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# Why Be Moral? Social Contract Theory Versus Kantian-Christian Morality

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According to social contract theories of morality, right and wrong are nothing more than the agreement among rationally self-interested individuals to give up the unhindered pursuit of their own desires for the security of living in peace. I argue that theism provides a better motivation for rationally self-interested persons to be moral. In the context of our moral development, we are involved in the project of becoming certain kinds of persons, and this project must extend into the next life within a community similar to Kant's kingdom of ends. The temporary squelching of desire necessary for the common good is rewarded in the long run with long-term desire-satisfaction (including both self-interested and altruistic desires), but the squelching of desire makes sense only, I argue, if the moral project continues into the next life.

In Dostoevski's *The Brothers Karamazov*, Smerdyakov claims "If God does not exist, everything is permitted." This quotation has often been taken to imply Dostoevski's belief that morality is essentially dependent upon God; hence, if there is no God, then there is no right or wrong and everyone may do whatever he or she pleases. Perhaps morality is essentially dependent upon God so that, for example, duties or laws depend upon a Lawgiver, and rights are granted to us by our Creator, but Dostoevski may have had something different in mind. He might have meant that if God does not exist, human beings will lose their motivation to be moral. Remove the divine judge, and human beings will simply do as they please. There is an objective moral standard, on this construal, but there is no reason to abide by it.

Consider an analogy. The teacher of my seven-year-old son's class rules with an iron fist. She has laid down rules of proper conduct in her classroom that all of the students have learned well. If asked, each could recite the rules without hesitation and each would endorse the rules as essential to the proper functioning of the class, but when the teacher leaves the room, chaos ensues. The students know the rules, but absent the rule-maker and judge, they will do everything in their power to break the rules (as long as they can avoid getting caught when their teacher returns). When the teacher leaves the room, to paraphrase Dostoevski, everything is permitted.

On this construal of Dostoevski's justly famous phrase, the perennial problem of morality comes into focus: Why be moral? If one can be immoral and get away with it (i.e., avoid punishment), is one more likely to be happy? Is morality an obstacle to human happiness and contrary to the satisfaction of human desire? Is it in our best interest to be moral?

Apart from theism, the social contract theory offers a strong contemporary answer to the question "Why be moral?"[1] According to social contract theories of morality, right and wrong are nothing more than the agreement among rationally self-interested individuals to give up the unhindered pursuit of their own desires and interests for the security of living in peace with one another. In order to secure this peace, one willingly gives up the liberty of total self-determination and takes on the constraints of conventional morality. It is in my best interest, so the argument goes, to have my desires constrained by entering into a society where the desires of everyone are constrained by an agreed-upon power.

I shall argue that the social contract theory is motivationally deficient and that theism provides a better motivation for rationally self-interested persons to be moral. I shall argue that, in the context of our moral development, we are involved in the project of becoming certain kinds of persons and that this project must extend into the next life within a community similar to Kant's kingdom of ends. The temporary squelching of desire necessary for the common good is rewarded in the long run with the long-term desire-satisfaction in being a just, kind, patient, compassionate, and temperate person, but the squelching of desire makes sense only, I shall argue, if the moral project continues into the next life.

In this essay I shall grant the social contract theory's assumption that we are rational, self-interested persons. Self-interest is well-attested. The assumption of rationality is simply that we strive to be rational. Although we often behave in a less-than-rational manner, we strive toward what is in our *rational* self-interest; that is, we aspire as best we can to pursue the best path toward

the satisfaction of our interests. I define rationality in the sense that Gauthier defines it as doing one's best to fulfill one's preferences. A rational being, on this construal, is a self-interest maximizer.[2]

Let us first consider the problem: "Why be moral?"

In Plato's *Republic*, Thrasymachus claims "Justice is really the good of another … they make the one they serve happy, but themselves not at all" (343c). Justice is really another's good, and for the inferior who obeys it is a personal injury; it makes the superior happy, but not oneself. Morality, Thrasymachus argues, is an obstacle to human happiness as it runs contrary to the satisfaction of our desires and interests. Consider the demands of justice to see whose interests are protected. Suppose that I see Gordon's wallet on the table with one thousand dollars inside. I need one thousand dollars, and I consider stealing it. Assume that I can easily steal it and get away with it. Whose interests are protected by morality in this instance? Gordon's, not mine. In this instance, morality is *his* good, not mine. Suppose I get angry at Mary and wish to strike her on the nose. Assume that I can punch her with impunity. Again, whose interests are protected by morality in this instance? Hers, not mine. Examples abound: We ought to keep promises, tell the truth, be faithful to our spouse, avoid murdering others, and so forth.

