

"ON THE RELATION BETWEEN MORALITY AND THE NOTION OF GOD"

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The question of the relation between morality and religion which, during past periods of the history of Western philosophy, constituted the kernel of moral reasoning, has been systematically ignored by contemporary moral philosophers. The causes for this abandonment are many, some even quite obvious. It is, to say the least, unfashionable to concern oneself with religion while God is being killed, mourned, and buried. But, even worse, a contradiction of sorts seems to be involved in any attempt by atheists or agnostic philosophers to engage in speculations concerning God: And, indeed, such a contradiction would exist if any and all discussions relating to the concept of God did in fact presuppose the solution of the question of his existence. But, it so happens that the existence of God has no bearing whatever on the philosophical functions of the concept or notion of "God." In other words, a demonstration of the impossibility of the ontological proof does not, by itself, imply the absurdity and, much less, the uselessness of the notion of "God." Furthermore, it might well be the case that the necessity of the concept of "God" can be demonstrated independently from any proof of the existence of the being God. This I believe to be the case, and the purpose of this paper is to illustrate this point in regard to ethics. The thesis that I am proposing is, then, that moral reasoning, insofar as it is aimed at providing an ultimate justification for moral action, requires the concept of "God." Or, to put it differently, the notion of obligation points to God. This thesis is developed in two parts. The first one is a critical analysis of some views on the role of the notion of "God" in morality, which I take to be particularly revealing. The analysis does not pretend to be comprehensive or exhaustive, and its purpose is rather

to spell out the genesis and the implications of the central issues to be discussed in the second part. This part consists of an outline of the series of arguments needed to clarify the role of the notion of "God" in morality. The purpose of this outline is primarily to point out the problems which need to be dealt with and to suggest the strategies which might help solve them.

I

The Issues

I would like to start this part of the paper with a warning: nothing of what will be said in the following pages implies that I consider all attempts to develop a naturalistic account of morality to be doomed. On the contrary, I think that human behavior as a whole, including moral behavior, can be explained in a comprehensive and satisfactory manner from a purely naturalistic or materialistic perspective. Social science will become a serious enterprise only to the extent that it manages to develop a materialistic explanatory framework. And in that respect the claims of thinkers from Marx to Marvin Harris seem to me to be reasonable. By far the majority of earthly events are earthly and the mysteries which envelop them when they first occur can be solved by digging holes in the earth, so to speak.

But the ultimate and, hence, the most important task of ethics is not the explanation, but the justification of human behavior. No system of morals is complete unless it gives us guidelines for behavior, unless it exhibits the way to the good life. With the exception of a few modern skeptics this has been a conviction shared by philosophers of all times. Certainly, any attempt to provide a philosophical justification of behavior presupposes an understanding of its nature and conditions; but such an understanding does not provide all the material required to build a moral code and to recommend it in good faith to persons interested in doing the right things to go to heaven. Or, to put it differently, the understanding of the basis of human behavior might and, in fact, ought to make possible the construction of a moral code listing the conditions of possibility for human social life, for human life in general, namely a list of basic virtues. Although such a list of conditions or virtues is obviously a mediate precondition for the good life, it is not self-evident that it is also an immediate or

sufficient condition for the good life nor is it evident that the mere knowledge of this list will generate a willingness to be virtuous. Moral relativism results from the failure to understand this simple distinction. Relativism is the consequence of expecting more from the discovery of some of the causes of human social behavior than ought reasonably to be expected. What is ultimately required, then, is a means of jumping from the knowledge of the conditions of life in general, to the conviction that life is good or valuable or desirable and, even further, to the conviction that a certain style of life is superior to or more desirable than the innumerable other life styles made possible by these conditions.

Intuitionists seem to me to be those among modern philosophers who have best recognized this problem. To solve it, they take the course that appears to be the most adequate and direct, namely, they assume that the desirability or goodness of the conditions of human life is inscribed, printed on them, that it is there to be seen by all those able and willing to do so. But the intuitionists can support their thesis only by making certain assumptions that imply the existence of a more complex human nature than the one that in fact exists. In other words, the intuitionists violate the prohibition to engage in the needless and arbitrary multiplication of the attributes of human nature. But this argument, in itself sufficient to discard intuitionism, is unnecessary, for if one examines the terms of the problem one will soon notice that intuitionism elegantly begs the question it is meant to answer. In fact, the question would not even arise if the problem were simply one of shortsightedness or blurred vision. Given that there is but one list of conditions of possibility for human life, what has to be explained is the diversity of forms of life without having to make the arbitrary assumption that the "forces of evil" have managed to blind most humans, thus having systematically prevented them from seeing the right way to materialize these conditions.

Intuitionism is, it seems to me, also motivated by the modern discomfort with the notion of God. For, in the end, postulating the existence of eternal, unchangeable truths, directly accessible to humans in a manner similar to those that give them access to the knowledge of nature, is a way of dispensing with God while retaining the notion of the "absolute" and, thus, leaving the door open for providing final justifications for moral action. But the strategy of the intuitionists is self-defeating for it ignores the

lessons taught by the Neo-Platonists and, especially, by Augustine. One of the greatest contributions of the Latin Father to theology was his clear realization of the connection between the Parmenidean-Platonists' notion of the absolute and the notion of God. The road that leads to one, leads eventually to the other. This insight was later developed in a rather revealing manner by several Medieval philosophers, and particularly by St. Anselm in whose theory it plays a crucial role. The eternity of truth is established by the same arguments that establish the eternity of God, which is why Anselm feels free to identify the two. This identification is the ground for the theory of rectitudo which allows the conclusion that moral truth and truth in general are one and the same thing. Rectitudo is the one criterion of truth in regard to logical, practical, sensory and all other types of human activity. So we cannot rely on a Parmenidean conception of the absolute and still pretend to avoid making ontological commitments regarding the existence of God. Paul Tillich has suggested this in a general manner in connection with his criticism of what he calls "value theory," which, as we know, is in most cases a form of intuitionism. Tillich argues:

If there are such "absolute values" (absolute in the sense of being independent of a valuating subject), what is the source of their absoluteness, how can they be discovered, how are they related to reality, and what is their ontological standing? These questions lead unavoidably to a situation that the value theory by its very nature tries to avoid--namely, a doctrine of being, an ontology. For values have reality only if they are rooted in reality. Their validity is an expression of their ontological formulation . . .²

And the ontological question regarding the absolute, I should hasten to add, always becomes theology.

As far as I can see there are only two ways, historically speaking, that have been suggested to make the jump that the intuitionists fail to make. One is provided by Kant, the other by Aristotle and all those who have followed his path. The best way of characterizing the Aristotelian solution is perhaps by calling it the 'immanentist way.' This, in general, is

the belief that the justification for moral action can be derived from a definition of human nature. This belief has one immensely important consequence, to wit, that however we conceive the good, it cannot be something which lies beyond the qualities and capacities of human beings. So, for example, eudaimonia is something to be attained by the finite, living individual according to Aristotle. The individual has only to rely on his capacities, innate and acquired or learned, to reach the state of blessedness and joyful contemplation, for such a state is nothing but the full development and realization of the potentialities with which he is endowed by nature. But, as Kant has perceptively pointed out, even if we consider the state of contemplation to be a semi-divine state, the idea of happiness or eudaimonia in itself does not provide the sign or proof we desire for the final meaningfulness of human existence. Kant's argument has three steps.³ The mere fact, he says, that there is someone to contemplate or to know the universe does not give it any worth, for it is not by becoming objects of experience that things acquire value. This is obvious for Kant due to the limitations he attributes to theoretical reason, the task of which is merely to present an object. Hence, if value were something to be known in this sense, it would have to be a sort of quality, which is not the case. But, on the other hand, it is not self-evident that contemplation itself has worth, and, certainly, if it had some, such worth would have to be determined in relation to a "final purpose" external to it. Moreover, and this is the second step, even if we admit that eudaimonia is possible, it does not follow from that simple fact either that a man "should" have a happy existence or that he should exist at all. We are forced to conclude, Kant says, that man himself is the "final purpose of creation," i.e., the source of worth of the universe. But, clearly, he cannot be such a source insofar as he is dependent upon the world, since if this were the case, the worth of the world would depend upon itself and not upon man. Thus, man can be thought of as the final end of creation only insofar as he can give something to himself spontaneously and, in this way, to the world, which is not determined by the world. In other words, man can be the final goal of the universe only to the extent that he is free, a moral being.

