CHRISTIAN THEISM AND THE PROBLEM OF GUILT

by

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of moral guilt is a universal problem in need of explanation because when it is avoided, rejected, or denied, guilt diminishes our well-being and limits human flourishing: relationships remain estranged and unreconciled, the guilty suffer the pain of conscience, and unresolved wrongdoing ultimately means that justice is not served. Historically, various explanations of moral guilt have been proposed, some based on naturalism and others on theism. Robust explanations attempt to answer the questions of where guilt originated, how culture influences morality, and which moral standard adequately evaluates human behavior. By developing a chain argument starting from moral guilt, I propose that the phenomenon of guilt implies a theistic God with certain attributes whose existence makes better sense of our moral experience than naturalistic explanations of guilt. Limited initially to theism, I argue philosophically to show how our guilt points to a God who is personal, all-knowing, and a moral lawgiver who is good and fit to hold us accountable. I then turn to Christian theism to link this theistic God with the God of historic Christianity who, according to the biblical account, reveals himself to us and resolves our guilt by meeting our need for forgiveness and reconciliation through Christ's atonement. If this thesis accomplishes its aim, I will have shown that the existence of guilt is much harder to reconcile in a naturalistic world than in a theistic one, and that Christian theism offers a more likely and robust account for both explaining our moral experience and resolving the problem of moral guilt. Such an account contributes to the richness of the moral argument at large by identifying the five divine attributes important to moral discourse as noted above, explores how our guilt points to the God who has personally disclosed himself to humanity, and clarifies our moral standing before God instead of relegating our guilty feelings to pure subjectivism or moral relativism.

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ABBREVIATIONS

All references in the text of Nietzsche's essays in *On the Genealogy of Morals* are to sections, not pages. So, for instance, "*GM* II, 14" refers to section 14 of the second essay of the *Genealogy*. The following abbreviations and editions have been used.

General

b.	born
AD	*anno Domini* (in the year of our Lord)
AV	Authorized Version (i.e. the King James Version)
ESV	English Standard Version
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
r.	reigned
RV	Revised Version (i.e. King James Version, 1885)

Darwin

DOM	Darwin, C. (1874) *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*. 2nd edn. London: John Murray

Freud

CD	Freud, S. (1961) *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Standard edn. J. Stachey (tr.). New York: Norton

Nietzsche

EH	*Ecce Homo*: from Walter Kaufmann (tr.), *On the Genealogy of Morals*; and *Ecce Homo*. (1998) New York: Vintage Books
GM	*On the Genealogy of Morals*: from W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (tr.) *On the Genealogy of Morals*; and *Ecce Homo*. (1998) New York: Vintage Books
GM I	"'Good and Evil,' 'Good and Bad'" in *GM*
GM II	"'Guilt,' 'Bad Conscience,' and the Like" in *GM*
GM III	"What Is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?" in *GM*

Hebrew Bible / Old Testament (including Septuagint)

Gen	Genesis
Exod	Exodus
Lev	Leviticus
Num	Numbers
Deut	Deuteronomy
Josh	Joshua
Judg	Judges
Ruth	Ruth
1–2 Sam	1–2 Samuel
1–2 Kgs	1–2 Kings
1–2 Chr	1–2 Chronicles
Ezra	Ezra
Neh	Nehemiah
Esth	Esther
Job	Job
Ps/Pss	Psalm(s)
Prov	Proverbs
Eccl	Ecclesiastes
Song	Song of Songs
Isa	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah
Lam	Lamentations
Ezek	Ezekiel
Dan	Daniel
Hos	Hosea
Joel	Joel
Amos	Amos
Obad	Obadiah
Jonah	Jonah
Mic	Micah
Nah	Nahum
Hab	Habakkuk
Zeph	Zephaniah
Hag	Haggai
Zech	Zechariah
Mal	Malachi

New Testament

Matt	Matthew
Mark	Mark
Luke	Luke
John	John
Acts	Acts
Rom	Romans
1–2 Cor	1–2 Corinthians
Gal	Galatians

Eph	Ephesians
Phil	Philippians
Col	Colossians
1–2 Thess	1–2 Thessalonians
1–2 Tim	1–2 Timothy
Titus	Titus
Phlm	Philemon
Heb	Hebrews
Jas	James
1–2 Pet	1–2 Peter
1–3 John	1–3 John
Jude	Jude
Rev	Revelation

Introduction

THE PROBLEM OF GUILT

This thesis aims to address the universal problem of guilt by comparing various naturalistic responses given to explain guilt with an aim toward showing how theism better explains the phenomenon of guilt and a certain type of theism, namely Christian theism, also promises a more robust solution to resolve the problem of guilt. That said, in order to advance my argument toward this aim, here are the foundational questions that first must be addressed. First, What does it mean to engage in a naturalistic understanding of guilt? Second, what do I mean by characterizing the problem of guilt as universal? Third, what do I mean by referring to guilt as a problem? Fourth, what do I mean by *guilt* (i.e. what type of guilt am I referring to)? Fifth, how am I defining moral guilt? Sixth, what important distinctions must be made and understood in relation to moral guilt? Seventh, and finally, given the broad scope of naturalism and theism, what are the necessary limitations I plan to impose on this project? After briefly addressing these questions, a chapter by chapter summary is given in order to familiarize readers for the trek ahead.

1. Setting Out the Problem

1.1. What does it mean to engage in a naturalistic understanding of guilt?

Naturalists and non-naturalists alike recognize the phenomenon of guilt. Where they part ways is in their explanations or accounts of guilt as well as their remedy for it. Since there is some common ground shared at the outset in that both naturalists and non-naturalists alike recognize this phenomenon, this allows for an initial point of agreement, i.e. the phenomenon of guilt, before each group parts ways on how to account for it. To engage in a naturalistic understanding of guilt, then, is to explore some of the various explanations given by naturalists to account for our guilt. After considering various explanations to account for guilt in terms of naturalism in chapters 1–3, I will later consider in chapter 6 whether or not theism is better able to account for the moral facts in need of explanation.

1.2. What do I mean by characterizing the problem of guilt as universal?

By "universal," I mean to say that the problem of guilt is systemic and not time-bound. That is to say, guilt is a cross-cultural phenomenon, not confined to a particular culture or particular time in history. Of course, one might object that sociopaths or psychopaths undermine the universality of this claim, an objection that will be addressed in chapter 6.

1.3. What do I mean by referring to guilt as a problem?

The person overcome by guilt first and foremost wants to eliminate it—a motivation that speaks largely to guilt as a "problem." Failure to eliminate guilt results in subsequent problems, such as mental torment over past wrongs, alienation from others, and, as I will argue, even alienation from God among a wide array of emotional afflictions, which further serve to limit one's well-being.

As a result, the person pained by guilt is right to wonder as to the source of his guilt and to search out an explanation by looking for a remedy to absolve it. During such inquiry one may wonder if the cause of one's guilt is simply the product of a long evolutionary process put in place to advance his survival or muse whether it is the result of mere social conditioning or an illusion to be cast aside or simply a useful fiction to ensure social cohesion. One might even wonder if there is more to the story than meets the naturalistic eye and consequentially consider if people's guilt gives insight to their moral standing before a God whom they sense they have offended. Which explanation people give to explain their guilt will inevitably determine how they proceed to remedy the problem of guilt. And for this reason, guilt remains a problem to be explained. This thesis will bring its readers to consider various naturalistic explanations for guilt but will conclude by contending that Christian theism not only presents a fuller explanation of guilt, but a more promising remedy to resolve the problem of guilt than naturalism does.

