. Early Modern Mechanism' (Chapter 8) Paul Hoffman pursues the same issues as Rozemond, but moves in a very different direction. Hoffman

answers the question in his title in the affirmative: efficient causation *does* presuppose final causation. So, even mechanical causation will involve final causes. In his argument, Hoffman appeals to Aquinas' account of final causation to show that the early modern philosophers were wrong to think their theories of motion had dispensed with final causes.

According to Hoffman, Aquinas has a core notion of final causation, as a cause tending to some end, and a full-bodied notion of final causation, which adds additional requirements, such as the requirements that the end be a good and that the agent acts with the purpose of achieving that end. The core notion of final causation is presupposed by efficient causation, Hoffman says, since any cause is directed at some particular effect—if unhindered, the cause will bring about the specified effect. This meets the minimal requirements of Aquinas' core notion of final causation—namely, that the cause tends to some particular effect rather than another. The early modern philosophers resisted the use of final causation in natural philosophy, and they provided an account of inertia that was supposed to undermine the teleological explanation of nature. Hoffman considers the views of Descartes, Newton, and Spinoza and argues that their theories do not really dispense with final causes. Hoffman adds that the stripped-down version of final causation is robust enough to remain philosophically interesting.

In his 'Herder and Kant on History: Their Enlightenment Faith' (Chapter 9) Allen Wood corrects what he sees as a gross misunderstanding of the relation between Kant and Herder on the nature of human history. In the course of developing this interpretive point, Wood also provides a broader defense of an Enlightenment philosophy of history against its more recent critics. Such critics charge that the horrors of the twentieth century alone put the lie to any 'naive' Enlightenment belief in an objective purpose that guides human history towards some grand, telic realization of reason and rationality. The spread of the ideals of autonomy, freedom, and rationality, it is charged, have obviously and dramatically failed to usher in a new golden age of peace and justice. In this polemic, Herder is sometimes invoked as an important counter-Enlightenment voice who stood against any such 'naive' Kantian faith in the ideal of historical progressivism.

All of this—the charge of naivety, the rejection of an intrinsic, unfolding purpose to human history, and the appeal to Herder by

Enlightenment critics—is fundamentally wrong, according to Wood. After sorting out the points of disagreement and, far more importantly, the broadly Enlightenment framework of agreement between Herder and Kant, Wood appeals to a secularized version of Adams’s ‘moral faith’ to rebut the charge that Enlightenment approaches to human history are naive, immune to revision, or subject to dangerous totalizing tendencies. Such an orienting commitment to historical purpose, Wood uses Adams to draw out, is compatible with a healthy skepticism about humanity’s realization of Enlightenment ideals, a keen awareness of our widespread and horrific failures to date, and a renewed effort to pattern our understanding of the direction of history after such revisable ideals. Indeed, Wood presses, our own need to exercise moral agency in response to such horrors renders such ideals necessary.

Susan Wolf also experiments with a secularized version of one of Adams’s conclusions, focusing on his work on moral obligation in her ‘Moral Obligations and Social Commands’ (Chapter 10). Adams has proposed that our moral obligations are grounded in the commands of a loving God, arguing that such a divine-based theory of obligation, one whose content is often revealed and embedded in our social obligations, provides moral demands with their requisite objectivity and determinateness. Wolf is joined by Jeffrey Stout (‘Adams on the Nature of Obligation’ (Chapter 11)) in exploring whether Adams’s attempt to explain moral obligations in terms of social obligations can be had without the high costs sometimes associated with additional appeals to God.

Stout’s essay begins by worrying that Adams is inconsistent in his efforts to determine what the commands of the loving God are in the first place. Stout points out that Adams’s Christian scriptures contain portrayals of divine commands to engage in activities that Adams himself admits are morally impermissible, such as murder and genocide. So, applying Plato’s *Euthyphro* dilemma, either Adams’s theory admits morally impermissible actions as permissible, or else there exists some further side-constraint on what counts as a revealed and morally binding command of God. Stout thinks that Adams accepts the second horn by limiting what counts as a revealed and binding command of a loving God based on its coherence with either our moral intuitions about goodness or with our existing social practices. But then it begins to sound like these moral intuitions and actual social practices are really doing the explanatory work

in accounting for our moral obligation in the first place. At the very least, Stout argues, we seem no better off at discerning our de facto moral obligations for having adopted a metaphysically loaded divine-command theory than if we had simply tried to read off our obligations by examining actual societal practices and intuitions without all the metaphysical baggage.

Adams might retort that such a secularized version of his social-command theory fails to provide the metaphysical objectivity and determinateness that moral obligations are supposed to have. However, Stout replies, once we turn to examining actual social practices as the source for trying to read off our de facto moral obligations, we lose confidence that our obligations are or must be so determinate in the first place. And so not only do the metaphysical posits of Adams's divine-command theory create difficult epistemic burdens, the best way of discharging them may call into question the very motivation for positing the theistic framework in the first place.