At this point we do not need to get as far as the proof for the existence of God. But, Kant's arguments or something like them are probably enough to expose the inherent insufficiency of Aristotelian immanentism.

It is not at all surprising that, as has been pointed out repeatedly, Aristotle did not develop the notion of "obligation." The reason is not only that this notion implies the idea of "external compulsion" which clashes with his definition of voluntary action.⁴ The deeper reason, it would seem, is that the notion of obligation, when pushed far and hard enough, becomes indistinguishable from that of final justification, and there is, as Kant points out, no basis in Aristotelian ethics to support this last idea. Happiness is said to be the "supreme good" because we choose it for its own sake. But in a chain of justification it will appear not as an absolute, but simply as a reasonable and desirable ending point. That is, granted that we seek happiness, it does not follow that we "ought" to desire each of the actions that lead to it. All that follows is that, insofar as we are reasonable persons and honest in our desire for happiness, we would be better off desiring the means to achieve a certain goal that we might have in mind. Desiring happiness, then, helps us determine the practical necessity of certain actions, not their moral necessity.

Such Christian philosophers as Augustine and Aquinas were able, partially at least, to make up for the deficiencies of the Aristotelian position, while preserving its immanentism basically intact. This they did with the help of the notion of "God." Happiness is defined as the realization of all the potentialities with which human nature is endowed. This realization is to be accomplished through the means and capacities available to humans *qua* humans. The difference from the Aristotelian conception is that some of these capacities are thought to have a non-natural or, better, a supra-natural dimension. Insofar as they are supra-natural they are also supra-temporal. This means that their fulfillment cannot and does not have to be realized during the natural existence of humans. It is realized during their supra-natural existence. But given that the real fulfillment will come only later, all the actions undertaken during the period of natural existence will have to be seen as secondary in relation to the final goal of supra-natural fulfillment. But, of course, in regard to this final fulfillment, as in regard to the mundane happiness of the Aristotelian view, one can always ask the question, why should anyone desire it? In the case of Aristotle there was no answer to this question, no possible answer in terms of what ought to be done. The supra-natural character of the fulfillment envisioned by the Christian thinkers opens the door for a possible, plausible answer, for we can say that the supra-natural fulfillment not only is

desired, but that it ought to be desired. And we ought to desire it because we are not masters of our being, but depend on the one who conceived and gave us that being, who, in turn, is the only one who can guarantee our final fulfillment. In other words, we ought to desire the fulfillment of our being, because we owe it to someone who demands careful and punctual payment. The notion of "God," then, permits the introduction of the idea of "demand" or "debt" for which there is no place in Aristotelian ethics, and which underlies the concept of "obligation."

But this course of reasoning does not fully compensate for all the shortcomings of the Aristotelian conception, since together with the notion of "obligation" we inevitably get the one of "compulsion." The Christian strategy to dissolve the paradox of claiming that we have an obligation to desire the supreme good has always been to stress the loving nature of God. God is like a loving father, and the obligations he imposes stem from his infinite love and wisdom. In fact, they appear as a burden only to those who have chosen to go in the wrong direction and, hence, to forfeit their only chance to reach happiness or blessedness. God's demands appear as compulsory only to those who have alienated themselves from him. One finds here one of the reasons why the notion of liberum arbitrium is so crucial to Christian thought. If love and not sheer compulsion, in the form of either fear or utilitarian considerations, is to motivate humans, then they must be free beings, for love is not truly so unless it is spontaneous and contingent. The notion of necessary or obligatory love is a contradiction in terms. This is why, for the Christians, freedom, in its most basic sense, is the capacity to be spontaneous, to act voluntarily.

For Kant, too, as we have seen, freedom plays a crucial role in facilitating the transition to the idea of a "final purpose" of moral action. The notions of "obligation" and "God" are also essential to his system. But Kant goes beyond the traditional Christian thinkers in one respect, namely, he avoids making an ontological commitment in relation to the existence of God. His "proof" of the existence of God is based on the "subjective" demands of reason, and, therefore, all it proves is that the existence of God is a necessary assumption. This assumption is not even necessary to support the validity of the moral law, which would lose none of its absolute imperative force even if God did not exist, that is, even if we refused to assume that he exists. Without God goodness would, in the end,

make no difference, but it would still be mandatory according to the moral law.⁵

Kant is led into this path by a variety of considerations, most of which are well-known and depend directly on his analysis of theoretical reason. But the only reason really relevant to our discussion is a kind of corollary to his analysis, to wit, the necessary rejection of the theory of rectitudo. In the framework of Kant's system, moral rightness cannot be identified with empirical truth, nor with theoretical truth. The rejection of the theory of rectitudo closes the door for any argument of the Augustinian type concerning the relationship between moral obligation and God.

But it is not only his examination of theoretical reason which induces Kant to rely on a purely moral proof of the existence of God. He is pushed in this same direction by his study of physical or natural teleology. The consistent development of physical teleology, Kant says, "could only found a Demonology;"⁶ that is, it could at most generate the idea of an "intelligent-world-cause," which is all that is needed to satisfy the requirements of the "theoretical reflective judgment." But the idea of an intelligent world-cause is miles away from the idea of a Deity, which is what is needed to introduce finality into the universe and satisfy the demands of practical reason. Here Kant has arrived in his own peculiar way at the same conclusion forcefully expressed before him by Duns Scotus in his criticism of Aristotle and, indirectly, of Aquinas. The notion of God's perfection is not exhausted, the Doctor Subtilis argues, by that of an unmoved motor capable of an infinitely durable motion; that is, one cannot derive the perfection of God from the infinitude of motion alone, for the notion of "Divine Perfection" includes more than the simple notion of physical perfection. God is more than a perfect artifact.⁷ Etienne Gilson has explained Duns Scotus' argument by saying that what it proves is that arguments based on experience can never lead us beyond the natural realm to the supra-natural realm which is the dwelling place of the Divinity. For Duns Scotus the way to the Deity is an a posteriori but rational proof; for Kant, on the other hand, the argument must be moral.

Although with this move Kant in some sense escapes some of the problems that bothered the Medievals, he by no means can be said to have escaped all of them. The "paradox of obligation" remains with him in an

augmented and more treacherous form. Let us examine this briefly. Although God gives some sense or purpose to our moral action, the categorical character of the moral law is not grounded on God's will, for, as we saw, according to Kant the moral law appears as an absolute imperative even to the skeptic. But if God's will is not behind the moral law, neither is his love, and, hence, we are left with the idea of duty or obligation in its purest form, i.e. unmitigated by love. Love has a certain role to play in Kant's system, but only after having been totally deprived of its "emotional" content, only after having become a dry love, so to speak, and therefore incapable of operating as a mitigating force upon obligation. To love God, Kant says, is simply "to love to do His commandments."⁸ "True," someone is likely to say at this point, "but you are forgetting the notion of freedom, for it is after all freedom which grounds the moral law." Here we have come to the most difficult problem of Kant's ethical system, the conciliation of the notions of freedom and obligation. Obviously, this is not the place to embark on a detailed discussion of this issue, and such an enterprise is unnecessary for the limited purpose of this paper. The only general question we need to answer is whether freedom and obligation as presented in Kant's system relate to each other in a way which avoids producing the paradox that Aristotle solved by banning the latter notion from his ethical system.