1.4. What do I mean by **guilt** *(i.e. what type of guilt am I referring to)?*

There are various labels given to describe the term *guilt*, including the following: *survivor* guilt, where a soldier feels guilty for being the lone survivor of a military attack; *historic* guilt, where some present-day whites may feel guilty for the slavery that took place at the hands of their ancestors in the antebellum South; or

corporate guilt, where one person's actions result in the guilt of his associates. The particular type of guilt this thesis concerns itself with is *moral* guilt. This type of guilt attaches itself to a person who is guilty of committing a wrong action (i.e. a sin of commission) or failing to do a right action (i.e. a sin of omission).[1] Regarding this type of guilt, a distinction must be made between the *fact* of guilt and *feelings* of guilt. If someone commits a moral wrong that she was obligated to not do, she is in *fact* guilty, but this does not mean she will *feel* guilty. On this account, one can be factually guilty of some transgression without the accompanying feelings of guilt. Why? Because one's conscience does not react as a moral monitor due to ignorance that the misdeed is in fact wrong, or one may have deadened their sensitivity to conscience through a regular practice of ignoring it. Similarly, one can be bothered by feelings of guilt without being factually guilty. In this instance, the person is experiencing pseudo guilt because she is not blameworthy of wrongdoing. As I will argue, a healthy response to *actual* guilt is for one to also feel guilty. In this case, the feelings of guilt are objective in that the guilt one feels corresponds to the person's actual state of affairs—i.e. of in fact being guilty.

1.5. How am I defining moral guilt?

Before providing a more precise definition of guilt, a concession must be made. While I cannot guarantee a definition that satisfies the intellectual preferences of everyone, it is my intention to provide a definition that by and large attempts to be generous enough for theists and non-theists alike to find points of agreement so as to guide this overall project without unnecessary distractions. To accomplish this, I have sought to construct a definition specific enough to sail this thesis toward its destination but general enough for both naturalists (many of whom are atheists) and theists to come aboard. That said, even those not yet fully committed to moral realism, for the sake of argument, could concede without much hesitation that moral guilt is the *perceived* consequential result of a moral violation, or at minimum what one at least believes to be a moral trespass. Given this concession, here is a working definition of guilt. *Guilt is a violation of some perceived moral norm that is often, but*

[1] To avoid being overly pedantic, the use of the word *guilt* refers hereafter to the type of moral guilt that results from trespasses of commission or omission.

not always, accompanied by feelings of guilt.[2] In this case, the fact of guilt precedes the feelings of guilt. Or to put it another way, feelings of guilt surface after the person is already in fact guilty of a moral infraction. Now, notice what this definition does not do. It does not commit anyone to theism or naturalism. It does not offer an epistemic grounding for moral norms, nor does it explain the origin of guilt, or for that matter, supply a solution. Rather, this definition provides both theists and naturalists some common ground, while leaving room for both to develop an account of moral guilt with its accompanying ethical concerns. I concede that this definition is difficult to get off the ground without the appearance of circularity, so I was left with an option. Be generous to both naturalists and theists, which abductive argumentation allows, or else create enemies right out of the gate with a robust realism so airtight that there is little room for discussion. So, I chose the former with the hopes of guiding readers to consider naturalism along with theism in order to determine which account offers the best explanation for moral guilt.

Having said that, owing to the delimited nature of this dissertation, its focus is specifically on moral guilt. As evidence goes, this phenomenon of morality can arguably function to provide some measure of reason to believe in objective morality. But since the argument was thus delimited, the evidential significance is likewise limited. Our experience of moral guilt is likely one of several pieces of evidence that would need to be adduced in a robust, full-fledged case for moral realism and what I have called "factual guilt." This dissertation only hints and gestures and points at the additional pieces of evidence that collectively could comprise a cumulative case for moral realism. A fuller treatment would elaborate on those other cases for moral realism—from David Enoch's (2011) notion of deliberative indispensability to Terence Cuneo's (2007) two arguments for moral realism to Russ Shafer-Landau's (2003) rigorous defense of moral realism to yet others—but this dissertation sees itself as working in tandem with those other approaches. As such, it need not provide a definitive, fully orbed case for such realism; it rests content with providing but one

[2] Simon Blackburn (2005, p. 157) in *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* defines guilt as follows, "Guilt is the uncomfortable feeling of having done wrong, and therefore deserving the anger of others." This definition acknowledges (A) guilt is a feeling that is (B) caused by having done wrong, which (C) warrants an angry response of others. The feeling (A) is connected to the moral trespass (B). The fact of guilt (i.e. "having done wrong") explains the uncomfortable feelings.

piece of the puzzle, although, I would contend an important one—both morally and existentially.

To simply ignore the problem of guilt only invites the type of criticism stated by Richard Swinburne (1989, p. 74), who aptly points out, "A philosopher who does not like to talk of moral guilt deprives himself of an obvious expression for making the point that a person who fails in his obligations has got something wrong with him which needs dealing with."

1.6. What important distinctions need to be made and understood in relation to guilt?

There are important distinctions that must be made and clarified as they relate to moral guilt. One such distinction has already been made, namely the difference between the fact of guilt and feelings of guilt.[3] Another distinction that must be made and understood is pseudo guilt versus authentic guilt. Pseudo guilt is not the violation of some moral norm; rather, it is believing oneself to be guilty when in fact one is not. Consider the example of a guilt-ridden mother who lost her daughter after allowing her to go on an extended road trip in which she died in a tragic car accident. Though the mother is not responsible for her daughter's death, she believes she is and as a result suffers from pseudo guilt. In this instance the mother is not guilty because no real standard of right and wrong has been violated—what philosophers refer to as *objective morality*. The guilt would only be authentic if the mother was in some way culpable (e.g. if she attached a bomb to her daughter's vehicle before she departed because she resented her behavior as of late). To determine whether one's guilt is truly objective one must ask, Have I violated an external moral law (e.g. one of the gods, God, or a Platonic virtue, or even a cultural law)? If so, then the guilt is objectively valid. If no moral norm has been transgressed, then it is merely pseudo guilt. A mere shadow of one's imagination, haunting the victim but lacking objective force, as in the case of the mother discussed above. She suffers from objective *regret*, but not guilt. And if she is to get well, she must treat the true source of her grief.

[3] Swinburne (1989, p. 73) distinguishes between objective and subjective guilt: "Objective guilt is the status acquired by one who does objective wrong.… Subjective guilt is the status acquired by one who intentionally does wrong."