According to Thrasymachus, morality only protects the interests of the other and is not in my own interest. Of course, if one is unjust, gets caught, and is adequately punished, it is not to one's advantage. So, the most powerful person is the one clever enough to conceal her injustice, perhaps under the guise of justice, and get away with it. Justice is, of course, in *my* interest when Gordon wishes to steal my wallet and Mary wishes to punch my nose. Thrasymachus's point seems to be that when I am under obligation to behave morally, that is, from the perspective of the person performing the action, it is the interests of the other that are protected and not my own.

Since my intention is to compare the motivational force of theistic and non-theistic moral theories, we need to understand the kinds of goods that are attainable on either theory. The goods attainable by a non-theistic moral theory, that is, the goods attainable on the assumption of metaphysical naturalism, are, as far as we can tell, restricted to what I shall call, rather cumbersomely and archaicly, "This-Worldly Goods": A good is this-worldly if and only if it is a good that can be attained *antemortem*, such as pleasure and avoidance of pain and whatever human desire-satisfaction and happiness are attainable in life.

The goods that are attainable if theism is true include both this-worldly goods and what I shall call, admittedly quaintly, "Other-Worldly Goods." A good is other-worldly if and only if it is a good that can be attained *postmortem*, such as complete pleasure and avoidance of pain, total satisfaction of desire, full human happiness, *eudaimonia*, and moral perfection.

Corresponding definitions could be offered of This-Worldly and Other-Worldly evils. If, as naturalism presupposes, postmortem existence is untenable, we are restricted in our attainment of goods—only this-worldly goods are available to us. According to theism, however, both This- and Other-Worldly Goods are available to us.

The problem "Why be moral?" looms large: Morality appears, at first glance, to be designed to favor the protection of the this-worldly goods of the other and not of mine. It seems not to be my this-worldly interest for me to be moral. In terms of this-worldly desire-satisfaction, essential to the attainment of this-worldly human happiness, morality seems to favor the satisfaction of the desires of others and to constrain my own personal satisfaction. How might the social contract theory motivate us, given the pressures to immorality, to be moral?

The social contract theorist argues that it is in my best interest to agree to live in a society that enforces morality. Society protects the rights and interests of its members with both the threat and manifestation of force. Outside of society, that is, in the state of nature, where sufficient power is lacking to force people to respect the interests of others, life is chaotic, life-expectancy is radically uncertain, and the prospects for the enjoyment of one's own projects are dim. So, it is in my best interest to leave this state of nature, to give up my rights, primarily to total self-determination, and to abide by the conventional standards of morality that constrain my desires.

This much seems obvious—it is better to leave the state of nature, under specified conditions, than to remain in it given that in the state of nature the prospect of being able to satisfy our desires is precarious. The executive power in a civil society creates a situation where my life and what is left of my liberty are sufficiently protected from the wiles of other selfish creatures to permit at least the modest pursuit of happiness. It is vastly preferable for rationally self-interested persons to leave the state of nature where their pursuit of happiness is unhindered but also unprotected and to give up certain rights to secure at least a modicum of happiness.

Has the naturalist social contract theorist adequately answered the question "Why be moral?" It is clearly in my best interest to live in a society that

embraces conventional morality and also protects its members from offenders who violate the moral standards and harm its citizens. Yet, Thrasymachus's challenge remains: Why not be immoral, if one can get away with it?

There are at least three options for those who enter into the social contract:

1. To abide by conventional morality.
2. To violate the conventions of morality but to get caught and punished.
3. To violate the conventions of morality where one can avoid getting caught and punished.

Which of these three is most likely to conduce to the this-worldly satisfaction of human desire?[3] Number two is obviously the least likely to conduce to human happiness and I shall not discuss it further. Let us consider number one: Is number one most likely to conduce to this-worldly human happiness? Number one may do so but only on the assumption that most people with whom one deals also abide by conventional morality. If others do not abide by conventional morality and one does, then the likelihood of being taken advantage of and of having one's own desires regularly thwarted, is maximized. As Thomas Hobbes writes: "He that would be modest and tractable and perform all the promises in such time and place where no man else should do so, should but make himself prey to others, and procure his own ruin, contrary to all Laws of Nature, which tend to Nature's preservation."[4]