Wolf agrees with Stout that Adams's appeals to divine commands in this context are both unnecessary and problematic. She then uses several of Adams's insights to develop an account of moral obligations that is based on our actual social conventions, *sans* Adams's theological appeals. Wolf first argues in support of Adams that moral obligations are neither extensionally nor intensionally identical to the dictates of reason and offers several arguments to support the need for another source. But she thinks that a suitably developed theory of social obligations can do just that. Of course, as Wolf admits, there will be associated epistemic burdens with a secular social command theory, such as the difficulties in spelling out the identity conditions for societies and societal membership. But, even more threatening to the theory, isn't history populated with examples of societies that have commanded its members to behave in ways that we take to be morally impermissible? Must we now swallow the *first* horn of the *Euthyphro* dilemma and admit that our moral obligations are so plastic and historically relativized that even genocide might be morally permissible for some? Instead of appealing to the good and loving character of God, Wolf's proposed constraint appeals back to the deliverances of good moral reasoning as a necessary, but in itself insufficient basis for moral obligation. She notes in conclusion that her proposal may have the effect of diminishing the importance of the category of moral

obligation altogether. But, she argues, such a loss would actually be morally beneficial.

Shelly Kagan's essay 'The Grasshopper, Aristotle, Bob Adams, and Me' (Chapter 12) wonders what we would do in a Utopia. Supposing, he says, that all technological limitations have been overcome, there is no scarcity of any kind, and personal conflict has been eliminated. What would we do? Kagan points out that it is initially tempting to view this thought experiment as a way to get at what is intrinsically valuable, but, he argues, this would be a mistake. There are, he says, intrinsically valuable instrumental values. But, drawing on suggestions made by Adams, Kagan claims that perhaps no society, not even a utopian society, could contain all intrinsically valuable activities. But this should not deter us from asking the question, since in the end a Utopia may be a preferable society overall, even if it comes at the cost of some intrinsic goods.

So, returning to the original question, what would we do in Utopia? Kagan considers Bernard Suits's suggestion that utopian activity will be limited to game-playing and argues that this does not provide a sufficiently rich life to be a desirable one. Here again, Kagan develops an idea Adams discusses—the suggestion that well-being consists in the enjoyment of the excellent, which Kagan glosses as a pleasure in the possession and consumption of intrinsic goods. This will include such activities as the contemplation of the nature and laws of the universe, the contemplation of God, and the appreciation of beauty. This helps us appreciate the possibility of certain relations that cannot be separated from the activities of relating—to *be* in a certain relation with someone entails that we engage in *the activity* of relating. This, Kagan argues, doesn't appear to be an artificial constraint, and so not a game, and yet it does appear to add a good to one's life. So, one thing we will do in Utopia is to relate to one another—this will be an activity worth doing for its own sake.

This is the sort of activity we now turn over to the reader. The essays in this volume contribute to the common projects of exploring themes in Adams's work and advancing ideas that might be suitably applied in other philosophical systems. We believe that in doing so they shed new light on both Adams's own views and abiding questions in metaphysics, philosophy of religion, history of philosophy, and ethics. Can Adams's positions handle these challenges, proposed modifications, or new applications? Or would the philosophical theories on display in

this volume be more fruitfully embedded in alternative ways of trying to understand the world? These are questions we hope this volume stimulates among our readers. For Adams, reflecting on and wrestling with such questions is a way of loving the good. For us, it's also a way of honoring Adams.

1

A Philosophical Autobiography

ROBERT MERRIHEW ADAMS

My colleagues at Yale, generously organizing a conference in my honor, asked me to give an address at the banquet. I found it difficult to decide what to talk about. The idea came to me only the day before: when, if not on such an occasion, would it be appropriate for me to indulge in autobiographical reflection in public? Writing up my remarks in the present essay, I am rethinking as well as reconstructing them from the page of notes I had written down before the talk.

Is there a unity to my philosophical concerns? Their diversity made it hard to find a thematically unified title for the conference. To me, however, they seem to hang together; and one of my aims in narrating my life as a philosopher is to trace ways in which they have become integrated over the years. Still, I don't want to impose too complete a unity on them, either in narrative or in life. Each philosophical question demands attention in its own terms; and if one goes on learning, integration of one's views is a never-ending task.

I

I begin the story with my earliest memory of engaging in philosophical reasoning of any consequence. When I was fourteen or fifteen I became an idealist of a Berkeleyan sort. I had not heard of Berkeley, but I had recently been taught the modern, subjectivist view of colors, tastes, smells, and other so-called 'secondary qualities', which forms a starting-point for idealist argument in his *Three Dialogues*. I remember sitting on the lawn on a bright summer day, and wondering what a blade of grass could be like in itself. What could be its intrinsic qualities if the vivid green color and

the fresh grass smell were merely aspects of the way the grass affected my senses? The size and shape of the blade of grass were still supposed to be ‘primary qualities’, and real enough. But I was left with the question what it was that existed inside the space defined by those geometrical properties. What could it be like, in itself, for grass to exist in that space, rather than something else or nothing at all? I couldn’t imagine what qualities could fill the space with reality if colors, tastes, and smells were ruled out as subjective.