A final distinction that must be made and understood is the difference between *guilt* and *shame*. Although both words are part of the same normative moral family of obligation, they are not synonyms. To offer a thought experiment, here is how I distinguish these words in my own mind. The focus of guilt is on the *wrongdoing*, whereas the focus of shame is on the *wrongdoer*. Guilt focuses primarily on the act of the actor, while shame focuses primarily on the actor of the act. The distinction is subtle, which explains why the two words are often used interchangeably. These terms can be used synonymously (e.g. aspects of the range of each term's meaning overlap as depicted in the semantic range represented by the circles of a Venn diagram), but they can also be distinguished (some parts of the two circles do not intersect). Here is another way to note the difference: While shame often attaches itself to the guilty person, feelings of guilt do not necessarily afflict the person struggling from shame. That is because the person who feels guilty is focused on the action that led to his guilt, whereas the person suffering from shame is focused more on his audience's perception of him than he is on the trespass. The guilty person feels bad for being guilty, but the shame-filled person feels bad because others think he is bad. The guilty person feels bad because he did what he ought not do, but the shame-filled person feels bad because he ought not to have been caught. So in the same way a person can in fact feel guilty and not be, it is also possible for a person to not feel guilty, when in fact he is, and yet still feel shame. That is because the person in this instance is asking, "What will they think of me?," whereas the guilty person is thinking, "What have I done?" This is not to say that a person cannot experience both shame and guilt simultaneously. One can feel bad about committing a misdeed and also feel bad that others think less of him as a result. Nevertheless, even though the two words do overlap in meaning, they can also be distinguished and for purposes of this thesis and moral discourse, they need to be distinguished.[4]

[4] Distinguishing *guilt* from *shame* does not mean that those cultures that are considered primarily shame cultures or guilt cultures fail to understand both terms. It just means that one term receives special or more emphasis than the other term in one culture due to that culture's overall value system, and vice versa for the other culture. Noting that guilt and shame are generally ubiquitous, Blackburn (2005, p. 157) writes, "Although anthropologists and historians sometimes divide societies as more prone to stress one of these emotions rather than the other, both appear to be found in a large variety of human cultures. The social function of each of them is readily seen: with guilt we are primed

1.7. Given the broad scope of naturalism and theism, what are the working limitations I will impose on this research project?

While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to assess the explanations of each and every worldview concerning moral guilt, there is much to be gained by exploring both theism and naturalism. By "theism," I am referring to monotheism, which includes Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. And by "naturalism" (or a naturalistic approach), I mean the worldview of those who contend that nature is all that exists. However, I realize that there are those who live as if there is no divine being(s), using only the tools of methodological naturalism to discover truth, but who also may be agnostic about whether or not such a being(s) exists. For these individuals, the evidence is far from obvious, so they operate as if there is no supernatural realm when developing their theories. In the end, their method is functionally atheistic because it excludes supernatural inquiry. After examining the naturalistic explanations in chapters 1–4 and theistic explanations in chapters 5–6, I seek to do more than offer an account of the problem of guilt but show in chapter 7 how Christian theism offers a more viable solution to human guilt than its naturalistic counterparts.

2. Chapter-by-Chapter Summary

As it relates to Darwin, Nietzsche, and Freud's writings, I am primarily concerned with what can be "distilled" from their work regarding moral guilt, its origins, and its possible remedies in order to consider representative examples of positions at odds with theism. Obviously, these towering intellects do not represent the entire naturalistic field, but by delimiting myself to them, much can be gleaned regarding their naturalistic explanations for moral guilt. Upon reaching the conclusion of this thesis, three questions will have been answered enabling me to contend that theism better explains the moral data regarding guilt than naturalism does, and Christian theism offers the best resources not only to explain our guilt, but offers the most viable and universal remedy to ultimately eradicate it. The three questions to be taken up in chapters 1–3 are as follows: (1) How do the interlocutors account for the

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to tolerate the anger of others that would otherwise make us angry in return; with shame we internalize the values that lead to admiration or rejection."

origin of guilt? (2) What possible remedies do they offer to treat guilt? (3) What are the merits and demerits of their positions?

2.1. Chapter 1: Darwin's Naturalistic Explanation of Moral Guilt

In part I, I consider naturalistic explanations of moral guilt. I begin in chapter 1 with English natural historian and geologist Charles Darwin's naturalistic explanation of moral guilt in *The Descent of Man* (1871) and show how he used the terms *regret, remorse, conscience, dissatisfaction,* and *misery* synonymously to refer to moral guilt, and then I demonstrate how he sees guilt deriving from the moral sense. From this I explain how Darwin accounts for guilt by (1) attributing humanity's ability to reason and reflect to account for right and wrong actions, (2) considering their concern to be esteemed by others, and (3) showing how the diversity of human values depicted in various cultures all determine the degree to which each culture experiences the moral phenomenon of guilt. I then conclude the chapter with an assessment of Darwin's argument for the origin and remedy of guilt.

2.2. Chapter 2: Nietzsche's Naturalistic Explanation of Moral Guilt

In chapter 2, I examine German philosopher and cultural critic Friedrich Nietzsche's view of moral guilt by looking to his *Genealogy of Morals* (1887) and in particular his second essay to extract his explanation. Like Darwin, Nietzsche is a naturalist, but they part ways in their moral understanding of guilt at the point where Nietzsche takes the death of God to its logical conclusion, which for him results in a full-fledged rejection of morality and consequently moral guilt. By looking at his concept of a *bad conscience* and seeing how it became guilt-ridden under the herd morality as depicted by the debtor-creditor class, Nietzsche's understanding of the problem of guilt emerges as something to be both denied and overcome by means of a "will to power." I then conclude the chapter with an assessment of Nietzsche's argument for the origin and remedy of guilt.

2.3. Chapter 3: Freud's Naturalistic Explanation of Moral Guilt

In chapter 3, I next consider Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud's concept of moral guilt as seen in his *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930). Here he argues that guilt was a self-protective mechanism developed by humanity to protect civilization

from destroying itself. This chapter pays special attention to the two stages by which Freud believed guilt came to fruition, first through a fear of external authority as sons in the primeval family feared their father, which after killing their father led them to face second a fear of internal authority with the erection of the harsh super-ego. With the super-ego in place and the force of guilt now in effect, the consequence for humanity resulted in a loss of happiness, a limitation of freedom, a heightening of guilt, and various forms of neurosis. For Freud, only a revolt against one's super-ego to limit its demand can weaken the infliction of guilt imposed by one's overbearing super-ego. By means of this revolt coupled with the aid of therapeutic remedies, he hoped to assuage humanity's guilt. I then conclude the chapter with an assessment of Freud's argument for the origin and remedy of guilt.

2.4. Chapter 4: Comparing Explanations

In chapter 4, I take the three historical figures considered in the first three chapters, namely Darwin, Nietzsche and Freud, and seek to synthesize part I of this thesis by comparing the work of Darwin with Nietzsche and then comparing the work of Nietzsche with Freud. While both Nietzsche and Freud were influenced by Darwinian naturalism, Nietzsche is the central figure of comparison because he took Darwin's moral assumptions, given naturalism, to their logical conclusion. Freud picked up where Nietzsche left off with the internalization of one's instincts that then provided a naturalistic mechanism with the super-ego in order to offer a fuller naturalistic account of guilt.