Even if everyone else were moral, would number one be the most likely way of attaining this-worldly human happiness? If Thrasymachus is right, morality constrains the satisfaction of my desires and correspondingly protects the interests of others. The best situation of all, if we are restricted to this-worldly goods, is number three: To be immoral and get away with it. One might add the additional proviso that the maximally best situation, if restricted to this-worldly goods, is to be selectively immoral and get away with it where I can in a society of people who are moral—that is, within a society of people who abide by the social contract, for they will abide by a standard of morality that ensures the protection of my interests, and I will be acting immorally where I can; that is, in ways that protect my this-worldly interests as well. My immorality and their corresponding morality ensure the maximum satisfaction of my this-worldly desires.[5]

David Gauthier, a contractarian in morality, attempts to rebut this argument with appeal to only this-worldly goods; he does so by resolving the following paradox: "Duty overrides advantage, but the acceptance of duty is truly

advantageous."[6] The problem is not one of initially accepting the social contract—it is surely better for one to live within a society in which the pursuit of individual interest is constrained by standards of justice and morality, which are enforced by a sufficient power. So, it is more rational for self-interested persons to join a society than to remain in the state of nature. Furthermore, one's insufficiency at satisfying one's needs entirely on one's own will make it doubly rational to seek society for the mutual and maximal satisfaction of human needs. Rationality is, according to Gauthier, self-interest maximizing: "… the rational person seeks the greatest satisfaction of her own interests."[7] Hence, the joining of a civil society is rational.

The question is whether or not it is rational to violate, or in Gauthier's terms to "defect from," that contract when one can get away with it (without causing the breakdown of society). In order to prevent defections, Gauthier argues that we must cultivate the disposition not to ask ourselves on each occasion "Does this maximize my interest?" The straight maximizer is the person who asks such questions and seeks to maximize personal utility in every decision. If one were to do so, one would surely see that it is, on certain and perhaps many occasions, not in one's best interest to be moral.

Gauthier believes that adopting such a disposition is rational because people can tell if one is sincere in one's commitment to the social contract. If people adjudge that one is not sincere, one will not gain the cooperative benefits that drove one to rationally affirm the social contract in the first place. Rationality requires, therefore, the development of the disposition of "constrained maximality."

Gauthier's view, which cannot be discussed or criticized in detail, is defective: The development of such a disposition in the face of the evidence that morality is often not in our own best interest would require systematic and massive self-deception; it is difficult to imagine that a procedure that crucially relies on self-deception is rational. It *is* rational in Gauthier's sense of maximizing self-interest but only if the cultivation of such a disposition will maximize one's self-interest.

There is ample empirical (and usually personal) evidence that people will not be able to tell when one is insincere in one's commitment to the social contract and that one can often violate it without loss of cooperative benefits. Gauthier concedes that "the ability to detect the dispositions of others must be well-developed in a rational CM [constrained maximizer]. Failure to develop this ability, or neglect of its exercise, will preclude one from benefiting from constrained maximization."[8] Gauthier overestimates most people's ability to detect insincerity. The rational, straight maximizer will reason that adherence

to conventional morality is typically in her own interest; in addition, she will reason that most people most of the time will not be sufficiently crafty or strong to regularly violate the social contract and get away with it; finally she will adjudge that, when she can get away with it, it is more reasonable to defect than not. Hence, the crafty and strong straight maximizer will develop the disposition to appear sincere when violating the social contract.

Societies such as the United States, where people regularly obey but often violate the social contract, are relatively stable and provide the best state of affairs for the satisfaction of the clever and powerful straight maximizer. The journalist Daniel Schore is reputed to have made the following comment: "Sincerity: If you can fake it, you've got it made." If one were in the initial position—ignorant of one's potentialities—then one would rationally will to develop the disposition not to ask the question: "Is this in my interest?" But we are not in the original position when making characterological choices, and if we reasonably assess that our interests will be maximized by occasional defections from the social contract, then we would reasonably develop the disposition to appear sincere when we are not (but can fool people and violate the social contract with impunity). So, Gauthier has not resolved the paradox because he must concede that it is often not really in one's own interest to be moral (one has simply dispositionally repressed the question).[9]

If I am a rationally self-interested person and the only goods accessible to me are this-worldly goods, I should exploit the social contract in a manner that places demands on others and also seek ways to violate the social contract; that is, to satisfy my own desires insofar as I can avoid getting caught and punished. Ensuring that others feel themselves under the demand of morality will protect my own interests. Ignoring the social contract, on my part, will ensure the unfettered satisfaction of my own desires insofar as I can avoid getting caught and punished.