Such questions led me to idealist thoughts. Should I really believe there is anything the grass is ‘like’ in itself? Maybe its reality is located where the vivid qualities are. Perhaps, that is, it exists only in my seeing, feeling, and smelling. I won’t claim that I worked out a complete idealist theory. But I remember that I did ask myself why different people have similar perceptions (as I unskeptically assumed they do) if what we perceive has its reality in our personal perceptions. And I gave myself the same theological answer that Berkeley had given.

A year or so later, in reading, I encountered Berkeley’s name, and the formula that ‘to be is to be perceived’. I was ready to call myself a Berkeleyan. I wouldn’t say exactly that about myself now. I suspect that Leibniz, in his panpsychist version of the ontological primacy of the mental or quasi-mental, may have been closer to the truth than Berkeley. But I continue to have broadly idealist views. I still doubt that any wholly unperceiving thing could exist as a thing in itself.

But that is not the main thread through my philosophical biography. A more organizing theme can be found in the reading I was doing when I finally met Berkeley’s name and the words *esse est percipi*. It was in a book of theology by Paul Tillich. My later teenage years and my early twenties were a time of both deeper appropriation of Christian faith and intense wrestling with religious doubts and puzzlements. I was driven to theology, and eventually to philosophy, by a religious need to think through for myself questions about God and about Christianity. When it came time to choose my undergraduate major, I seriously considered history and classics as well as philosophy. I didn’t think I would enjoy history or classics less; I chose philosophy because it seemed more important or more urgent. At a personal level it was what I needed to think about. As a matter of religious vocation also I had decided before going to college that I should become a minister; by the time I chose my major I had come to think it would be part

of my vocation to be a theologian. And it seemed to me that philosophy was the most important intellectual discipline for theology. I still hold that view about the relation of philosophy and theology, unfashionable as it may have become in theology.

II

Philosophically I was fortunate to enter Princeton University as an undergraduate in 1955, the year in which Gregory Vlastos and Carl Hempel arrived to play their central part in building the great philosophy department that Princeton has had for many decades now. The two philosophy courses I took in my first year were historical, but by the end of the year I had begun to be clued in to analytical philosophy. I bought A. J. Ayer's *Language, Truth, and Logic*, and read it during the following summer. I was immensely impressed by it. When I first had to face a class as a teaching fellow, several years later at Cornell, I was surprised at how difficult it was to explain why I had ever thought the verifiability criterion of meaning plausible enough to be worth worrying about. But in the summer after my freshman year at Princeton, I was almost persuaded of the fundamental soundness of Ayer's version of logical empiricism. And for several years I saw myself as thinking about philosophy, including the philosophy of religion, in an empiricist framework.

Among several outstanding teachers at Princeton, the one who did the most to excite and deepen my interest in analytical philosophy was Hilary Putnam, then an assistant professor there. I think the best philosophy course I ever took was a course in 'Advanced Logic' that Putnam co-taught with Paul Benacerraf, then still a graduate student. Their lectures covered a lot of logical theory, concluding with a fairly full sketch of Gödel's proof of his famous incompleteness theorem, and a discussion of its implications. That was excellent, but even more important for me were the 'preceptorials' (discussion sections), which I had with Putnam. Each week we read and discussed one of the great papers in philosophical logic from the previous six decades or so, including: Russell, 'On Denoting'; Frege, 'On Sense and Reference' (on *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*); Tarski on truth; Carnap, 'Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology'; Quine, 'On What There Is' and 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism'; and others. From my years at Princeton, and especially

from Putnam and Hempel, I retain a conception of analytical philosophy that owes more to its German than its British roots, and was shaped by interests in logic and philosophy of science.

At Princeton in the late 1950s all undergraduates wrote two junior essays that were term-long projects, and a senior thesis that was a year-long project. My junior essays were both historical, on Kant and Aristotle. Vlastos thought well enough of the Aristotle essay that he offered to advise me in the project if I wanted to develop it further as a senior thesis. I would have been wise to accept the offer. And I might have been even wiser to expand my essay on Kant's argument for the causal principle into a senior thesis. I think it was the most interesting thing I wrote as a student, graduate or undergraduate. I was essentially self-taught on Kant. I took on the project because I saw Kant as a philosopher I really needed to understand, and my introduction to him, in a Descartes to Kant course, had been by way of his *Prolegomena*, which has always seemed to me to leave out too much of what is most interesting and illuminating in the critical philosophy. I worked enormously hard on the argument about causality in Kant's first *Critique*, and came up with an interpretation similar to those that Peter Strawson and Jonathan Bennett were soon to publish, though of course much less fully developed than theirs.