2.5. Chapter 5: **Features** *of the Moral Argument*

In part II, I turn from naturalistic explanations of moral guilt to consider theistic explanations to account for morality in general. In chapter 5, I provide a brief history of the moral argument to show how an argument from moral guilt complements the moral argument at large. I consider various moral arguments given by both classical and contemporary theistic philosophers by paying special attention to various *features* each framer of the argument utilizes to construct his argument. I conclude the chapter by listing several reasons why adding a moral argument from

guilt contributes to the cumulative case of the overall moral argument through including the feature of moral guilt.[5]

2.6. Chapter 6: The Argument From *Moral Guilt*

In chapter 6, I develop my argument from moral guilt in two stages. The first stage includes an abductive argument where I argue that theism offers a better explanation than naturalism to account for moral guilt. In the second stage, I argue deductively that if moral guilt exists, then God exists. My theistic argument argues for an Anselmian God as the greatest conceivable being who is a personal, all-knowing, moral lawgiver who is good and fit to hold us accountable. I argue over and against the moral Platonists contending that a moral offense requires one who can be personally offended. Not only does a sense of *ought* compel one to ask if God exists, so too does the sense of *caught* cause one to ask the same question. Caught is the guilty feeling that we are being watched by someone personal. To account for universal moral guilt, I argue that the personal moral lawgiver must be all-knowing.[6]

[5] The phenomenon of moral guilt is a moral feature located near the bottom of what I refer to as the moral trajectory. This trajectory captures the scope of the various moral features in the obligation family of moral discussion. At the top of the moral trajectory exists (1) a good and loving God, one who in the Anselmian sense issues (2) moral commands, which form the basis of our (3) moral obligations and duties. Those failing to adhere to these obligations and duties are considered (4) blameworthy and in turn are rendered (5) guilty. Such guilt is often accompanied by feelings of (6) shame, and those in such a state stand in (7) moral judgment before the God to whom they are (8) accountable. (This list is not meant to be taken as exhaustive, nor is the order necessarily precise, but rather the list serves as an example of the moral trajectory in a non-technical sense. It is simply meant to demonstrate guilt and how it fits into the moral picture.) While each of the moral features along the trajectory serves as a possible candidate for discussion in any moral theory, a further investigation into the problem of guilt and what this entails for the individual in such a state is worth exploring.

[6] Gyges's magic ring does not exist to make one's actions invisible before an all-knowing God.

And to make his commands known to us, I argue that God as our moral lawgiver has disclosed to us his moral expectations.[7]

2.7. Chapter 7: A Christian-Shaped Response to Moral Guilt

In chapter 7, I show how Christian theism is well-suited to resolve guilt. To do this, I draw on the rich resources of Jesus Christ's atonement as God's benevolent response to the universal problem of guilt. Whereas in chapter 6 I argue philosophically from guilt up to God, in this chapter I argue from God down to our guilt in the person of Jesus, who came to eradicate our guilt. Taken together, these two chapters provide a round-trip argument demonstrating how the Christian narrative does better justice to all the data regarding guilt.[8] Consequently, by not being metaphysically reductive, Christian theism offers a fuller account of human guilt that not only explains the cause of our guilt, but also offers the guilty a total remedy to resolve human guilt. This means that the shape of the Christian case is a response that is more comprehensive in its explanatory scope and that actually is able to resolve the problem of moral guilt.

3. Conclusion

If this thesis has accomplished what it set out to do, I will have shown that the existence of guilt is much harder to reconcile in a naturalistic world than in a theistic world, and that Christian theism offers the clearest picture for both explaining and resolving moral guilt amongst these two worldviews. In the end, I am attempting to show that Christianity better explains and resolves the universal problem of guilt than does naturalism. Admittedly, the endeavor that would be required to show that Christianity better explains and resolves guilt over and above other versions of theism

[7] The order of being is different from the order of knowing. We may *know* guilt before we understand the *being* whom we have offended.

[8] By data, I am referring to things like moral grounding, objective morality, accountability, and how our experience with guilt fits well with a personal God who can and has been offended. All of these issues will be taken up in chapter 6 where I develop my moral argument from guilt to show how the God of theism makes sense of this moral data in need of explanation regarding guilt.

is for another project beyond the scope of this thesis. However, I am confident both Jews and Muslims alike would find much common ground from my argument regarding how theism offers a better explanation of guilt than naturalism does, although where they would part ways would be on the solution level, in particular where I turn to Christ and his atonement to resolve guilt.[9]

In the end, I argue that guilt is but a secondary problem, as Baggett and Walls (2011, p. 189) write, "A biblical portrait of reality reminds us that guilt is secondary; it's not our worst problem. The deeper problem is alienation from God, of which the guilt is but a symptom." Unfortunately, the problem of humanity's guilt results in our alienation from God. But fortunately, God's solution to our guilt by means of trusting in Christ's atonement removes the relational barrier caused by our guilt and instead offers us complete reconciliation before God. Given the various benefits, such as forgiveness of one's moral status before God, reconciliation, restored mental and emotional health, and the promises of a meaningful life both now and forevermore, it is a solution that supplies a total account for guilt and all that is entailed with it.

[9] For a little more insight as it pertains to Islam's stance regarding how Allah forgives the guilty, see the first note in section 4.2.5. Concerning Judaism, historic Christianity by and large aligns with the Jewish understanding of Yahweh's handlings of the guilty under the old covenant, yet where Christianity parts ways with today's Orthodox Judaism is in regard to how God currently deals with humanity's guilt under a new covenant inaugurated by Christ's (Messiah's) atonement, which Judaism rejects. The New Testament book of Hebrews explains the superiority of the new covenant nicely.

Part I

NATURALISTIC EXPLANATIONS OF MORAL GUILT

Part I of this thesis begins by looking at three naturalistic explanations of moral guilt. The three figures discussed in this first part are Charles Darwin, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud. While each of them provides an account of guilt from naturalism, their accounts still vary and their work provides plenty of insight into the topic at hand. Darwin is of particular interest because he set out to offer the first historical account of guilt on the basis of naturalism. Nietzsche is equally of interest because he took Darwinism to its natural or logical conclusion and rejected morality and guilt altogether as something that was fabricated by humanity to tame culture. And then there is Freud, the great psychoanalyst who shared some similar opinions with Nietzsche concerning the internalization of one's instincts to act out, but differed in his account of the origin of guilt. Much of the work completed by these three towering figures of history has impacted the way we understand morality and in particular guilt, and for this reason, we enter into this assessment of their work by turning back in history, beginning first with Darwin. By the end of this part, we will better understand the moral story of guilt and how it took naturalistic shape.

Chapter 1

DARWIN'S NATURALISTIC EXPLANATION OF MORAL GUILT

1. Introduction

The English naturalist, geologist, and biologist Charles Darwin, known for his theory of evolution by natural selection, is a figure of monumental importance as it relates to the topic of morality, and in particular moral guilt. Though his groundbreaking book *On the Origin of the Species* (1859) had little to say about morality, the implications of his evolutionary theory upon human morality was not missed by his contemporaries. This resulted in no shortage of opinions from both theists and naturalists alike. And fast forward to today, with over a century and a half now passed, the discussion has intensified as contemporary naturalists of all stripes, be they biologists, psychologists, sociologists, primatologists, and neuroscientists, have sought to construct moral theories upon the naturalistic foundation laid by Darwin in his seminal work.

Together these various field experts work to explain how Darwin's theory informs the various features of morality, including moral guilt. Considering Darwin's towering influence, it seems fitting to begin with the man himself.