Perhaps I should become a teacher of philosophy who persuasively and publicly professes the virtues of civil obedience, all the while cleverly searching for ways to be civilly disobedient. Or maybe I should become a powerful politician who, with impunity, secretly flouts the laws she is pledged to uphold. Or maybe I should become a wealthy entertainer who in her spare time endorses charities but all the while is permitted to live by a different standard from that of others. The immoralist option will not be embraced by the weak, Nietzsche makes us aware, but only by those with sufficient wisdom to see what is in their own best interest and sufficient power to avoid recrimination.

If I am restricted to this-worldly goods, then I am most likely to attain them if I endorse and live in a society of individuals that abides by the social con-

tract yet I do all that I can to violate it with impunity. Social contract theories, therefore, have a serious motivational problem: The social contract is insufficient to motivate rationally self-interested people to be moral.

The principal motivational defect of social contract theories is clear: If we are restricted to goods attainable in this earthly life, it is not always in my best interest to be moral. It may be in my best interest to lie, cheat, or steal (if I can get away with it), if there is no next life with which to contend. If only this-worldly goods are available to us, then morality will surely be perceived as an obstacle. It is folly to maintain that happiness is directly proportional to virtue *antemortem*; indeed the Thrasymachean argument is that happiness is often inversely proportional to virtue. This is not hard to see with moral demands that are so severe that no this-worldly good could accrue to oneself from their performance—the giving up of one's life for one's child, say, or a lifetime of sacrifice for one's severely, mentally retarded child, or remaining in a deeply troubled marriage for the sake of one's children, or to speak up when someone else is falsely blamed even when assuming responsibility may prove costly to oneself.

Even less-demanding duties—to declare all of one's income on one's tax returns, not to overbill to cover one's deductible when making a claim for damages to one's insurance company, or not to exceed the speed limit or run a red light in one's car while running late for an important meeting, or to return the extra money that the salesperson mistakenly gave for change—are often contrary to one's own good (assuming that one can violate these duties with impunity).

Now it may be the grim truth that we ought to do our duty regardless of the consequences. Even if virtue does not conduce to our own happiness, we ought simply grit our teeth and do our duty nonetheless. Indeed, according to some interpretations of Kant or at least of the early Kant, it is better if we see that doing our duty is contrary to our own happiness. This interpretation of the Kant of the *Groundwork* has some slight evidence in its favor: He praises most highly the person who does her duty solely out of respect for the moral law and contrary to her inclination to do otherwise.[10] Let us call the early-Kantian view the one that answers the "Why be moral?" with "Because it's our duty"—full stop.[11]

There is wisdom, however, in what we teach our children, lest moral instruction be a noble lie. We tell our children that they ought to be good because it is good for them and because it is better for them to be the kind of person who is patient, kind, generous, unselfish, and loving. In what sense is

it good for them, according to Hobbes and the early Kant? If Hobbes is right, should not our moral instruction primarily consist in the admonition that it is a dog-eat-dog world and that no one will look out for number one if they [our children] do not? And if the early Kant is right, should we not teach our children to do their duty simply because it is good, and say no more, perhaps noting as shining moral examples those people whose lives are wrecks but who rise above the wreckage to do their duties regardless of the consequences? In the first case, one takes thought only for oneself, and in the second, one takes no thought for oneself. But if what we teach our children is true—that morality is good for them and is conducive to their happiness—then the Hobbesian and the early Kantian answers are inadequate.

How might the theist answer the question "Why be moral?" One reply that I shall argue is morally pernicious is that morality is properly motivated by fear of eternal punishment and desire for eternal bliss. God sees all that we do, judges justly, and will punish us in the eternal fires if we are wicked or will reward the righteous with eternal bliss. While both of these may be true and should be sufficient reasons for a rationally self-interested person to be moral, they seem crassly self-interested—even selfish; and selfishness is an inadequate motivation for the moral life. Nonetheless, I have assumed that we are self-interested and perhaps irretrievably so. Let us distinguish, however, two kinds of self-interest:

1. Crass self-interest—interest only in our self and the attainment of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, the satisfaction of desire (not including altruistic desires), or the enhancement of power. Crass self-interest is synonymous with selfishness.
2. Benevolent self-interest—interest both in our self and in the good of others, manifested in generosity, kindness, patience, and primarily charity.[12]