For my senior thesis, however, my sense of my vocation led me to choose the topic of the use of language in prayer. The result was a disappointment to me, and I suspect to my advisers, Hugo Bedau and Sylvain Bromberger. It was an occasion for beginning to learn that in choosing a topic for philosophical work, the importance of the topic can matter less than the likelihood that one will have something to say that makes a difference to the discussion of the topic. It took me a long time to learn the lesson; and I fear I have remained subject to temptation in this area. Of course, it is also permanently difficult to discern what one will have something worth saying about.

III

The six years that followed my graduation from Princeton University in 1959 were devoted first to the study of theology for two years at Oxford and one year at Princeton Theological Seminary, and then to the practice of

ministry for three years as pastor of a small Presbyterian church in Montauk at the eastern tip of Long Island. During that whole time I continued to study philosophy as well as theology.

My theological program at Oxford was demanding, and I attended few classes in the philosophy faculty that were not about philosophy of religion. I went to all of J. L. Austin's 'informal instructions' in the last term he taught before his untimely death, and was awed by the performance, though I'm not sure how much philosophy there was to take away from it. I managed to go to hear Strawson and Ryle only once or twice each. I did philosophy of religion as a 'special subject', however, for my theology degree at Oxford. I went to all of Ian Ramsey's graduate classes in philosophy of religion. His approach to reconciling theology with logical empiricism was hopeless, but he was a hugely generous sponsor of stimulating and valuable discussion. And at Princeton Seminary I was fortunate to have a philosophy of religion seminar taught by John Hick, as I was at Oxford to attend Austin Farrer's lectures, for two terms, on philosophical topics in Thomas Aquinas' theology. I consider them two of the most outstanding philosophical theologians who have been at work during my lifetime, very different in their approaches; and it has been a privilege and an inspiration to know Hick over the years since then.

John Marsh, my tutor in philosophy of religion at Oxford, got me working on Anselm's so-called ontological argument for the existence of God. I noticed the modal form of the argument in Anselm's response to Gaunilo, and was intrigued by it, but at the time I couldn't find out enough about modal logic to do much with it. John Hick encouraged me to keep working on the argument, and pointed me to Charles Hartshorne's work on it, which contained the basics of the relevant modal logic; and I put in quite a bit of effort studying that during my years in Montauk.

IV

In 1965, roughly as I had planned, after three years in the pastorate, I became a student again, in the Ph.D. program in philosophy at Cornell University. The chair of the Cornell philosophy department at the time was Norman Malcolm, and his ordinary-language-based Wittgensteinianism was the dominant influence in it. In philosophical methodology, that influence did

not prevail over the more Carnapian formation I had received at Princeton. I did welcome the loosening of the grip of empiricism on analytical philosophy, but did not think it needed to take a Wittgensteinian form. What I appreciate most about my education at Cornell was the unremitting demand for clarity and rigor in thinking and writing. When I arrived at Cornell, with rather grandiose ideas about what I might accomplish and how quickly, I had hardly begun to realize how hard philosophy is. When I left three years later, I had a much better understanding of that most important philosophical lesson.

A main reason why I went to Cornell was that Nelson Pike was teaching philosophy of religion there. He was a great encouragement, both in the seriousness with which he took theological and metaphysical ideas, and in his insistence that they be treated with clarity and rigor. He was also a great adviser, supportive and accessible, wise about philosophical strategies, demanding good philosophizing but not agreement in views. I considered writing a dissertation about the relation between religion and ethics, which was really the subject that most interested me. A very good ethics course I took as an undergraduate at Princeton, from Douglas Arner, got me thinking about it, and I had thought a lot about it at Oxford. But I had written little or nothing about it, and had much less worked out about it than I had on the ontological argument. That led me to conclude that it would be wiser, with a view to finishing my degree in good time, to write on a modal form of the ontological argument. I did that, and I did indeed manage to leave Cornell with a practically finished dissertation after only three years there. Within a few years I had quarried the dissertation for one published article and a significant part of another. But while my dissertation was thoroughly competent and (I still believe) largely correct, I have never felt there was enough important news in it to warrant working the whole of it up for publication as a real book.

The most obviously important thing I got out of my work on the dissertation, besides the timely completion of a Ph.D., was a pretty good grounding in modal logic and metaphysical issues related to it. I was essentially self-taught in modal logic, as I had been at Princeton in Kant. I knew no one at Cornell who knew as much about modal logic as I did, except Arthur Fine, who had just arrived to teach philosophy of science; it was helpful to check my understanding of it with him. The closest I found to a usable textbook in modal logic was Arthur Prior's philosophically

admirable *Formal Logic*, with its difficult Polish notation; the textbook by Hughes and Cresswell was not quite out yet. But it was clear to me that the literature on the subject was growing rapidly and modal logic was opening up as a very exciting field. It would be ‘where the action was’ in the 1970s, and my dissertation work left me prepared to have a bit of the action.