As noted above, though Darwin said very little about human morality in what would become his magnum opus, this does not mean he was bereft of thought on this topic. Rather, he reserved his thoughts on that subject for about a decade later when he published *The Descent of Man* (1871; hereafter cited as *DOM*).[10] In *DOM*, where

[10] In 1874, Darwin published his second edition of *The Descent of Man*, which has since been the most widely read version. For this reason, I too draw my research from his second edition, which includes more detailed explanations of human morality, or the moral sense. For the sake of clarity, Darwin's primary chapter on the moral sense in his first edition, which is entitled, "Comparison of the Mental Powers of Man and the Lower Animals—*continued*," was located in chapter 3, but the same revised chapter under the same title is moved to chapter 4 in the second edition. Unless otherwise indicated, all citations are from *DOM*, 2nd edn. (1874). All quotations from *DOM* and other cited works by Darwin are from transcribed or scanned originals at *Darwin Online*, available at http://darwin-online.org.uk.

the bulk of my attention will be given in this chapter, Darwin seeks to explain morality, what he refers to as the moral sense, through the lens of natural history.[11]

Here one might ask, "What does Darwin's moral sense have to do with guilt?"[12] The aim of this chapter is to answer this question in order to grasp his naturalistic explanation of guilt. And in doing so, I will show how his view of moral guilt derives from his naturalistic understanding of the moral sense. To accomplish this, I will first address the way he interchanges synonymous terms in reference to guilt. I will next define what Darwin means by the moral sense. I then will clarify what I mean by deriving guilt from the moral sense. With this framework in place, I have selected three naturalistic explanations that Darwin provides for moral guilt as derived from the moral sense, which will be examined. Next, I will offer six final assessments and then conclude the chapter with a brief summarization.

2. Darwin's Synonymous Terms for Moral Guilt

Let me begin by acknowledging that Darwin does not explicitly use the word *guilt* in chapter 4 of *DOM* (his key chapter on the moral sense), but the concept of moral guilt can be easily identified through his interchangeable use of such terms as *regret*, *remorse*, *conscience*, *dissatisfaction*, and *misery*.[13] This will soon become

[11] Darwin's interest in moral philosophy is evident given his familiarity with moral philosophers such as Kant, Hume, and Mill. To see how Darwin's moral view fits into the scope of today's normative categories of ethical theory, see Mizzoni's (2014) article "Darwin and Normative Ethics" in which he shows how Darwin's views complement other theories like virtue ethics, natural law ethics, social contract ethics, utilitarian ethics, deontological ethics, and care ethics. While admitting the uniqueness of Darwin's evolutionary view of human beings, Mizzoni contends that although Darwin's ethical theory is not far-fetched and is not a fully fleshed-out, normative theory of ethics, it still retains features familiar to contemporary normative ethics.

[12] For articles addressing Darwin's view of morality, see Ayala's (2010) "The Difference of Being Human: Morality," Hodgson's (2014) "The Evolution of Morality and the End of Economic Man," and Charmetant's (2010) "Darwin and Ethics: The History of an Early Encounter."

[13] To see these words as close "siblings" is not difficult, but a philosopher or scholar would no doubt prefer greater precision in defining one's terms and sharpening the distinctions between such terms. One might say that Darwin apparently did not split philosophical hairs concerning his use of synonymous terms for guilt.

evident.[14] To support my claim, I will briefly situate each of the aforementioned words in their contexts as seen in *DOM* before explaining the idea of the moral sense in the next section. This clarification of terminology will be useful for understanding Darwin's view of moral guilt, a concept that I have already claimed supports his idea of the moral sense.

Since the use of a word in a given context determines its meaning, it is helpful to remember how words can have a range of meanings, and Darwin's use of terms is no exception. Furthermore, in this chapter I will not cover every use of the terms in Darwin's writings, but for reasons of space constraints and research focus I will discuss only those passages in chapter 4 of *DOM* in which Darwin uses synonymous terms for moral guilt. After examining these terms, I will then provide a brief critique of Darwin's use of these terms.

2.1. Regret

Darwin poses two important questions that will help inform our understanding of the moral sense. First, why do humans feel a sense of ought? And second, why then do humans feel regret when they fail to do what they ought? In chapter 4 of *DOM*, Darwin (1874, p. 110) inquires, "Why should a man feel that he ought to obey one instinctive desire rather than another? Why is he bitterly regretful, if he has yielded to a strong sense of self-preservation, and has not risked his life to save that of a fellow-creature? Or why does he regret having stolen food from hunger?" Contained within his questioning are two examples where a person failed to do what he ought to have done. First, according to Darwin, he ought to have put others before himself, and second, he ought not to steal.[15] After failing to do what he ought to have done, Darwin's sub-question of regret is doubly asked. In the two examples listed above, he

[14] Darwin (1872, p. 263) does use the word *guilt* in his book *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. In that work he details how one can discover a person's guilt through various human emotional expressions, such as through the eyes or by blushing. He even provides an example of an instance where he detected guilt in his own two-year-old child. For the related quotation describing this incident (pp. 262–263), see note in section 5.3.

[15] Darwin's examples fit nicely with his view of morality. For Darwin (1874, p. 126), "the golden rule" is: "As ye would that men should do to you, do ye to them likewise," which he calls "the foundation of morality."

uses the phrase "bitterly regretful" and the word "regret," the former expressing the intensity. On one occasion a person simply feels regret and on another he feels *bitterly* regretful. The emotion apparently can fluctuate depending on the nature of the wrong committed.

The synonymous relationship between regret and guilt are easy to observe given that the word "guilt" could just have easily been substituted for "regret" without compromising what we mean by guilt as a *violation of some moral norm* or the failure to do what one ought as Darwin put it. And guilt, like regret, has a feeling component accompanied by the fact of one's wrongdoing.[16]

2.2. Remorse

Another term Darwin uses to describe moral guilt is *remorse*. Remorse can be the consequence of breaking some societal rule. Darwin (1874, p. 114) says, for example, "Many a [Hindu], it is said, has been stirred to the bottom of his soul by having partaken of unclean food. Here is another case of what must, I think, be called remorse." Granted, many would contend that this is unnecessary remorse, built on superstition; nevertheless, the violation is still accompanied by remorse. Darwin later writes, "It would be difficult to distinguish between the remorse felt by a [Hindu] who has yielded to the temptation of eating unclean food, from that felt after committing a theft; but the former would probably be the more severe" (p. 122). Of the two crimes Darwin mentions, eating unclean food and thievery, theft is largely considered the severer crime by most cultures, although remorse can also weigh heavily on the

[16] In *Charles Darwin: His Life, Told in an Autobiographical Chapter, and in a Selected Series of His Published Letters*, Darwin (1892, p. 328) writes, "As for myself, I believe that I have acted rightly in steadily following and devoting my life to Science. I feel no *remorse* from having committed any great sin, but have often and often *regretted* that I have not done more direct good to my fellow creatures" (emphasis added). With this quote, Darwin seems to connect remorse as something caused by sin, in this example, "great sin," of which he felt innocent. However, in this context, unlike other places he uses "regretted" not in the sense of a moral trespass (though one might argue he is conceding regret as it relates to lesser sins of omission, as contrasted with "great sin." If that was the case, it would only reinforce my argument) but, in the broader sense by which we typically understand the word as it *can* include guilt feelings, but regret can be experienced not necessarily because some trespass has been violated, but often because through reflection we can better weigh how we would repeat the past if given another chance.

violator of some social taboo, perhaps with greater severity. Further discussing remorse, Darwin writes that "it is scarcely credible that a savage, who will sacrifice his life rather than betray his tribe, or one who will deliver himself up as a prisoner rather than break his parole, would not feel remorse in his inmost soul, if he had failed in a duty, which he held sacred" (p. 131). Here the notion of remorse is expected for the person morally guilty of violating his duty to remain loyal by instead succumbing to betrayal. Such remorse breaks forth after one fails to keep a sacred duty. As with regret, these examples illustrate how Darwin depicts remorse as synonymous to moral guilt.