To the question, why should I comply with the Moral Law, Kant answers, "because you are a rational being, and rationality implies universal lawfulness." But does this mean, we might then ask, that we are determined by "nature" to be rational, to act according to law? If by "nature" we mean physical causality, Kant would respond, then the answer is no, and in this sense we are free in a negative sense; but, if by "nature" we mean simply that we have a capacity to be rational, i.e. to order our behavior by means of our will in such a way that it corresponds to law, then the answer is yes, and we are free in a positive sense. The problem with this is that even if we grant that Kant is right so far, we are left up in the air, for this response is not enough to show that we have an "obligation" to follow the moral law. All it shows is that we should "desire" to follow it, but mere "desire" even when it is desire of the moral law, is not "obligation," and nothing is changed here if instead of the word "desire" we use the word "will." Another way of putting this same problem is to ask, why should I do my duty, or why should I desire to do my duty, or even

more clearly, why should I desire to exercise my "positive" freedom; why should I not allow myself to be overwhelmed by desire? The answer made possible by the moral proof of the existence of God is not fully satisfactory, since at most it results in an admonition to act taking into account a reasonable supposition. Such an admonition is no more effective than Pascal's wager, and, perhaps, it is less so because Kant's God is handicapped, for this god does not back his demands and promises with the big stick of the traditional God; he does not threaten anyone with eternal damnation. God, insofar as he is simply a sense-giver, but not a law-giver, cannot be thought of as the source of obligation. But then we are left with a new paradox, for it appears that the obligation inherent in the idea of the categorical imperative is itself contingent in some sense, namely, contingent upon our desire to exercise our pure will. In other words, even if we grant that Kant has proved that humans have the ability to act as causes upon some world and modify it so that it corresponds to the commands generated by their legislating will, we do not have to grant also that they have an "obligation" to attempt to modify the world in that manner. Proving that man has a certain capacity or faculty does not presuppose or imply a proof of the necessity to exercise that capacity. It is only with reference to God that "having" and "doing" can be said to be identical; in the case of human beings such an identification is impossible, since the person is not all powerful and hence can at most aspire to be a Demiurge; one can attempt to order and reorder things, not to create them *ex nihilo* in a particular order. This Kant knows, for otherwise he would not feel the urge to introduce the idea of God into his ethical system.

It seems, then, that without the idea of a supreme-law-giver it is not possible to conciliate the notions of "freedom" and "obligation." If all we have to rely on are people's capacities and incapacities, a gulf will always exist between these two notions. Kant had to pay a certain price for living in somewhat skeptical times. He had to pretend to ignore the fact that the notion of "law" was first introduced into metaphysics in conjunction with that of an all-powerful creator. Before, law had always been perceived under the modes of contingency and practical necessity. This can be seen clearly in Aristotle's treatment of the notion. Law is not desired for its own sake, for truly virtuous people are above the law, which is merely an efficient mechanism of compulsion. It is necessary only because there are beast-like humans who respond only to threats

and force; it is external, alien to humanity, and it partakes in reason only accidentally. In fact, by itself, it can produce only an appearance of happiness, since happiness, as Kant himself remarks,⁹ cannot be the subject of command. But God, insofar as he is a loving-father, can make absolute laws and stipulate the pursuit of happiness as an obligation. The difficulty arises when, like Kant, we want to think of God as a mere postulate while insisting on the absolute autonomy of human reason, for then we can have neither absolute commands in the strict sense of the word, nor a command to make ourselves happy.

The problem is immensely complicated by the fact that God is the only being which can be conceived as beyond the conflict between reason and passion. God alone is infinitely reasonable and infinitely passionate, for in him the different attributes of being cannot collide. This is why he can be both a legislator and a loving father at the same time. But in humans passion and reason oppose each other, so that they cannot be both passionate and law-givers. A serious legislative activity must therefore be passionless, unemotional. Man can play God only at the expense of crippling himself. This has rightly and consistently been perceived as the greatest weakness of Kantian ethics, although, as far as I have been able to see, very few philosophers have made serious proposals to compensate for this weakness. This is partly due to the, strictly speaking, Godless character of most of the original systems of modern ethics. Some of these systems do not even include the notion of "obligation," as, for instance, in the case of most naturalist schools, particularly utilitarianism. Other schools, such as existentialism, for example, have sought to escape the problem by watering down Kant's ideas to the point that they become meaningless and devoid of explanatory power. They confuse freedom with caprice and distort the notion of duty to make it reappear as a weak and purely subjective sense of commitment that individuals are supposed to feel in regard to their fellow humans. Such theories are not very enlightening and serve less to solve the problem than to illustrate difficulties. On the other hand, we have already mentioned some of the limitations of moral intuitionism, which is the other important modern attempt to deal with the issues being examined here.

Curiously enough, however, what seems to me to be the most serious (albeit somewhat incomplete) effort to advance beyond Kant in the study of morality and its relation to the notion of God comes from a religious

man, Tillich. In his brief lectures on ethics (cf. p. 49 above), Tillich seeks to produce a synthesis of Christian and Kantian ideas which, while preserving the notions of "law" and "obligation," is able to accommodate those of "God" and "love" and to make concessions to the circumstantial or contingent character of man's earthly existence. Let us briefly examine these ideas.

Tillich's starting point is the Aristotelian claim that the good for man is the full development of his potentialities. The central problem of moral philosophy becomes again that of jumping from this assertion to the imperative that man ought to develop his potentialities. To assist him in accomplishing this feat, Tillich calls on the notion of God. But the God he summons is not a law-giver in the traditional sense, for God, being at the same time creator and law-giver, has inscribed his law in the essence of his creatures. Thus, the obedience demanded from these creatures is not mere submission; it does not imply external compulsion, but it is nonetheless totally unconditional. Note, however, that the unconditional character of the moral demands does not stem exclusively from the fact that they reflect our essence; the principal fact to be considered here is the God-given goodness of this essence. It is then not because it is ours that we have an unconditional obligation to heed the demands of our essence, but because it is a "good" essence. Goodness itself and not our contingent essence, is the origin of the unconditional moral imperative.

But what does our essence demand? Simply, Tillich says, it demands that we develop ourselves as persons and that we treat persons as ends in themselves, that we treat persons as persons. This basic demand we call "justice." Because of the kinds of things persons are, because of the fact that they are, to use Buber's expression, not mere "its," our perception of persons as persons cannot be merely this, but has to lead to a certain attachment or involvement; it has to be accompanied by love in all its multifaceted forms. Here we need not to go into lengthy discussions of Tillich's notion of love, although this would certainly be a most interesting task given that, to my knowledge, no other thinker has treated the issue with comparable depth and seriousness. Let us simply point out what love, as the concrete content of the moral imperative, adds to it, and what are, in Tillich's view, the main advantages of these additions.

Justice, as regards the human condition, must be both universal and flexible. Now law, in the sense of human law, can be universal only at the expense of being purely formal, that is, general enough to ignore the particularity of each situation. On the other hand, law can be flexible only by limiting its scope of applicability or, in other words, by renouncing its claim of universality and making itself relative to a set of particular circumstances. Justice, then, if identified with human law, becomes either void formalism, as is the case in Kant's philosophy, or relativism.

But the main limitation of human law, Tillich thinks, is its essential inability to reach the degree of flexibility needed to "accept the unacceptable;" law does not have the power of forgiveness, for such a power "must come from something above the law." In this respect Tillich's views on law are closer to those of Aristotle than to those of Kant. Human law, in his opinion, is necessary when human beings exercise their freedom to alienate themselves from their essence, to act against their own essence. When this happens law itself is impotent to redeem, for it cannot "accept the unacceptable," namely the very same thing it is supposed to prevent. Only love has the power and the flexibility to redeem.