Of possibly greater, though less obvious, significance for my philosophical biography was the largest positive conclusion to which I found myself tending in my reflections on the modal argument for theism. That argument never seemed to me likely to persuade anyone of the existence of God, because any doubts about its theistic conclusion so easily turn into doubts about its premises. But in reflecting more broadly on issues of necessary existence I found myself drawn to the view that in thinking about logic and mathematics we are tracing structures whose existence is as necessary as the truths of logic and mathematics. Thinking about what sort of being those structures could have, I was drawn further to the thought that they are structures of God’s thinking. I drafted a chapter on the argument for God’s existence that Leibniz had based on this thought. In the end I did not include it in the dissertation, perhaps for the good and sufficient reason that the dissertation was about a different argument; or perhaps I was not yet ready to go so far out on that metaphysical limb. A quarter of a century later I did include in my Leibniz book a chapter on the argument ‘from the reality of eternal truths’; and the argument, and the sort of theistic Platonism it represents, figure prominently in work that engages me still.

V

In 1968, I left Cornell to take up my first full-time faculty position at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. My four years at Michigan were pivotal in my philosophical formation. I don’t think that after only three years in graduate school I had fully become a professional philosopher. I think I had by the time Marilyn and I moved to UCLA in 1972. I’m not sure that six- and seven-year Ph.D. programs, now the de facto norm, are desirable; but we will have them as long as academic employers prefer fully formed professionals for entry-level jobs.

Michigan hired me primarily to teach the history of modern philosophy—specifically, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; and that

teaching proved to be, philosophically, the most formative part of my experience at Michigan. Relative to my own interests and sense of vocation, it was also one of the more contingent turning-points in my philosophical biography. I had taken a lot of courses in the history of philosophy at Cornell, and certainly considered it one of the things I was prepared to teach, and interested in teaching. A seminar on Locke, Berkeley, and Hume that Jonathan Bennett taught as a visitor at Cornell had reawakened my interest in Berkeley; and my serious interest in Leibniz began in a seminar on him that Norman Malcolm taught. Malcolm was at his best on Leibniz; he really wanted to understand the great philosopher, and the material did not engage the intolerant rigidity that too often emerged when Wittgenstein was in view. But I had done even more work on ancient philosophy, and thought I was as ready to teach ancient as early modern. And of course my number one specialization, my dissertation field, was philosophy of religion.

Michigan already had a philosopher of religion, one of the leaders of the field, George Mavrodes. They were willing for me to spend half my teaching time in philosophy of religion, or any other field of philosophy in which I might be interested and competent. But what they really wanted me to teach was the history of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy, and they were insistent that I should spend half my teaching time in that field. Finding the Michigan philosophy department very attractive, I took the job and committed myself to the teaching in early modern. I have never regretted it.

About half of the teaching I have done in my career as a whole, including a majority of my doctoral dissertation advising, has been in the history of modern philosophy. The field did not loom so large in my research plans at first. Almost all the writing that I did in it before the late 1980s began as lecture notes for teaching; but I eventually published a whole book on Leibniz.

It was quite specifically part of my job at Michigan to teach the one-semester survey course on early modern philosophy that was required of all undergraduate philosophy majors. I had very largely to invent the course for myself, as I had not taken any course that was based on the views I was coming to have of the structure of the history to be studied. Planning the course and preparing the lectures the first time I taught it was an enormous effort; I have never worked harder than I did that semester.

The work was also enormously rewarding, and a major part of my own education in philosophy. In the late 1960s, analytical philosophers who wanted to think about metaphysics were still struggling to figure out how to do it. I found that the great philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had engaged metaphysical questions quite directly, and had done so, in their best work, with the sort of clarity and rigor to which analytical philosophers aspired. They became my models for thinking about metaphysics and, in effect, my teachers in metaphysics.

I think that teaching the history of philosophy has also had more general effects on my conception of philosophy. The canonical figures in a survey of early modern philosophy were systematic philosophers. Their systematicity is one of the attractions that has kept them in our canon. We would like to be able to put the world together in our minds, and we are interested in ways of trying to do it. As Tyler Burge remarked to me years ago at UCLA, it is an attraction of teaching the history of philosophy that it offers the chance to expound and discuss a large philosophical system (or more than one of them) even if one has not yet worked out a system of one's own.