2.3. Conscience

A third term Darwin uses synonymously to refer to moral guilt is *conscience*. On some occasions, he correlates the moral sense with conscience (1874, see pp. 79, 80),[17] and in others, such as the following sentence, he distinguishes the moral sense from the conscience: "The moral sense … tells us what we ought to do, and … the conscience … reproves us if we disobey" (p. 116). When a moral "ought" is shunned, the conscience enlivens the wrongdoer with a sense of guilt. In this context, conscience serves more like a conduit for conveying a message of guilt to the guilty party. However, on another occasion Darwin defines conscience closely to moral guilt: "Nevertheless, the bee, or any other social animal, would gain … some feeling of right or wrong, or a conscience" (pp. 99–100). I said "closely" because he says, "some feeling of right" as well as "wrong." Insofar as the feeling of wrong is involved, conscience is hard to distinguish (emotionally) from moral guilt. A bad conscience is a guilty conscience, and a guilty conscience is a bad conscience. In general, conscience has a dual function or operates more like the moral sense; it is like a coin whose two sides, heads and tails, are nevertheless part and parcel of the same coin. The coin itself is conscience (or the moral sense), and the two sides are right and wrong. Though Darwin's moral terminology is at times murky, it is clear from the following statement that he understands the conscience as a sort of guide: "This is conscience; for conscience looks backwards, and serves as a guide for the future" (p.

[17] See also Darwin (1874), p. 110, in chapter 5 of *DOM* entitled, "On the Development of the Intellectual and Moral Faculties during Primeval and Civilised Times."

114). In this instance, conscience acts as a moral guide, or functions like a moral sense, to help people discern right from wrong. However, more important to the concerns of this chapter, Darwin also uses conscience synonymously for moral guilt.

2.4. Dissatisfaction *and* Misery

The final two words Darwin uses as synonyms for moral guilt are *dissatisfaction* and *misery*. Like the preceding terms, Darwin uses each of these terms to describe moral guilt. The reason I have grouped these words together is because Darwin frequently does. For example, this connection is observed in a passage where he postulates that if any animal were to develop a similar intellectual capacity to that of humans, that same animal would also acquire a moral sense that would be the source of much dissatisfaction and misery whenever the moral animal reflects on past wrongs. Darwin (1874, p. 98) says in this case, "As soon as the mental faculties had become highly developed, images of all past actions and motives would be incessantly passing through the brain of each individual; and that feeling of dissatisfaction, or even misery, which invariably results … from any unsatisfied instinct, would arise." As will be discussed below, Darwin recognizes a gradation of guilt. For now, the gradation is evident through his heightened expression of the words "dissatisfaction, or *even* misery," sparked upon reflection of past wrongs.

In addition, Darwin says further that "satisfaction, dissatisfaction, or even misery would be felt, as past impressions were compared during their incessant passage through the mind. In this case an inward monitor would tell the animal that it would have been better to have followed the one impulse rather than the other. The one course *ought* to have been followed, and the other *ought not*; the one would have been *right* and the other *wrong*" (p. 100, emphasis added). The "inward monitor," i.e. the moral sense (or in some instances conscience), disturbs the wrongdoer with a lively sense of guilt or moral unease. After moving on from his belief that all social animals with increased intellectual abilities will develop a moral sense, Darwin expresses the same sentiment while explaining how the moral sense developed in humans through increased intellectual ability (p. 92). And presently, by reflecting on what others consider to be praiseworthy or blamable, they are met with feelings of "dissatisfaction, or *even* misery" at the thought of committing blameworthy actions. Later, Darwin states that for humans to avoid disturbing their conscience, they must

not violate their social instincts, nor shall they act in a way that runs contrary to ways supported by reason, lest they "assuredly feel dissatisfaction" (p. 116). In this context, misery is not adjoined to dissatisfaction.[18] However, in another context "misery" is used without "dissatisfaction." Darwin says, "It is far from strange that an instinct so strong and so generally admired, as maternal love, should, if disobeyed, lead to the deepest misery, as soon as the impression of the past cause of disobedience is weakened" (p. 114). A deep sense of misery, regret, remorse, or guilt is experienced through disobedience. Here misery is connected with disobedience—the failure to do what one ought to have done.

Having now considered these five terms—*regret*, *remorse*, (bad) *conscience*, *dissatisfaction*, and *misery*—it should now be evident that Darwin uses these terms synonymously for moral guilt. This was demonstrated by citing cases where Darwin uses each of these terms in chapter 4 of *DOM* to describe a guilt-like sensation following a moral lapse.[19] Having clarified the connection between these synonymous terms for moral guilt, a point of critique is warranted. Darwin would have served his

[18] Darwin (1874, p. 114) also uses the word "misery" apart from "dissatisfaction" non-morally: "Even when an action is opposed to no special instinct, merely to know that our friends and equals despise us for it is enough to cause great misery." Here misery is caused through rejection or being unloved rather than wrongdoing. Context is key for taking his intended meaning. In another instance, he uses "dissatisfaction" without the word "misery" to counter the utilitarian idea that humans always act according to the pleasure principle or that which will produce the greatest amount of happiness. Rather, Darwin shares how certain deeds, in particular, certain actions that transpire under dire circumstances, like rescuing someone from a fire, are not thought out according to the pleasure principle, but persons typically act from impulse, instinct, or habit, without considering the "dissatisfaction" that could follow if the person did not act (p. 120). He even prefers the idea of acting for the "general good" or "welfare" of others versus the "general happiness" (p. 121), as in the event of rescuing a fellow person.

[19] Other words Darwin uses to express the concept or idea of guilt that could be considered but will not due to constraints of space include *blame* (1874, pp. 89, 109), *blamable* (p. 92), *repentance* (p. 93), and *shame*, a feeling that "relates almost exclusively to the judgment of others" (p. 93, 99, 109). Mentioning several of these in one passage, Darwin says, "After having yielded to some temptation we feel a sense of dissatisfaction, shame, repentance, or remorse" (p. 125). Here he describes feelings of wrongdoing caused by yielding to temptation.

readers better by clarifying his terms. A justification for this critique will now be explained.

2.5. The Need for Terminological Clarity

The influence of *DOM* is still felt, and the intellectual prowess of Darwin cannot be denied. Nevertheless, I think Darwin's moral argument could have been improved by cleaning up his terminology for his readers by providing clear definitions of the moral terms he utilizes. Had he done so, not only would his argument make better sense, it also would have left him less exposed to critique regarding some ambiguity of meaning in his use of synonymous terms for moral guilt.