But, one might ask, how do humans recognize the law of God dwelling in their essence? Tillich answers this question with the help of what he calls the Pauline notion of "conscience." Conscience is not the source of morality, but is capable of "witnessing" the law. It is through "conscience" that humans gain an understanding of divine law.

There is, however, another important advantage of love over human law. The latter, Tillich argues, cannot adapt to historical change without being annihilated, for insofar as human law is relative to a set of conditions, wherever those conditions change radically, what will be needed is not a mere modification of the old law, but new laws. In Tillich's words, law cannot respond to "Kairos." This term is central in Tillich's thought, and what it denotes is, basically, the appearance or the coming to be of a new historical moment, such as the one initiated by the coming of the Christ. Love, on the other hand, remaining substantially unchanged, can modify its appearance to match the demands of "Kairos." Tillich's explication of this process of adaptation seems to me to be one of the weakest elements in his

moral theory; but, at any rate, in its concrete form, the historical transformations of the appearance of love result in an extension of justice in the world, that is, more and more people are regarded and treated as persons.

Even this sketchy and imperfect presentation of Tillich's moral theory should be sufficient to help us see some of its obvious advantages over Kantian formalism. But there is one important respect in which it falls short of solving the problems that Kant's theory was designed to address. For, after all, Tillich did not live in a historical period any less skeptical than Kant's. We are no more in a position simply to affirm or assume the existence of God than Kant was, but it is precisely this assumption which underlies Tillich's views. I realize, of course, that these views constitute a part of a much broader theological system, but the problem is, precisely, that much of their correctness depends on the correctness of certain theological speculations. Nevertheless, it is clear that, granted the assumption of the existence of a God interested in human affairs, Tillich's theories provide a better picture of the nature and the mechanisms of this interest than do Kant's theories. This does not mean, however, that the picture is faultless. Let me try to point out some of the dark spots I perceive.

For all its merits, Tillich's moral views remain firmly grounded on the presuppositions of bourgeois individualism. I will not attempt to discuss here the very interesting suggestion of the Peruvian philosopher, Antonio Pena, who claims that Christian thought is essentially individualistic and that, thus, it finds its most accomplished expression not in scholastic but in early modern philosophy. The thesis seems to me to be quite plausible and, further, consistent with Tillich's claim concerning some of the theological views of the reformers, which he regards as important rediscoveries of the initial and true Christian spirit. My claim here is rather that bourgeois individualism is a major obstacle for the perception of the true nature of persons and of the relationship between persons.

Now, Tillich is aware of the fact that justice must be realized in a social setting and, hence, that whoever attempts to fulfill the moral law and develop himself as a person, must at the same time attempt to promote the personhood of his fellow men. What bothers me is not this, but the way Tillich pictures the

relationship between individuals. Individuals, he says, are each a "self" and "every self is self-related and a complete self is completely self-related." The individual is an independent "center," indivisible and impenetrable, and therefore is rightly called an individual.¹⁰ Love is the force that brings these separated centers together, and it can do so because they are not completely strange or alien to each other, but simply "estranged" from each other, there being a certain fundamental unity among them. But a fulfilled love relationship does not imply the annihilation of the separate selves:

It is the superiority of the person-to-person relationship that it preserves the separation of the self-centered self, and nevertheless actualizes their reunion in love. The highest form of love and that form of it which distinguishes Eastern and Western cultures is the love which preserves the individual who is both the subject and the object of love. In the loving person-to-person relationship Christianity manifests its superiority to any other religious tradition.¹¹

The fundamental ontological unity of all self-centered selves is in God, who is the basis of all being or being-itself. To the question, why did God go to the trouble of disrupting this fundamental unity, thus making love necessary, Tillich answers with a variation of the old Augustinian argument to explain the existence of evil and imperfection in creation: "The power of God," he says, "is that He overcomes estrangement, not that He prevents it; that He takes it, symbolically speaking, upon himself, not that He remains in a dead identity with Himself."¹²

Estrangement is the basis for the "dynamics of life," hence, the image of a world in which all estrangement has been overcome cannot be confused with that of the Kingdom of God; the Kingdom of God, in other words, is, strictly speaking, not of this world.¹³ This conclusion, it seems to me, reveals the real nature of Tillich's moral theory, which is grounded on the bourgeois assumption that conflict and tension constitute the juice of existence, the "dynamics of life." This conception gives us an inverted picture of reality, for it represents the

relations between persons not as fundamentally cooperative, but as prima facie antagonistic. This is precisely why Tillich is forced to attribute a divine quality to love, for purely human love would have to be contingent, since, by themselves, two strange individuals cannot generate a necessary urge to unite. But the role of God, then, appears diminished, almost like the role of God in the tragedies of Euripides, a God which emerges from the wings to impose necessity on a world condemned to contingency.

It is only by conceiving the generation of persons as a process resulting from the necessary cooperative intercourse between human beings, that the notion of moral obligation can be introduced without arbitrary or seemingly arbitrary references to the Divinity. God, then, should not be introduced to demonstrate that humans have an obligation to relate to each other and to treat each other as persons. A purely naturalistic account of morality should be able to provide a more than satisfactory demonstration of this fact. God is necessary, if at all, as Kant clearly saw, to introduce the notion of absolute necessity. I should not need to think of God to know how I ought to relate to my fellow humans; "God," or any similar notion, is required only to convince me that I should desire without reservations to fulfill my obligations toward myself and toward other persons. Or to put it differently, a purely naturalistic account of morality is successful if it shows that the mere self-awareness of a person as a person suffices to indicate to him his duties toward other persons. But, what no naturalistic account can do is prove that one ought to desire to exist as a person, that one ought not be tempted to commit suicide. Tillich's theory, although illuminating in many respects, is deficient in that it relies on the notion of "God" to generate both the idea of moral obligation and that of absolute moral obligation. So, although the strategy followed by Tillich to explain the relationship between the notion of "God" and morality is superior to that used by Kant, the latter must be acknowledged to have recognized the problems involved in the solution more clearly.

In a brief booklet dealing with the problems facing contemporary theologians, Peter Berger has made a point similar in some ways to the one I am attempting to express here.¹⁴ He claims that any serious theological speculations undertaken now a days must start with people; in other words, that it must face what we could call the Feuerbachian challenge and show that every well-developed science of humanity, a serious

anthropology points at the Supernatural. The understanding of human nature, Berger believes, can constitute the basis for general arguments to show the plausibility of postulating the existence of a supernatural realm of being, of which humans are constantly aware. Whether one agrees with his particular claims and arguments, one has to admit, it seems to me, that Berger's most general claim, namely, that all theology must be grounded in an anthropology, is correct. Tillich, like Heidegger in his later years, wanted to start from the opposite end, from a general ontology. But to do so is to deny the elementary Aristotelian rule which is the inevitable rule of inquiry in our time, that what is first in the order of being is not necessarily first in the order of inquiry. Modern philosophy has raised too many extremely serious epistemological doubts that cannot be simply dismissed. The reconstruction of ontology cannot be undertaken by simply ignoring the many valid questions raised in the last few centuries concerning the limitations of human understanding and the mechanisms of knowledge. Above all, we cannot simply resurrect God without giving extraordinarily good reasons to do so, and, like Kant, I believe that the first of those reasons ought to be provided by a science of morals.

Part II. The Arguments

So, having briefly and incompletely insinuated some of the problems involved in the explication of the relationship between morality and the idea of "God," let me now insinuate, in a manner not less brief and incomplete, what I take to be the solution to some of these problems.

What is it, then, that needs to be shown? First, it is indispensable to prove that there are limitations intrinsic to any purely naturalistic attempt to provide an ultimate justification for human moral action. Secondly, it has to be shown that such a justification must be thought to be supra-natural in character. The second task involves numerous assumptions about the nature of the supernatural, the most important of which are: a) that granted that there is a super-natural realm of being, such a realm is related to the natural realm so as to serve as its final cause, and b) that this causal connection can be known by humans. Let us examine these presuppositions and attempt to determine whether we would be justified in making them.