Systematicity is not just an aspiration. As one studies the systems of great philosophers in the receptive but critical frame of mind that is necessary for getting the most out of them, one experiments with them, pulling a string here to see what moves over there, so to speak. What happens to the system as a whole if this thesis is dropped, or that implausible or clearly outdated doctrine is revised in one or another way? One learns that some doctrines can survive credibly without the system, and the system without them, and that others are not so detachable. In the process one discovers not only the internal connectedness of the views of this or that philosopher, but the intrinsic systematicity of the subject-matter, the interrelatedness of the problems of philosophy.

I had been trained in an 'article culture' that thought of analytical philosophy as 'piecemeal philosophy', a social project like the natural sciences, in which we are not trying to build our own individual systems, but each trying to contribute a bit here and a bit there to the progress of a cooperative intellectual enterprise. That model has surely been salutary in important ways for the health of our discipline. And, clearly, since none of us can do everything at once, it is important to learn to discern topics and issues that can be at least provisionally excluded from any philosophical project one is working on. But philosophy also resists piecemeal treatment. Except

for the most straightforwardly empirical facts that figure in philosophical reasoning, philosophical theses tend to be fragments of actual or potential systems, and to look quite different in different systematic contexts. I think that is one of the reasons why the undergraduate courses that seemed to me most successful, in my teaching of philosophy, have generally been courses that focused on great books of at least moderately large scope.

I believe it is also salutary that serious work in the history of philosophy leads one to think about major philosophical issues, not just in one way, but from the diverse points of view that are represented in the history one studies. A good philosophical understanding of a philosopher's work is never uncritical. We need to explore objections to the work in order to put the philosophy through its paces and discern its implications and motivations. But the aim of the philosophical historian's critical examination is not to determine what is the true theory or the best point of view. It may be healthy to try to make such judgments for ourselves; but our endorsement of them, as distinct from the arguments we contrive for them, is not likely to be a particularly important part of our professional contribution to the discipline.

That is largely because the progress of the discipline is not to be found in such judgments. Few of the big questions of philosophy have been permanently settled. Few of the main theoretical positions have been conclusively determined to be right or wrong. Philosophy has been much more successful in exploring possible ways of thinking, giving us a clearer, deeper, and fuller understanding of them, than in generating agreement as to which of those ways of thinking accord best with reality. It is plausible to think that will continue to be the case, because it is plausible to suppose that the contents and relations of philosophical views and questions are more accessible to us intellectually than many of the facts that would make the views true or false as representations of reality.

This is not to say that we should not expect philosophy to help us deal with reality. Even if we do not have agreed answers to large issues of metaphysics and metaethics, a philosophical understanding of concepts and arguments related to those issues may help us think in clearer-headed and uncontroversially better ways about particular scientific and ethical questions. But I do not think that is the deepest reason for studying philosophy and its history. The realm that philosophy is likeliest to succeed in exploring, the realm of possible ways of thinking, is full of objects of great beauty. It is worth loving for its own sake.

It is hard to date my falling in love with philosophy. It probably began in my undergraduate years, as I found in the clarity and rigor of analytical philosophy's formulations and arguments the same sort of beauty I had learned in high school to see in mathematical proofs. That is of course one of the forms of the experience, and love, of beauty that are celebrated in the speech of Diotima in Plato's *Symposium*. In the theistic Platonist's view it is also a glimpse of the beauty of the divine mind. I began to study philosophy, no doubt, with the thought of using it to serve other interests of a religious sort. But I have come to think that the deepest religious significance of philosophy demands that it be loved and practiced for its own sake.

VI

I think of three further ways in which the four years in Ann Arbor set directions for my future philosophical work. Two of them I will discuss rather briefly; the third will open a longer discussion in the next section. (1) During my theological studies and my years of ministry in Montauk I had devoted considerable time to reading nineteenth- and twentieth-century religious thinkers, of a generally 'Continental' philosophical orientation; but I arrived at Michigan with no intention of working further on them professionally. Quite likely I never would have, had it not been for the influence of Jack Meiland, a senior colleague at Michigan. He persuaded me of the pedagogical value of teaching such material to undergraduates, and in my second term in Ann Arbor I gave an undergraduate seminar on four nineteenth- and twentieth-century Continental religious thinkers. I continued to teach this material throughout my career, and greatly enjoyed the way it engaged undergraduates' interests. At Michigan and UCLA I did not find much graduate student appetite for courses in this field; one of the things I enjoyed, much later, about my situation at Yale was the opportunity to teach seminars on Schleiermacher to groups composed of doctoral students in theology as well as undergraduates. This area has not been a main focus of my research, but over the years I have published about half a dozen essays on Schleiermacher, Kierkegaard, and Buber.

(2) One of the doctoral students I had the good fortune to advise at Michigan was William A. Polkowski. I learned a great deal from his thesis

research on ‘The Possible Evidential Value of Religious Experience’, and particularly from his use of Bayes’ Theorem in the calculus of probabilities, which he had studied at Michigan with Arthur Burks. I became very interested in the relevance of Bayesian considerations to metaphysics and epistemology. Seeing the ineliminable place of ‘prior’ assignments of absolute and conditional probability in Bayesian reasoning helped to make clear to me that I should not any longer count myself as an empiricist about the justification of belief.