Benevolent self-interest recognizes that we have legitimate concerns for the self and also recognizes that it is possible for us to desire the welfare of others. Benevolent self-interest includes the virtue of altruism—being concerned for and delighted in the welfare of others. If we desire virtue simply because it will make us happy or bring us life eternal or enable us to avoid damnation, we are being crassly self-interested, but if we aspire to the life of

virtue because we desire the good of others, or believe that we ought to, we are moving from crass self-interest toward benevolent self-interest.[13]

I take it that altruism is demanded of the moral life, insofar as morality includes heeding the interests of others. The early Kant seems to diminish the role of other-regarding inclinations in motivating morality; he writes: "To be kind where one can is a duty, and there are, moreover, many persons so sympathetically constituted that without any motive of vanity or selfishness they find an inner satisfaction in spreading joy, and rejoice in the contentment of others that they have made possible. But I say that, however dutiful and amiable it may be, that kind of action has no true moral worth."[14] The moral saint, contra the early Kant, is the one who sees her duties and out of sympathy for other people delights in doing them. The highest moral state of the individual is not only doing the right thing but doing it out of genuine sympathy for the other.

Still, Kant is right in maintaining that we ought not to do our duty primarily because of the rewards that might come to us. We esteem altruism most highly when it arises out of concern for others and not out of a desire to attain some other, extraneous reward—such as the Nobel Peace Prize, winning the next election, or going to heaven. The moral motivation of theism cannot lie simply or even chiefly in the desire for the greatest reward or aversion to the worst punishment. To do so, reduces moral motivation to crass self-interest.

It is not difficult to see the moral defectiveness of such a motivation. One might behave in a manner that is perceived as kind, self-sacrificial, patient, or generous; but one's motive is invidiously self-interested if one's desire is only for the good of one's self. Just as we would properly judge as base the person who is generous simply to gain a good reputation or a public office, so, too, we would properly judge as base the person who is moral simply to gain God's favor or eternal bliss. The other, who has indeed benefited from such actions, has been used as a mere tool, simply the means to an admittedly grand end. Crass self-interest debases apparently other-regarding actions and diminishes the moral value of such actions. The demands of the moral life include not only other-regarding behavior but also the proper concern, desire, or feelings for the other.

Kant's more nuanced view is not unlike the view that I have just defended. With respect to consequences, Kant claims that our primary motive for action is duty to others but that we nonetheless have duties for our own happiness. Kant's intention is simply to isolate the primary and most important motivation to act morally for everyone in every situation—to heed the call of duty, regardless of one's desire for happiness. Here is another way to clarify Kant's

apparently severe point about duty versus inclination. Human beings are a curious admixture of inclination and duty. We have a sense of obligation, but we are also creatures of need. In the good person, which is subordinate to which? It is clear in Kant: In the person of goodwill, inclinations and desires are subordinate to their sense of duty (and vice versa for the wicked person). Kant is not opposed to inclination or desire, but he is interested in understanding the proper order of motivations in the good person.[15]

How can theism properly motivate the moral life without degenerating into crass self-interest? The facile answer is that in becoming altruistic we are becoming better persons, but in becoming better persons are we thereby likely to attain human happiness or inner peace? We might become better persons, but will we secure for ourselves better lives? The moral life demands that we believe that the pursuit of virtue will lead to happiness. Without that hope, rationally self-interested persons will be demoralized and move in the direction espoused by Thrasymachus.

Let me proceed by way of example. Suppose that one is considering both whether to have children and how one should behave toward them. Consider the crassly self-interested parent-to-be. She will have children if she supposes that they will bring her happiness, perhaps to satisfy her desires for holding small, cuddly things or to give her something to boast to her friends about, or to provide for her financially in her old age, or because she is lonely and cannot make any adult friends. She may be good to her children, but she does so simply as a means to her own happiness.

Now consider the benevolently self-interested parent-to-be. She will have children both for her own sake and for the sake of the child. She will surely want the child and the benefits of child-rearing but will also desire the good of the child itself. She may have talents, finances, opportunities, or a whole hunk of burnin' love that are better shared than kept to herself. Her behavior toward her child will be self-sacrificial, altruistic, and not primarily because of the benefits that accrue to herself. Her devotion to her child will be motivated primarily by her desire for the good of the child itself.[16]

The benevolently self-interested parent also reasonably hopes that her sacrifices will create an environment of security, freedom, honesty, peace, joy, fun, and reciprocal love that will redound to her own benefit as well. The burdens of child-rearing are lessened to the extent that the parent creates an atmosphere of mutual self-satisfaction. The parent gives and gets, thus creating a healthy environment both for the child and for herself. Benevolent self-interest demands altruism and self-sacrifice without neglecting the satisfaction of one's own interests.