In general, there are three ways of explaining naturalistically the motivations for human behavior.* One can claim either that the predominant motives are physiological, psychological or sociological in character. By physiological motives is meant those connected with the needs and demands of the body, namely those that the ancients used to call appetites and emotions. Psychological, in this context, are those motives for behavior stemming from the reflective activity of the soul, and here it is irrelevant whether we think that the soul is identical with the brain or totally different from it. The only thing that counts to characterize a motive as psychological is that it be generated when the soul reflects upon its own needs or those of the body it serves or, if you will, controls. Sociological motives are those that stem from the demands of the human or cultural environment in which the single individual lives.

If we suppose that the only acceptable sort of explanations of human action are physiological, then the very notion of "justification" will have to be abandoned. And this will be so even if we leave room for teleological explanation, for in this latter case, the highest notion we can generate is that of an "organism." The only representation of God compatible with the conception of nature as a whole, including human beings, as an organism is that of a Demiurge or, even better, that of the gods who, according to Protagoras' story in the Platonic dialogue, attempt to establish a closed, balanced ecological system. What is missing in such a picture of the world is the notion of a free agent. The functioning of an individual organ does not need to be "justified;" the exhibition of its internal mechanisms and of its role in the net of interorganic relations exhaust all that can be said about it. This is why, even when an organism has been thoroughly understood, the question about its purpose is always possible. To answer that question it is obviously not enough to rely on new teleological explanations of the

*This classification does not pretend to be final, it is rather propedeutic in nature. An attempt to fit all real views into this framework would have to take into account some other elements and an infinitude of details and nuances. I do think, however, that the three groups of theories considered here are the most basic and the most general.

type which permitted the understanding of the working mechanisms of the organism. Such strategy can lead, at best, to an infinite regress, and, at worst, to a circular argument, for to the question, why should organ x do y , we can answer only by pointing out that doing y is x 's business in the organism.

In this respect, psychologism, which introduces the notion of "soul" or "mind" and, hence, that of "freedom," is infinitely superior to physiologism. The whole Kantian proof, which we have briefly mentioned above, hinges on the conviction that this is the case. Kant's conception of God, on the other hand, constitutes the best illustration of the inherent limitations of psychologism to understand the transcendental or supernatural dimension of morality.

Psychologism can provide us with the idea of a free agent, an agent capable of voluntary action, that is, capable of placing himself beyond natural causality, be it physiological or mechanical. But this mere faculty of freedom does not provide the justification for its own exercise, unless one thinks, a la Nietzsche, that the will justifies itself through its own exercise. But, as is well known, the Nietzschean thesis presupposes the death of God, that is, the impossibility of thinking of an ultimate and unique justification. If, on the other hand, the agents of freedom are numerous, then it follows necessarily that there cannot be a unique justification, save by accident; namely, if it happens to be the case that there exists only one free agent in the universe. But, even if this were the case, the task of proving that the actions of such a unique agent contain their own final justification would remain unsolved until it were shown that, by necessity, the agent could not be thought to act whimsically or arbitrarily.

It was, it seems to me, to escape this paradox that Kant equated the exercise of freedom with the voluntary submission to a universal law. The universal law provides a natural meeting point for all the individual wills, it helps them transcend themselves, overcome their narrowness and, most importantly, endows each of them with the appearance of necessity. But given that the universal law is a mere formula it cannot be of any help in the task of discriminating between the relevant and the irrelevant motives of action of the individual wills. Any wish can become morally relevant provided only that it be incorporated into the magic formula and thus endowed with the appearance of necessity. The most trivial or absurd wishes can in that manner be

transformed into duties or unqualified obligations. From the perspective of moral law, then, all cats are grey, for the feats of the hero are not any more moral than the activities of the mediocre. The lifestyle of the petit-bourgeois, who consumes his life worrying about inconsequential matters, is thus vindicated, and triviality is endowed with a transcendental meaning. Kant's God is, in this respect, the God of the honest Hausfrau.

Here, again, the problem is that an individualistic conception of man has been adopted as the starting point. Later we will see that it is reasonable to assume that God is in a general way concerned with the fate of the individual person. What is not reasonable is to pretend that God's major concerns coincide with those that individuals might have qua individuals. The ultimate meaning of moral action cannot reside in the private domain of individuals, since, as we have seen, this clashes with the very idea of an ultimate meaning of moral action. But, on the other hand, if that which transcends individuality and constitutes what is universally common to humans is to be thought meaningful, it cannot be thought simultaneously to be devoid of all substantial content. Sociologism can be defined, in general, as the doctrine which claims that the social bonds between individuals constitute the substance that justifies or gives meaning to human action. Marxism, in its vulgar version, is probably the best contemporary example of sociologism.

So, the forces that join a man with other men to constitute society provide, at the same time, the ultimate justification for the actions of each individual and of society as a whole. In a way, we have already dismissed this doctrine when, at the beginning, we claimed that the mere explanation of the causes and mechanisms of human behavior does not, by and in itself, provide an ultimate justification for that behavior. Let us now give more detailed arguments to support this view.

Imagine a society that sets as its goal and, therefore, as the implicit goal of the individuals that constitute it, the construction of certain architectonic marvels, which will bring, when completed, not only a great sense of accomplishment and collective fulfillment, but also considerable well-being to all citizens. Assume further that the construction of these marvels requires the sacrifice of several generations of men, among whom there is an incurable skeptic who never ceases to ask the question:

"why should I sacrifice myself for the sake of some future generation since, after all, all I am going to experience during my lifetime is deprivation and suffering?" The answer to this question can only be, "you should sacrifice yourself for the sake of the fatherland or for the sake of your children, etc." In other words, the answer is the same, exactly the same, that the skeptic would get if he were to ask why he should be a good citizen, respect the law, and love his family. What is not the same is his situation, for in this latter case, and provided that his society is not an utterly miserable and unjust one, his being a "good" citizen and parent will be translated into observable or, at least, immediately foreseeable results, while in the former case this is ruled out by the initial assumption.

Unless we choose to persuade him with the help of a whip, we should have to find better reasons to convince a person that the immediate sacrifice of his happiness for the sake of the uncertain future happiness of remote generations is reasonable and, more importantly, that doing so is his absolute moral obligation. (To facilitate the argument we can even assume that there is only one society in the world, since, otherwise, to the challenge just mentioned we would have to add that of proving that each man is, by nature, bound to the society into which he has been born in a way that would make it immoral for him to switch allegiances.) In other words, a society can never provide its citizens with more than what it has to offer during their lifetimes. This apparently trivial fact or, better, the attempt to ignore it, has had an enormous importance. All messianisms of the sociological type owe their effectiveness to their ability to get people to forget this fact, namely the fact that only living persons are effective members of society and that, therefore, society can give them only practical compensation for their efforts.

This is why, in the long run, only the exercise of organized terror can perpetuate the ideals of sociological messianisms. For, if such a messianic ideal is able to succeed in motivating people to act and if these people do in fact derive some practical advantages from so doing, then the ideal will become superfluous and if, on the contrary, their actions based on the ideal prove to be useless in practical terms or even counterproductive, then, too, the ideal will become useless. Insofar as it survives, it will be only as a series of void slogans or as an imposition. No promise, the fulfillment of which

depends exclusively on the achievement of practical goals, can generate in the minds of people more than purely utilitarian calculations. The ideological distortion of sociological ideals consists therefore mainly in the attempt to dress up such ideals with the robe of transcendence and absolute necessity.