VII

During my first term in Ann Arbor I taught a topical survey of the philosophy of religion as an undergraduate lecture course. It was a pedagogical disaster, pitched way over the students’ heads; but a lot of my later work grew out of it. In it I began to open up the topics in the relation between religion and ethics that I had prudently set aside at Cornell in order to write a dissertation I could finish quickly. One of these topics was the divine-command theory of the nature of moral obligation. My first published essay on that subject, ‘A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness’, was written at Michigan in response to an invitation obtained for me by my senior colleague Bill Frankena to contribute a paper to an anthology on religion and ethics. In my own view none of my contributions to philosophy is more significant than the work I have done, beginning with that essay, towards the development of a viable theistic metaethics.

The development of my own position on the subject has not exactly followed a direct path. I published a few further essays on divine-command theories, casting them in different lights. But they did not add up, in my own opinion, to a complete metaethics, because they presented only theories of obligation, or of right and wrong, and I was not ready to offer a theory of the good.

I had some thought that a theistic metaethical theory of the good might be sought in reflection about God’s goodness and love, a subject which interested me also in relation to work I was doing on the problem of evil. Accordingly, during my first year at UCLA, in 1972–3, I began writing about the nature and ethical significance of love, both divine and human;

and I conceived the project of writing a book on the subject. That was my project for 1974–5, the first year that Marilyn and I took leave from UCLA, with the aid of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities. We spent the year in Oxford, and it was immensely fruitful for me. The reading I did there, and discussions I had, especially with Derek Parfit, laid major foundations for all the subsequent work I have done in ethical theory. I also drafted several chapters on love; but it was clear to me at the end of the year that they were not adding up to a book, and I was not ready to publish them. The only piece from the project that I published in the immediate aftermath of the leave was my article ‘Motive Utilitarianism’. In relation to my larger project, it was originally conceived only as a prolegomenon, defending the independent significance of the ethics of attitudes, or more broadly of ‘agent ethics’, as distinct from the ethics of actions. I went on for years teaching classes and seminars on the ethics of love, but it took further catalysts to bring my ideas on the subject into a synthesis (a larger synthesis) that I found satisfying.

Two catalysts stand out in my memory. One was an invitation to give the Wilde Lectures on Natural Religion in Oxford. I accepted, with the plan of giving them on the relation between religion and ethics, committing myself to something more like a book on the subject. The other catalyst was supplied in a discussion I had, late at night at a conference during the 1980s, with Bill Alston and Al Plantinga, in which they pressed on me the question why I should not think that the goodness of things is to be understood in terms of resemblance to God. I don’t remember with confidence how the discussion started, but I think it was connected with thinking Bill had been doing on the relation between Platonic metaethics and theistic metaethics. As I planned my Wilde Lectures I became more and more interested in a theistic Platonism in which God occupies something of the role that the form of the Good (or of Beauty) occupies in Plato’s ‘middle dialogues’, and more and more convinced of the centrality of the idea of intrinsic excellence, both for ethical theory and for theology.

The Wilde Lectures that I gave in Oxford in the spring of 1989 started with those ideas, and developed a metaethical view that gives the idea of excellence priority in relation to the idea of obligation. I worked on the lectures for practically ten years more (alongside other projects) before I finally had a book on the subject. Our move to Yale in 1993 provided a helpful situation for this work, one in which I had occasion to teach more

in ethical theory than I had before. It was also helpful that Yale's lively interdisciplinary culture put me in conversation about ethics with students and colleagues in theology and religious studies, political theory, and law, as well as philosophy. When *Finite and Infinite Goods* came out in 1999, the metaethical theory presented in it also provided a context in which (as I had realized only in 1997) much of the work I had been doing on the ethics of love could form part of a coherent whole. Not that it completed the development of my views in agent ethics. I left the nature of virtue somewhat to the side as a topic in that book, but have focused on it more recently, writing *A Theory of Virtue*, published in 2006.

VIII

One main context for my thinking about the relation between religion and ethics has been the Society of Christian Philosophers, which a number of us formed in 1978 with a view to helping and encouraging each other to integrate our Christian faith and our philosophical vocation. It has certainly helped and encouraged me to do that. Personal integration is a difficult business in any case, and the integration of personal identity as a religious believer and as a philosopher is particularly delicate. Not that I have ever seen philosophy and religious belief as inherently opposed. On the contrary, in common with major traditions in the world's most developed religions, I believe that religious thought, and even spiritual meditation, can advantageously take a philosophical form. But even where faith and philosophy are married, each has its own integrity, and there will be tensions. It requires some courage for the believer to acquire the experience that teaches the limits of what philosophy can do either for or to religion. And it is a potentially crippling temptation for religious philosophers to adopt a primarily defensive and protective stance in relation to religious doctrines, where what is really needed is creative and imaginative thinking about religious questions.