Deprive a parent of the hope that doing her duties toward her child will result in a greater good both for the child and for herself, and that parent will be demoralized. Deprive parents in general of such hope and the project of parenting will be quickly abandoned. The self-sacrifice demanded of the parent requires that the parent believe that her actions will redound to the greater good both of her child and of herself.

What I have said about parenting can be extended to other members of one's moral community as well. Becoming virtuous or doing one's duty must be properly motivated by genuine concern for the other. This does not, however, require one to abandon all self-interest. One ought to desire one's efforts to contribute to a community of mutual satisfaction in which every person both desires and seeks to attain the good of the other. This is not unlike the creation of what Kant calls "the kingdom of ends." Kant maintains that the third version of the categorical imperative, "Treat people as ends and never merely as means," requires me to endeavor to further the ends of others, "for the ends of a subject who is an end in himself must, if this concept is to have its *full* effect in me, be also, as far as possible, *my ends*."[17] I am required, that is, to share as far as possible the ends of others and to make their ends my ends. In striving toward the kingdom of ends, we are striving toward a community devoted to the welfare of each of its members.

While we should strive for the kingdom of ends, we ought not eliminate all regard for the self. Self-interest neither can nor should be eliminated.[18] Fortunately, benevolent self-interest is not inconsistent with genuine altruism. It is possible, as it is for the good parent, to primarily desire the good of the other but nonetheless to desire one's own good. In attempting to realize the kingdom of ends, one is attempting to bring about a situation of maximum desire-satisfaction both for others and for oneself. In Kantian terms, the order of inclination must be duty first and happiness second. The desire for one's own happiness can be subordinated (but not sublimated) to desire for the good of the other.

The moral life demands an intrinsic connection between virtue and happiness. Kant, however, contends that virtue is not instrumentally connected to happiness: "… morals is not really the doctrine of how to make ourselves happy but of how we are to be *worthy* of happiness (his emphasis)."[19] The kingdom of ends, as I have described it, seeks through the life of virtue both the happiness of the other and the happiness of oneself. The virtue of every member of the moral community is essential to the happiness of every other member.

In order for morality to be good for me and not an obstacle to my own happiness, the kingdom of ends must be attainable. Moral motivation of rationally self-interested people requires the hope that I and everyone else can become virtuous and that everyone's desires, including my own, can be mutually satisfied. What, precisely, should be our hope? What should we hope for if we wish to motivate properly the moral life? I agree with Aristotle that human flourishing takes place when two conditions are met:

1. One attains a life of virtue, and
2. External conditions of life are arranged such that human desires are satisfied.

Our pursuit of happiness is, or ought to be, ordered, to secure both number one and number two. The crassly self-interested person tends to focus on number two: human desire-satisfaction,[20] but in making the moral demand, I also must believe, as Kant argues, that the life of virtue is essential to the attainment of my happiness.

Now here is the problem: Our *antemortem* existence, in many cases, seems to favor wickedness in pursuit of number two. There is no necessary connection *antemortem* between devotion to virtue and human desire-satisfaction. If restricted to this-worldly goods, wickedness may be the best policy to secure human happiness, but becoming virtuous cannot be seen as an obstacle to attaining happiness. We cannot reasonably adjudge that our interests are better served by immorality.

What rationally self-interested beings require, therefore, is hope that there is a next life in which the kingdom of ends is fully realized and in which virtue results in happiness. There must be a next life, with other-worldly goods, if justice is to prevail. It should motivate us because we will believe that our best but invariably puny efforts to flourish will not be in vain. Deprive us of that hope, and we will believe that since the moral struggle cannot be won it is not worth fighting; better to gain all of the this-worldly goods—pleasures and avoidance of pains—that one can for oneself.

Should we hope for a better world simply to gain our own happiness? Are we not led back to crass self-interest once again? Here the demands of virtue are clear, and as is emphasized by most theists, our own interests cannot be completely satisfied unless and until they include the interests of others. *The fulfilled human being seeks the good of others.* If one desires the interests of others, is one not being selfish or crassly self-interested? Here the reply seems

obvious—wanting to help others is the opposite of selfishness; indeed, it is altruism at its finest. The altruistic person need not ignore her own interests, of course, and her interests include the interests of others as well.