From the perspective of the individual moral inquirer, on the other hand, sociological ideals appear as utterly abstract and void. They are too rigid to constitute the natural end of moral inquiry, although, of course, their achievement can bring about its factual termination. But a person who equates his practical well-being with the end of moral inquiry does not appear happy, only content. This impression is fully justified, since the real termination of moral inquiry can be only the absolute dissipation of moral doubt, that is, the achievement of a state in which it is both logically and psychologically impossible to continue the search for a total justification of action. A mere sense of contentment, which depends on external factors beyond the control of the individual moral agent, cannot be the response to a quest for the absolute justification of moral action. And this would be the case even if, like Faust sought to do, we were able to turn the instant of supreme contentment into an infinite state, for, as we have seen, what we are looking for is not only a psychological end to our inquiry, but, most importantly, a logical end to it. Paradise, even if it is to be earthly, must have some attributes capable of affording us a sense of fulfillment more powerful than the one that even the realization of the purest socialist ideals could provide us. The expectation of such a paradise, and it alone, can calm our moral uneasiness.

But if neither physiological, psychological or sociological arguments can provide the ultimate answer to moral questions, and if we assume that these three types of explanations exhaust the gamut of possible naturalistic explanations, then we will either have to conclude that there is no final justification for human action, or that, if there is one, it cannot be naturalistic. Here I will not concern myself with the first alternative, since, as I stated at the beginning, my task is not to prove the existence of God, but merely to determine the role of the concept of "God" in moral reasoning. Hence, it is to the second alternative that I must now address myself.

The perceptive, but also the not-so-perceptive reader will have noticed that at the end of the

previous argument we were left in a position similar to that in which Kant put himself before introducing his argument for the existence of God. But it is obvious that at this point we cannot simply follow Kant's steps, since we have already dismissed some of his basic claims as untenable. If, on the other hand, we show in different terms that the notion of "God" is necessary to provide an ultimate justification for moral action, then the basic tenet of his thesis will have been proven, although, of course, not its details.

What we need, then, is a justification for human action which is free of the effects of all the examined naturalistic proposals. It is important to notice from the outset, nevertheless, that whatever the nature of the ultimate fulfillment of moral action, such fulfillment cannot be totally independent from the concrete manifestations of moral action, that is, moral action must be both the matter and the agent of its fulfillment. The negation of the efficacy of action in respect to its own fulfillment can be described as moral mysticism. Moral mysticism is self-defeating, since its very premises must lead it to proclaim the need to abstain from acting or, at the very least, the irrelevance or amorality of action, for it is difficult to see why one ought to act in order to achieve a good that, by assumption, and insofar as it is achievable, is so by means other than action. Certain forms of Protestantism seem to me to come very close to moral mysticism.

Furthermore, the relation between that which needs to be justified or made meaningful, and that which gives meaning or justifies must be such that the latter can be said to be the final cause of the former. It is immediately obvious that this relation implies the notion of an active link between its two terms. The concept of a passive relation amounts to the assertion that the mere simultaneous existence of the two beings confers meaning to the existence of one of them, which, in and by itself, would be meaningless. To give consistency to this concept one has to assume a) that the existence of one of these beings depends upon that of the other being and b) that their relationship is analogous to that between an artisan and his artifacts, since this is the only relationship capable of linking the existence of two beings so as to make the meaningfulness of one completely dependent upon its meaning or utility for the other. All that is required to justify the existence of an artifact is its usefulness for its creator. On the other hand, it is impossible to see how the question of an ultimate

justification could arise in regard to beings, the mere existence of which renders them meaningful. This, as we have seen, is the intuitionist's way of begging the question.

It is also evident that the relationship we are discussing cannot be blind or purely mechanical. If the "justifier" were to be conceived as a mere mechanism which is triggered or set to work when the right things happen, then it would be not the idea of a final cause but, merely, that of an effect. Furthermore, the notion of "justification" entails that of "evaluation." A thing cannot be justified unless its worth is proven; the justifier, therefore, must be thought of as endowed with the capacity to judge the worth of that which it is to justify.

There are at least two more attributes that the justifier must possess in order to be able to perform its task appropriately, namely, it must be ubiquitous and eternal. That it must have these qualities follows from what has already been said concerning the relation between individual and collective action. For, as we saw, an ultimate justification of moral action requires both that each and every relevant action performed by each and every individual be justified, as well as their actions collectively considered. Given that actions are performed by individuals in different places, sometimes simultaneously and sometimes at different times, and given that the time span covered by these actions can, in principle, be extremely long, the justifier must be both ubiquitous and eternal. Note, however, that the claim here is not that the time span occupied by the actions demanding to be justified is "infinite," but merely that it is or can be long. We have to assume that the process in need of justification is finite, since the justification of the actions of individual agents cannot be completed until the whole process, constituted by the sum total of their actions, has been judged. In other words, unless we want to fall back into the type of individualism we have already rejected, we must assume that the act which provides the ultimate justification to both individual actions and the collective process they constitute is one and the same.

There is, however, a stonger and more important indication that the justifier must be thought to be eternal. If it were finite, then the task of providing an ultimate justification would be beyond its powers. This is so, because if we think it to be the source of the justification it provides, such a justification

will last only as long as it itself lasts, and a perishable justification can hardly be called ultimate.

In relation to this it is easy to appreciate the wisdom behind the Christian notion of the final judgment, which marks the end of the historical process and hence its fulfillment. We can also see the limitations of the notion: the final judgment is conceived as a collection of individual judgments and not as a single judgment passed on the historical process as a whole. The final justification must be of the latter rather than of the former sort, since part of its task must be the consolidation and reaffirmation of the substantial link between all individual actions. The question that arises rather naturally at this point is, of course, which individual actions are we talking about. While discussing psychologism we have demonstrated the absurdity of claiming that any action undertaken by an individual has the qualifications required to attract the attention of the justifier. Let us, as I have surreptitiously done already, call those actions deserving of the attention of the justifier "relevant" actions. We assume then that these actions, and these alone, contribute to the fulfillment of the historical process. It is obvious that our immediate task should be to examine them and to determine some sort of criterion for their identification.

We can hardly imagine a more ridiculous claim than the one that each and every action undertaken by an individual is in need of justification. Most of the things people do, do not call for a justification. Now, another large set of actions is fully and satisfactorily justified in terms of natural desires; and still another set of actions is justifiable in terms of moral obligations explainable on purely naturalistic grounds. These types of justifications and explanations of our actions are enough to satisfy our purely psychological demand for meaningfulness: a fact proven beyond any reasonable doubt by experience, since denying that this is indeed the case would be tantamount to asserting that people never act. In fact, most people do not only act, but they would feel that their life as a whole, that is, the sum total of their actions, were fully justified if it led to a state of contentment or happiness. Happiness, then, is the end of all psychological uneasiness. Now, if we assume with Aristotle, that the happiness of the individual is contingent upon that of the society as a whole (and this is undeniably a reasonable thing to say, since some of the actions of the happy persons are the fulfillment of moral obligations), then it becomes

clear that the mere notion of a happy society does not exhaust that of the final justification of human action.

But if the actions that make a man a happy citizen of a happy society do not, by themselves, justify his existence absolutely, which actions are then left to perform this immense and elusive task? For a man cannot do more than he actually does, and the sum total of what he does are his actions as a citizen. There is only one way out of this riddle, it seems to me, and this is to assume that some of the actions of a man insofar as they lead toward happiness, perform at the same time another task, to wit, that of providing a final justification for his existence and that of the scenario of his actions, namely, the human community.