I do not believe in drawing a sharp line between philosophy and theology. Especially in ethics I think one ought to bring one's whole self to one's thinking. What I have written in moral philosophy since the early 1980s has certainly been influenced by Christian beliefs and sources, and has sometimes touched quite explicitly on theological themes and issues. At the

same time I have usually written for a general philosophical audience. In that context I have not wished to presuppose commitment to Christianity, and I hope that Christian ideas may shed light on ethical views that will commend themselves also to people who are not Christians.

Philosophy of religion is among the areas that have benefited most from the tremendous development and broadening of analytical philosophy in the last half century. When I began to study the subject in the 1950s, I could easily carry in my hands the small pile of volumes containing practically all that had then been written in contemporary analytical philosophy about religious issues. On the whole it was not a very satisfying library. Today there is a large analytical literature in the philosophy of religion, of the sort that I wanted to read, and rarely found, in my student years. I am pleased to have been able to contribute something to that development.

IX

More broadly, I am proud of the contributions of my generation in analytical philosophy. To find a fit comparison for the flowering of rigorous philosophizing, in English, on an ever-widening range of topics and ideas, in a context of mutually illuminating discussion, in the last 100 and especially the last fifty years or so, one might have to go back to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. For me the most exciting philosophical development in my adult lifetime was the explosion of interest and activity in the 1970s connected with the so-called ‘new theory of reference’ (or *direct* reference) and possible world semantics for modal logic. Those developments began, of course, in logic and philosophy of language, but I was most interested in possibilities they opened up for metaphysics. The idea they generated that has stayed with me the longest (and eventually became central for my treatment of metaethics too) is that of ways of separating questions about the natures of things from questions of meaning.

I began working in this area during my last year or so at Michigan, where engagement with David Lewis’s paper on ‘Anselm and Actuality’ led to my writing a first draft of my paper on ‘Theories of Actuality’. After we moved to UCLA, the philosophical atmosphere there, and especially discussions with David Kaplan, were a great stimulus to further work on modal metaphysics and related issues about identity. I continued writing in

the area, and expected during our second leave from UCLA, in 1979 and 1980, to produce a book of which a major part would develop my views on these subjects.

Once again I found that I was not ready to write a projected book. That was largely due to the fact that the project was not simply to write a book about modal metaphysics, but to solve the theological problem of evil, using ideas about identity and its modality as a central part of the machinery for doing so. During the 1970s, I had published a couple of papers based on the Leibnizian thought that if evil had never existed, you and I would never have existed either, but, at most, as other individuals similar to us. I initially saw that idea as offering a promising framework for theodicy, but during 1979 and 1980 I was forced to conclude that it would not solve enough of the problem. The only thing I published in the project area as a result of that leave was my paper on 'Actualism and Thisness'.

I still think the Leibnizian idea about the connection between evils and our identity is relevant for thinking (and feeling) about the problem of evil. And I have recently published another, somewhat chastened and (I hope) better focused paper on that subject. But I doubt that I will publish a book on the problem of evil. Marilyn McCord Adams, my wife, has provided a much better framework for thinking about the problem. I believe her book, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, is the deepest and most satisfying treatment of this inherently unsatisfying subject that we are likely to have any time soon.

About ten years ago, after a number of years of focusing on other areas, I began to work again on analytical metaphysics, this time with a primary focus on ontology, and no special connection to the problem of evil. When I wrote about actuality in the 1970s, I intended to go on to write also about existence, which I regarded, and still regard, as a distinct topic from that of actuality. I have been writing about existence, and related issues about substance; and I related them to ideas about God as 'being itself', in a series of four Gifford Lectures on 'God and Being' that I gave at the University of St Andrews in 1999.

The thought that connected the topics of God and being in my Gifford Lectures connects my current interests in ontology also with my theistic Platonist metaethics. Very much as I think of the goodness of other things as (very imperfect) imitation of God, theistic Platonists in the medieval and early modern periods tended to think that all the fundamental attributes

of finite things are imperfect imitations of attributes of God. That idea is the basis of the conception of God as *ens perfectissimum* or *ens realissimum* in the writings of Leibniz and Kant, for example. I have been thinking and writing about the prospects for that way of conceiving the relation between God and the structure of finite things. I hope to produce a book of metaphysics, but it remains to be seen just what form it may take.

X

I conclude this essay with the same summary of my philosophical convictions that concluded my autobiographical remarks at the conference at Yale. I believe that there is a metaphysically significant difference between appearance and reality; that there is a capital 'R' Reality that grounds everything that appears; that it is mental; that it is good; and that doing philosophy can be a way of loving it.