The life of virtue is acquired by ridding ourselves of unwarranted and exclusive devotion to our self and taking on the interests of others (while not denying a healthy self-interest). In so doing, one finds one's deepest desires satisfied—to know and to be known, to care for and to be loved by others, to take delight in the joys and to grieve at the sorrows of another (who likewise grieves and rejoices with oneself); the intrinsic reward of altruism is deep desire-satisfaction.

Humans are an essential part of one another's happiness and not merely tools to one's own happiness. The virtue is the reward, so to speak, in the kingdom of ends. When virtue and justice embrace, an ideal community is formed of people who genuinely delight in one another's good. Mutual satisfaction of our deepest human desires ensues. The other is not merely a means to an end but treating the other as an end in herself will intrinsically reward those who are concerned for the other.

The moral life that I have been describing suggests a double source of desire-satisfaction. First, the virtuous person secures the satisfaction of her desires to be kind, just, loving, generous, and patient toward others. Second, the virtuous person, when fully a member of the kingdom of ends, is part of a community devoted to her happiness as well. Neither of these states of affairs is attainable *antemortem* so neither is available to motivate the naturalist, social-contract theorist. Yet, if we are to respond to the moral demand, to sacrifice *antemortem* happiness and even life itself for the good of another, then rationally self-interested persons must believe that it is possible to attain virtue and happiness in the next life.

So far, my argument supports the belief that it insofar as the demand to be moral is rational, it is rational to believe in the next life. There is no necessity, so far, for one to believe in God, but if one supposes, as does Kant, that we are in bondage to sin—that is, to the evil maxim whereby duty is subordinate to self-interest—then virtue is not attainable in this life. If virtue is not attainable, then neither is deep, human fulfillment (according to my argument).

So, if we are in bondage to sin, neither virtue nor happiness is attainable. If virtue and happiness are not believed to be attainable, it is not rational to have them as ends. If it is rational to have virtue and happiness as ends, they must be believed to be attainable. So, rationality requires if there is a legitimate moral demand to pursue virtue and happiness, both the belief that they are attainable in the next life and that God exists to assist in the transformation of

will from the evil maxim to the good maxim or, in my terms, from being crassly self-interested to being benevolently self-interested.[21]

Theistic belief unites the altruistic imperative of the life of virtue with the attainment of human happiness. Neither virtue nor human happiness is guaranteed in this life; if they are attainable, there must be *postmortem* existence where virtue is consonant with happiness. If either virtue or happiness through virtue is not attainable, then the motivation to strive for them is diminished. Restricting ourselves to this-worldly goods, therefore, is demoralizing: The moral life is not sufficiently motivated and one might more reasonably choose the life of wickedness.

Motivating the moral life, therefore, rationally demands hoping for a next life in which virtue is attainable within a community of like-minded people and intrinsically issues forth in happiness. This requires the belief that God can and does offer assistance in the transformation of the will. And finally, if there is a God in whom we find our deepest desires satisfied, as Boethius, Aquinas, and Pascal contend, then the life of virtue will include devotion to him and the kingdom of ends will become the kingdom of God.

I have argued, in Kantian fashion, that Christian belief has moral advantages in that it, and it alone, is sufficient to motivate rationally self-interested people to be moral. A prominent alternative motivation is the social-contract theory, which, I have argued, is desperately inadequate.[22] Only if there is a next life in which virtue is attainable and issues forth in happiness, may one be properly motivated to be moral. This is crucial when morality is demanding. If this moral argument were the sole reason offered in defense of theism, belief in God would be held on poor grounds indeed. We might recognize the truth of my argument and simply be demoralized; the sober truth might just be that it is often in my best interest to be wicked.

Suppose, however, we were to locate this debate within the context of a larger theistic argument in which we were able to demonstrate that theism is roughly equal in explanatory power to naturalism.[23] In such a case, the moral advantages of theism might tip the scales in favor of belief in God. No doubt that there are pragmatic advantages to theism as well, concerning, say, the meaning of life or the grief suffered when loved ones die. These pragmatic advantages may provide additional reasons to believe in God. All things being equal, it is surely more reasonable to accept an explanatory theory that has more moral and pragmatic advantages than its competitors. As for motivating the moral life, theism has the advantage.[24]