Now some may object, and perhaps rightfully so, that Darwin never felt obliged to say he was using these terms synonymously, because explaining this to the reader would merely be to state the obvious. While that may be the case given his flexible usage of such moral terms elsewhere, it also seems reasonable to suggest that given his bold goal in providing a naturalistic account of the moral sense, he would have been wise to more carefully define and distinguish these terms at the outset. On the other hand, some may say, although perhaps less convincingly so, that Darwin never meant to use these terms synonymously for moral guilt. This is to say that moral guilt is in a separate category of its own, and that is why he avoided the term in chapter 4 altogether. Such persons might even suggest that I am smuggling moral guilt in to make my point. While rejecting the latter charge, as my assessment of synonymous terms has just shown otherwise, and by responding to the former one, I would suggest that if moral guilt is its own category, that too should have been made clear by Darwin, since the terms he uses that I consider synonymous certainly look and feel a lot like moral guilt, as each of the terms is used in contexts that describe the state of angst one feels after capitulating to wrongdoing. Therefore, Darwin captures the essence of guilt through his synonymous terms by featuring both a factual component (i.e. committing a perceived immoral act), and the oft-accompanied corresponding feeling component (i.e. the sensation of regret, remorse, bad conscience, dissatisfaction, and misery).

3. Darwin and the Moral Sense

For Darwin, the moral sense is what sets humans apart from the rest of the animal world. He begins chapter 5 of *DOM* with an important acknowledgement: "I fully subscribe to the judgment of those writers who maintain that of all the differences between man and the lower animals, the moral sense or conscience is by far the most important" (1874, p. 97).[20] Darwin summarizes the moral sense as a sense of "ought," a sense that he considers humankind's finest quality.[21] His intrigue with the moral sense beckons him to consider German philosopher Immanuel Kant's question regarding duty or ought, "Whence thy original?"[22] It is this question, on the origins of *ought-ness* as experienced by the moral sense that leads Darwin in pursuit of the answer from the vantage point of natural history. Darwin even admits, "As far as I know, no one has approached it exclusively from the side of natural history" (p. 80). Admittedly, many philosophers and theologians have grappled with the origin of morality, but Darwin, an evolutionary naturalist, concentrates his attention in

[20] Note how Darwin equates the moral sense with conscience, yet as will be discussed later in the chapter, he distinguishes the words. Furthermore, while Darwin concedes that the moral sense is the greatest difference between humans and the lower animals, he also stresses at the end of chapter 4 that the difference between humans and the higher animals is "one of degree and not of kind" (1874, p. 126). Nevertheless, he clearly admits that the human being "alone can with certainty be ranked as a moral being" (p. 111).

[21] Darwin (1874, p. 116) says, "The imperious word *ought* seems merely to imply the consciousness of the existence of a rule of conduct, however it may have originated. Formerly it must have been often vehemently urged that an insulted gentleman *ought* to fight a duel. We even say that a pointer *ought* to point, and a retriever to retrieve game. If they fail to do so, they fail in their duty and act wrongly."

[22] Kant (1836, p. 136) writes (cited in Darwin, 1874, p. 97), "'Duty! Wondrous thought, that workest neither by fond insinuation, flattery, nor by any threat, but merely by holding up thy naked law in the soul, and so extorting for thyself always reverence, if not always obedience; before whom all appetites are dumb, however secretly they rebel; *whence thy original?*'" (emphasis added).

chapter 5 of *DOM* on developing what he believes to be the first naturalistic explanation of the moral sense on account of natural selection.[23]

Many years later, the acclaimed naturalist Edward O. Wilson (1975, p. 27) would famously write, "Scientists and humanists should consider together the possibility that the time has come for ethics to be removed temporarily from the hands of the philosophers and biologicized." The biologicization of ethics began with Darwin.[24]

After stating his intended purpose for chapter 4 of *DOM*, Darwin spends the next several pages (98–110) sharing what can be learned about morality from non-human animals. When the thrust of his argument resumes, Darwin (1874, p. 111) readily distinguishes the human being from the lower animals as a moral being, definitively stating, "A moral being is one who is capable of comparing his past and future actions or motives, and of approving or disapproving of them. We have no reason to suppose that any of the lower animals have this capacity." For Darwin, humans have acquired a moral sense (the ability to discern right from wrong), and as a result, they alone can be called with certainty "moral beings."[25]

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[23] Admittedly, Darwin spends the first portion of chapter 4 (1874, see pp. 80–88) exploring his secondary interest in the moral sense, and that is to share his observations regarding the higher animals and the moral sense. He believed that if such animals were endowed with similar intellectual capacities as humans, then they too would eventually be moralized. For this to obtain, higher animals would need to develop their social instinct coupled with sympathy, as well as memory, language, and habit, all of which are present in humankind. Darwin believed it very probable that any animal endowed with social instincts, such as parental and filial affections, would acquire a moral sense once its intellectual aptitude was similarly equivalent to humankind. Yet he did not think that if animals acquired this moral capacity, they would then share a replicated moral code to humans (p. 80).

[24] While offering a biological explanation for morality, Darwin was without a doubt influenced by philosophical moral thought. Like Wilson a century later, Darwin was eager in his day to provide a "biologicized" explanation for ethics, but not necessarily at the expense of drawing on the insight of moral philosophers such as Mill, Spencer, or others (see Darwin, 1874, pp. 98–101).

[25] This is not to say that Darwin failed to recognize certain moral features in animals such as altruistic behavior, caring for one another's needs, and reciprocity. He did. But animals, in his opinion, had nowhere near the amount of moral capacity as humans because of lack of reason. Similarly, the famed primatologist Frans de Waal (2006b) has captured the attention of many readers with his work *Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved*, which looks at the continuity of morality among

Having defined what a moral being is and conceded that humankind is distinct among the animals as a highly developed moral animal, Darwin returns to his immediate subject to ask, "Why then does man regret?" (p. 112). This is a telling question, because from this question Darwin derives moral guilt from the moral sense.

4. Deriving Moral Guilt from the Moral Sense

While Darwin's overarching argument in chapter 4 of *DOM* is to provide a naturalistic explanation for the moral sense, in general he does so on the heels of humankind's shortcomings. Think of the moral sense as an umbrella term, arching over other subordinate moral features, in particular, shame, fear, altruism, and guilt. Of the various subordinate moral features, the concept of guilt is the *main* feature that Darwin utilizes to help his readers grasp his overarching theme of the moral sense.

Following several pages of discussion about socially instinctive animals, Darwin (1874, p. 110) circles back to his core research question.

> We have not, however, as yet considered the main point, on which, from our present point of view, *the whole question of the moral sense turns*. Why should a man feel that he ought to obey one instinctive desire rather than another? Why is he bitterly regretful, if he has yielded to a strong sense of self-preservation, and has not risked his life to save that of a fellow-creature? Or why does he regret having stolen food from hunger? (emphasis added)

This is quite the admission. What is the question on which the entire moral sense turns? He actually raises more than one question. First, why is there this sense of *ought*? And second, why are humans *regretful*? Regret is used here morally; the type of regret that one experiences after breaking some moral law or code. In this case, the regret or guilt is induced by egoism at the expense of altruism, and guilt is also accompanied by thievery. Therefore, Darwin's question "Why regret?" as morally featured in this context could just as easily be asked, "Why do humans experience guilt?" And here, guilt is derived from violating one's moral sense or duties by failing to do what one ought.