However painful it may seem, however, the problem, at this point, is far from being solved. For not only are societies perishable and finite, but there are many of them, separated from each other not only by thick juridical walls, but also by even thicker and more impenetrable walls of hatred, enmity and secular mistrust. Are we to assume, then, a la Hegel, that only a few men in each period of time have the fortune of being born into a society in which their actions are capable of calling forth both happiness and the attention of a rather whimsical justifier? Are we to assume that there are "elected" people, as the repetitive legend of many a nation would have us believe? That this cannot be thought to be the case is clearly seen from our previous conclusions, which established that, regardless of what the ultimate justification of a man's life is, it must be in his power to attain it. And, obviously, this would not be the case unqualifiedly, were such power dependent on an accident of birth. Are we to think then, on the contrary, that the existence of each and any human society is justified? If by this we mean to say that the mere fact of existing absolutely justifies the existence of a society, we must be wrong, as has already been demonstrated in connection with the brief discussions of intuitionism and sociologism. We must also be wrong if we believe that each society is separately justified, for it has been established before that the justification of the actions of all individuals must be one and the same. It follows, therefore, that if the actions of all individuals as well as those of the societies they constitute are justifiable, all these actions and societies must be thought of as being part of a single process: it must be postulated that they constitute one entity and that, hence, they are substantially linked to one another. Thus, the whole of human history must be imagined as a single process.

Now we begin to visualize a possible criterion to distinguish individual actions deprived of transcendental meaningfulness from those which possess such meaningfulness. In general, we can say that those actions the exclusive purpose of which is the realization of the agent's (be it an individual or a society) goals are not transcendently meaningful in an immediate and direct way, although it might be said that they are so in an indirect way, namely, insofar as they serve as a means for the realization of action of transcendental significance. It is their contribution to the fulfilment of the historical purpose of mankind which endows with ultimate meaningfulness the actions of individuals. But here, we ought to be very careful, and to begin with we ought to try to explicate in what sense the historical process can be said to be ultimately meaningful. Clearly, it is not so in itself, since being constituted of actions which are not self-justified or intrinsically meaningful, a mere juxtaposition or collection of such actions cannot suddenly render them meaningful. The historical process must receive its final justification from outside, from a being capable of grasping it in all its details but also as a totality, and the idea of such an ubiquitous, eternal being, capable of rendering things meaningful is what has traditionally been called God.

Many rather intriguing questions remain unanswered at this point, for instance, whether the historical process can fail to achieve its goal and hence, whether it can remain unjustified; whether some societies can fail to participate in the historical process, or, more precisely, in the part of it which renders it ultimately meaningful; whether the meaning of the historical process can be deciphered in advance by men and, thus, known "in concreto," as opposed to being known in general, namely, as existing. In regard to this last aspect, it is self-evident that the moral or practical efficiency of the notion of an ultimate justification of human action depends upon its being known by the human agents as an attainable possibility. But nothing more than the mere knowledge of the possibility of attaining an ultimate justification must be postulated as necessary from the point of view of practical efficiency, that is, one does not have to assume that humans know or can know in detail what will ensue once history is fulfilled. This is perhaps why most gods have not taken the trouble to reveal the secrets of life in paradise, save, perhaps, the god of Islam.

The question whether some societies or some men can fail to render their lives meaningful through their action is crucial to moral philosophy and to any kind of theology. Its discussion leads, among other things, to the study of the notion of freedom. Here I have to limit myself to a few very general remarks that, I hope, can at least insinuate the different issues to which one ought to pay attention in this connection.

If one denies that individual human beings or societies can fail to render their action meaningful, one is immediately committed either to an intuitionist position of sorts, or, worst yet, to some kind of moral determinism. For, if the actions of societies and individuals can be justified regardless of what the actual content of these actions is, then it must be assumed that this is the case either because they are part of a predetermined finite series of causal connections, i.e. parts of a some sort of super-masterplan, or that they are meaningful in themselves, and that, hence, their mere existence constitutes their justification. The latter alternative has already been sufficiently discussed. The first alternative demands some more attention.

The type of determinism we are considering here could be called aprioristic determinism, in the sense that it implies the assumption that any relevant action undertaken by an individual or a society is endowed with a meaning even before it actually occurs. If an action is determined to happen, and if it is meaningful, then it must be assumed that its meaning does not depend upon its actually happening. The action therefore cannot be viewed as the source or cause of the meaning, but must be seen as the realization or materilization of it. For the determinist, actions do not bring about meaning, rather they simply objectivize it. But if this were indeed the case, then the historical process would be meaningful even if it did not take place, for its actualization cannot add any meaning to its idea. If history is inevitably unfolding a predetermined master plan, then indeed nothing new can happen under the sun.

It would seem, therefore, that we have to assume both that certain societies and individuals can fail to render their existences meaningful, and that the historical process as a whole can fail to achieve its final justification. This last proposition directly follows from the first, since it is quite conceivable that not only some, but all individuals and societies can fail to render their lives meaningful.

At this point, the perceptive reader will once more prevent us from putting an early end to these brief remarks, for he will submit a question which follows naturally from what has just been said. He will say, "granting that God or whatever we call the justifier does not predetermine the course of events, the question of whether he has a master plan for history, still remains unsolved, since if he does not possess such a plan then it would seem that we have to conclude that the final meaning or justification of history is uncertain and depends entirely on his whim." Certainly, the idea of a whimsical, capricious justifier is not likely to inspire much confidence in people wondering about the meaning of their lives. But, is the idea of an engineer-god, of a maker of blueprints and master plans the one that we ought to oppose to that of a whimsical-god? The tradition, quite reasonably it would seem, has, more often than not, taken a different course: to the idea of a whimsical-god it has opposed that of a just-god. The justifier, as we have seen, must be conceived as a judge; but if he is to be an efficient justifier, he must also be conceived as a just and, hence, completely reliable judge. The ultimate justification of human action, therefore, is also a supreme act of justice. It must be thought of as the recognition of the special merit of certain particular actions or accomplishments. God, unlike the Greek historian or the Spanish chronicler, must not simply think that certain events are curious or fantastic enough to be recorded and preserved in the memory, he must honor them and praise their worth as an act of justice.

Now, I think, we are in a better position to characterize, if not fully, at least more precisely what we have called "relevant acts." Relevant acts cannot be those aimed exclusively at the perpetuation of a man's life, or even at the preservation of his society, since these actions, as we have repeatedly seen, can be fully explained and justified on purely naturalistic grounds. The actions of a person or societies are relevant in relation to their ultimate justification not insofar as they are exclusively directed towards the preservation of their existences, but only insofar as they are aimed at realizing a certain type of existence. This type of existence must be the result of unusual efforts, of undertakings that go beyond the demands of everyday social life, provided that such undertakings seek to achieve universal and not merely particular or local goals. In other words, the actions of individuals and societies can be part of the great search for meaningfulness and deserve the

recognition of the justifier only if they can, actually or potentially, affect humanity as a whole. Again the wisdom of those religions which possess a universalist thrust becomes evident, for if salvation is not open to all, it is open to none.

A rather curious conclusion can be drawn from what precedes, namely that even if history as a whole fails to become meaningful, and even if in the course of human existence only one relevant act were to be performed, this one act would be meaningful to some extent and deserve the recognition of God in the final judgment, for it would mark the extent of the meaningfulness of human history. The failure of the total process does not completely invalidate the success of its parts, since God can individualize his judgment. On the other hand, if the end of history is not the recognition of its worth by God, but merely the achievement of a certain state of affairs, socialism say, and this is not accomplished, the final failure renders each and every individual action directed towards this goal meaningless. This, of course, depends on the assumption that such goals can indeed provide an ultimate justification of human existence, which is an idea we have already rejected.

Even these brief introductory remarks on the relationship between the concept of God and morality cannot be concluded without some reference to the most thorny issue that anyone engaged in these sorts of inquiries must face, namely, the question as to exactly how God is the source of absolute moral obligation. In our criticism of Kant we pointed out his inability to account for this as a major fault in his moral theory--an inability of which, in Martin Buber's opinion, Kant himself was aware and desperately tried to remedy in his later years.¹⁵ What Buber says of Kant can, *mutatis mutandis*, be said of our view as developed so far. We too have yet to show that our knowledge that doing certain things would give transcendental meaning both to our actions and to the history of mankind itself, should produce a sense of absolute obligation.