## Notes

1. Recent defenders of social contract theories of morality include Kurt Baier, *The Moral Point of View: A Rational Basis of Ethics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1958) and David Gauthier, *Morals By Agreement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).
2. Gauthier, *Morals By Agreement*, 8–9.
3. This is more properly conceived of in terms of strategies and outcomes. The strategies will be to abide by or violate conventional morality and the outcomes may not be simply up to the individual. Which outcome is obtained will depend in part on the way the world is.
4. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), chap. 15.
5. Here my argument departs from George Mavrodes' otherwise excellent argument in "Religion and the Queerness of Morality," in *Rationality, Religious Belief and Moral Commitment*, ed. Robert Audi and William Wainwright (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986), 213–26.
6. Gauthier, *Morals By Agreement*, 2.
7. Ibid., 7.
8. Ibid., 181.
9. The literature on Gauthier's views is vast. For more substantive critiques of his defense of constrained maximization, see Peter Danielson, "Closing the Compliance Dilemma: How It's Rational to Be Moral in a Lamarckian World," in *Contractarianism and Rational Choice*, ed. Peter Vallentyne (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 291–322; Maarten Franssen, "Constrained Maximization Reconsidered …" *Synthese* 101, 2 (November 1994): 249–72; and J. Howard Sobel, "Straight Versus Constrained Maximizers," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 23, 1 (March 1993): 25–54.
10. Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1959), 14–16. I shall argue in the next section that this is a misinterpretation of Kant or, at least, is not the all-things-considered view of Kant.
11. Again, there is some evidence in favor of this early Kantian view. Although Kant allows that we have duties to our self and that, when duty is not calling, we may attend to our own happiness, but we are required "to take no account of [happiness] when duty is in question." From *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1983), 93. And in the

*Groundwork*, he writes: "The [moral] incentive of the human will … can never be anything other than the moral law.…"

12. This distinction is not unlike that made by Aristotle when he contrasts the bad form of self-love of the many with the good form of self-love of the excellent person in *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1168b17–1169b2.

13. While Kant contends that we are always motivated in part by self-love or happiness, he also believes that we have an "instinct to benevolence." See *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. Louis Infield (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1930), 194.

14. Kant, *Foundations*, 14.

15. Kant so fears the intrusion of the "dear self" into our moral deliberations that appeals to self-interest are entirely inappropriate to the motivation of the moral life.

16. Kant would agree that it is proper to pursue one's happiness if one primarily pursues one's duty. He is concerned with the order of incentives: The good maxim is where one puts duty first and happiness second; the evil maxim puts happiness first and duty second. Kant writes: "Hence, the distinction between a good man and one who is evil cannot lie in the differences between the incentives that they adopt into their maxim (not in the content of their maxim) but rather must depend upon *subordination* (the form of the maxim); *that is, which of the two incentives he makes the condition of the other*.

    Consequently, man (even the best) is evil only in that he reverses the moral order of the incentives when he adopts them into his maxim. He adopts, indeed, the moral law along with the law of self-love; yet when he becomes aware that they cannot remain on a par with each other but that one must be subordinated to the other as its supreme condition, he makes the incentive of self-love and its inclinations the condition of obedience to the moral law; whereas, on the contrary, the latter, as the *supreme condition* of the satisfaction of the former, ought to have been adopted into the universal maxim of the will as the sole incentive." *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), 31–32 (emphasis his).

    I am trying to argue that we can be motivated by both duty and happiness. In the case of child-rearing, however, short-term desire fulfillment for the parent, will be superseded by the benevolently self-interested parent's sense of duty to her child.

17. Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. H. J. Paton (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 98.

18. It is not clear that Kant does, either. He simply argues that morality requires making self-interest subordinate to duty.

19. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 130. There is a connection between virtue and happiness, according to Kant. God grants happiness insofar as an individual merits it according to her virtue. He continues: "Only if religion is added to it, can the hope arise of someday participating in happiness in proportion as we endeavored not to be unworthy of it."

20. Assuming that we eliminate the desire for virtue, once again.

21. This argument has been developed in detail in John Hare, *The Moral Gap* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Hare points out the defects in Kant's understanding of divine assistance and offers a more adequate solution.

22. There are, of course, other non-theistic answers such as those offered by eudaimonistic theories. It is beyond the scope of this essay, but I contend that the best eudaimonistic theories are likewise theistic. If we agree with Aristotle that the conditions necessary for happiness must obtain to secure eudaimonia and that virtue is not always its own *antemortem* reward, then eudaimonistic theories are best located within a context of *postmortem* rewards.

23. That it can and perhaps has been so argued, see William L. Craig and Quentin Smith, *Theism, Atheism and Big Bang Cosmology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) and Kelly James Clark, *Return to Reason* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990).

24. I am grateful to my former colleague, John Hare, for inspiration and critique on all matters relating to this paper. I owe him more than I can say, and I dedicate this essay to him.