Now, it is clear that if the obligation we are talking about is absolute, it cannot have anything to do with fear of reprisal or anything like that, since if this were the case it would not be unconditional and, hence, absolute. So, the idea of divine punishment as the source of absolute obligation must be discarded, as must, for the same reasons, the idea of heavenly rewards. In fact, I would go so far as to say that God's feelings, if he experiences any, must be

completely disregarded. Nothing done to please Him or to offend Him belongs to the realm of obligation. Only two of God's attributes, therefore, can be taken into account in this context, and these are His potency and His justice, i. e., his ability to justify our actions. It would seem, then, that the mere thought of the possibility of the final justification of action should somehow generate a feeling of absolute obligation in individuals. How this might happen, we now have to try to imagine. But first let us make sure that we understand what is meant by the expression "absolute obligation."

We saw at the beginning that obligations simpliciter are accounted for, without exception, in terms of the needs to be fulfilled to make possible the establishment of a human community. An absolute obligation, on the other hand, must be unconditional and, hence, in some sense it must not depend upon any desire other than that of fulfilling the obligation. Or, to put it differently, the fulfillment of an absolute obligation must be conceived as an end in itself.

But this conclusion rather than clarifying things seems to complicate them enormously, for, in a sense, it amounts to a negation of the basic thesis of this paper, that God is indispensable for the final justification of action. Let me explain. If indeed the fulfillment of an absolute obligation is an end in itself, then presumably even an atheist can recognize its worth, provided that, in the manner of the intuitionists, he acknowledges the existence of self-contained absolute values. We must show, therefore, that the notion of God is analytically inherent in the thought of a final justification of action. This amounts to showing that the atheist is an insipiens in the Anselmian sense, that he does not know what he is talking about. This proof is a necessary positive complement to the negative proofs developed earlier in the paper.

I inquire into my potentials and obligations and, with ease, come to understand my duties toward my fellow men. But then I ask myself about the ultimate sense of all my action and whether I have an obligation to go beyond the most immediate requirements of social life. The first thing I must notice is that such an obligation cannot be expressed in terms of commands, since commands can never express absolute obligations. No action which is inherently good, good without qualifications, need be the object of a command, since

it is unthinkable that a being sensitive enough to recognize goodness could refuse to materialize it. A being which refuses to help materialize unqualified goodness must be either utterly insensitive and thoroughly evil, or totally ignorant. If the latter, then he could not be able to identify goodness at all, for whoever does not know anything, cannot know goodness; if the former is the case, either the being cannot recognize goodness, or, if he can, he cannot possibly help materialize it, in spite of all the commands to that effect, since evil cannot be a direct and free agent of the materialization of goodness. If there is a God, it is not, therefore, because they stem from his commands that we have to fulfill absolute obligations.

Now, then, does the thought of the Divinity enter our vitalistic calculations? It does not move us by generating fear, nor does it stir us to action by invoking the idea of inescapable commands. What it does, it seems to me, is allow us to represent to ourselves the very possibility of realizing the potential for relevant action with which we are endowed as soon as we become aware of such potential. Consequently, the very thought of an ultimate purpose of action is identical with the notion of God. Essentially, this notion is the idea of possibility of constructing meaningfulness. The atheist is indeed an insipiens; moreover, he displays infinite imprudentia in aiming his efforts towards a goal without asking himself about the possibility of fulfillment. The atheist is one who steps into the abyss.

Now we can, I think, properly account for the concept of absolute obligation. Once a person becomes aware of the possibility of endowing his existence and the existence of his species with meaning, he will also realize that the failure to do so is an infinite, irreparable, dismal loss. It is the fright, the overwhelming sensation of waste that the realization of the dangers of moral laziness generate, which constitutes the substance of absolute obligation. Two, then, are the constitutive feelings of the sensation of absoluteness. One is the certitude of death, the awareness of the finitude of human existence; the second is the realization of the possibilities which can be wasted by inaction. But these feelings in themselves could generate only despair were they not accompanied by the idea of God, which offers a guarantee of fulfillment.

The atheist, on the other hand, cannot experience the sensation of absoluteness, since in denying the existence of God, he minimizes the gravity of the failure. Failure can appear to him only as regrettable, not as hideous.

Clearly, the most important question which remains unanswered is the one concerning the existence of God. As Kant has taught us so well, from the mere fact that we wish that our efforts have an ultimate purpose it does not follow that they do in fact have such a purpose. But this crucial philosophical question need not bother us now, since the intention of this rather hasty collection of notes is simply to exhibit how a person interested in arguing for an ultimate meaning of human action would have to proceed. But even this very general examination of the issues shows, I hope, that any attempt to offer an absolute justification of human action must rely on the notion of God. In this sense this notion is inescapable, for the only alternative to it is the belief that human existence is ultimately worthless.

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NOTES

¹Cf. De Veritate in Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson, eds., Anselm of Canterbury, Vol. II (New York: The Edwin Mellin Press, 1976), pp. 75-102.

²Paul Tillich, Morality and Beyond (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 25-26.

³Critique of Judgment, translated by J. H. Becaard (London: MacMillan, 1914), 86, pp. 370-74.

⁴Cf. Nicomachean Ethics, Book III, 2 (1111b 5-ff). A voluntary action is defined as one in which the cause or reason for the action lies within the agent. Now, within the agent we can find only a desire to be virtuous. It would make no sense to say that I am compelled to be virtuous, for virtue must be accompanied by pleasure, and compulsion is always accompanied by pain. But given that pain is the sign of an involuntary action, if I am internally or externally compelled to act, my action is not virtuous. So, the alternative would be to imagine that the feeling of obligation (compulsion) originates outside myself. But actions, the course of which is external, are also involuntary. Hence, insofar as obligation implies compulsion of some sort, obligation and virtue must be thought to be mutually incompatible.

⁵Cf. Critique of Judgment, 87 end.

⁶Cf. Critique of Judgment, Appendix, 86.

⁷Cf. De Primo Principio, translated by Evan Roche, O.F.M. (St. Bonaventure, New York: The Franciscan Institute, 1949), p. 126. Here I reproduce the Latin original, since the translation of this particular passage seems to me to be rather deficient: "Non videtur consequentia bene probari. Non primo modo, quia duratio maior nihil perfectionis addit; non

perfectior albedo, quia uno anno manet quam si uno die; igitur ex hoc, quod agens habet in virtute activa et simul, non concluditur maior perfectio hic quam ibi, nisi quod agens diutius movet et ex se. Et ita esset ostendendum quod aeternitas agentis concluderit eius infinitatem; alias ex infinitate motus non potest concludi. . . ."

⁸Critique of Practical Reason, translated by Thomas K. Abbott (London: Longmans, Greens Co., 1883), pp. 175-76.

⁹Critique of Practical Reason, pp. 124-27; for Aristotle's view on the relation between law and virtue see particularly Nicomachean Ethics, Book K, No. 9.

¹⁰Paul Tillich, Love, Power and Justice (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 25-26.

¹¹Tillich, p. 27.

¹²Tillich, pp. 112-13.

¹³Cf. Tillich, pp. 115ff.

¹⁴Peter L. Berger, A Rumor of Angels. Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural (Garden City, New Jersey: Doubleday and Co., 1970).

¹⁵Gottesfinsternis in Martin Buber, Werke. Bd. I (Munich: Koesel Verlag, 1962), pp. 515.

¹⁶I use here the adjectives "free" and "direct" because I do not wish to claim that a being or an evil force like Mephistopheles is unthinkable. Evil might well be a tool of goodness, but it must be so in spite of itself. This is not a mere verbal game. Goodness and Evil are conceived here as opposite aims or goals of rational, purposeful human action, and hence, they are mutually exclusive.