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humans and apes, as well as de Waal's (2013) *The Bonobo and the Atheist*, where he argues that religion is not necessary to explain how animals demonstrate moral capacity.

This derivation of guilt from the moral sense is made even more obvious upon returning to his question a page or so later, where Darwin queries, "Why then does man regret, even though trying to banish such regret, that he has followed the one natural impulse rather than the other; and why does he further feel that he ought to regret his conduct? Man in this respect differs profoundly from the lower animals" (p. 112). There is something unique about humans regarding morality. For Darwin, humans alone are troubled by guilt. The difference between humans and animals is profound. Unlike humans, the rest of the animal kingdom is not overcome with remorse over past wrongs. When a scorpion fly steals a dead insect from the spider's web, or when a rhesus monkey snags a poor lady's purse and runs, these species are not vexed with feelings of guilt.[26] To account for this moral difference between humans and non-humans, Darwin is prepared to explain. But first an answer to a very important question is in order.

5. Darwin's Naturalistic Explanations for Moral Guilt

Why are humans moral? According to Darwin, social sympathy is what awakens humanity's moral sense, for without sympathy there would be no moral concern for the other. Thus Darwin (1874, p. 126) considers "the social instincts,—the prime principle of man's moral constitution." Without such a constitution, moral motivation would be amiss and human beings would be amoral beasts. However, as moral beings, humankind is now equipped with a sympathetic disposition that is capable of measuring the moral worth of decisions and experiencing moral guilt. And to answer his question, "Why then does man regret?" (p. 112), Darwin comes forth with at least three explanations to defend his view that the moral sense, and in particular guilt, has evolved through natural selection. But before looking at the first explanation, let me mention that these explanations are also his explanations for answering the question of where the moral sense in general originates. Recall that

[26] Frans de Waal, however, would certainly disagree that humans alone are moral animals. For example, consider de Waal's (2006a) article "The Animal Roots of Human Morality" or de Waal's book (2006b) *Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved*. For a counterargument included in de Waal's book, see contributor Christine M. Korsgaard's (2006) chapter, "Morality and the Distinctiveness of Human Action."

moral guilt is derived from Darwin's view of the moral sense. Due to the fact that he has so much to say with respect to moral guilt in particular, it will be helpful to now view Darwin's explanations in light of this topic along with brief intervening critiques that I will provide after each of his explanations.

5.1. The reflective capacity of humans causes them to experience guilt.

Darwin believed that morality was biologically determined, and with advanced intellectual development, the moral sense would be further sharpened. At last, with humankind's intellectual faculty firmly in place, they would now be equipped with reflective capacities that emerged from natural selection to assess the moral worth of past ethical decisions. According to Darwin, once the memory capacity surfaced, humans could reflect on the past impressions that led to their moral decisions. Nevertheless, this reflection mechanism was not a pain-free process. Humans remembered, but sometimes sorely. As past actions rendered them socially blameworthy, humans could now see by reflection where their past impulses got the best of them. Concerning this matter Darwin (1874, p. 113) writes,

> A man cannot prevent past impressions often repassing through his mind; he will thus be driven to make a comparison between the impressions of past hunger, vengeance satisfied, or danger shunned at other men's cost, with the almost ever-present instinct of sympathy, and with his early knowledge of what others consider as praiseworthy or blameable. This knowledge cannot be banished from his mind, and from instinctive sympathy is esteemed of great moment. He will then feel as if he had been baulked in following a present instinct or habit, and this with all animals causes dissatisfaction, or even misery.

The current emotional state of humankind is now rattled upon reflection. Such guilt-producing actions cause the perpetrator to be blameworthy, and hence feelings of dissatisfaction and misery follow. To illustrate how reflection can lead to regret, Darwin shares an example of a swallow. He has his readers imagine a female bird with maternal instincts forever forsaking her maternal duties once her young ones are out of sight as she succumbs to her more persistent migratory instincts. Darwin then says, "When arrived at the end of her long journey, and the migratory instinct has ceased to act, what an *agony of remorse* the bird would feel, if, from being endowed with great mental activity, she could not prevent the image constantly passing through her mind, of her young ones perishing in the bleak north from cold and hunger" (p.

113, emphasis added). Absent of reflective capacity, the swallow migrates sorrow-free. Guiltless.

Clarifying Darwin's connection between guilt and the moral sense in light of Darwin's illustration of the swallow, philosopher Mark Linville (2015) writes, "Like the moral sense in general, guilt is the yield of a sort of recipe: one part spurned instinct to one part 'great mental activity' that permits remembrance and remorse." By forfeiting her maternal instincts at the expense of her migratory instincts, the swallow in the meantime is still spared from remorse as it lacks the reflective capacity of humankind. Unlike the swallow, unless the human mother is morally calloused or a sociopath of sorts, she would be overwhelmed with moral guilt upon reflection that by violating her motherly instinct she abandoned her children to die.[27]

5.1.1. A critique of Darwin's reflective capacity

The reflective capacity of human beings is quite obviously a tool for better understanding past moral decisions. Understandably, it is hard to feel tormented by actions long forgotten or inaccessible for lack of ability to reflect on past decisions and their moral worth. And while it may be the case that reflection shows us why we feel guilty, it does not answer why we *ought* to feel guilty—a question that Darwin was interested in settling.[28] Moral reflection, in Darwin's view, appears to be more commonsensical than ontological. A person may gather common sense through reflection, enabling him or her to make better decisions in the future and thereby avoiding feeling guilty, but such reflection still does not explain *why* he or she *ought* to feel guilty to begin with. For example, Action A upon reflection may have produced guilty feelings that causes one to choose Action B over Action A in the future, but was Action A ever *really* wrong in and of itself, or did it just *feel* wrong?

[27] Darwin (1874, p. 114) says, "It is far from strange that an instinct so strong and so generally admired, as maternal love, should, if disobeyed, lead to the deepest misery, as soon as the impression of the past cause of disobedience is weakened."

[28] See the beginning of chapter 4 in *DOM* where Darwin (1874, p. 97) refers to "*ought*" as "the most noble of all the attributes of man." Yet also note later in chapter 4 of *DOM* where he mentions "disinterested love for all living creatures, the most noble attribute of man" (p. 126).

Therefore, the reflective capacity, at least how Darwin understands it, still fails to answer the question of why *ought* we do something, or why *ought* we regret? Granted, we may feel guilty, but why *ought* we feel guilty? And if there is such a thing as objective morality, or real moral facts, then regardless of a person's memory *or* feelings about such actions, that person is guilty if he or she committed a guilt-producing action. So it appears that even if Darwin sought to ground his moral claims beyond subjectivism, which he avoided, he would have had an even bigger question to tackle, and that is why on the basis of evolutionary naturalism, would a person be truly obligated to avoid Action A in the first place? This leaves Darwin with another question to solve, and that is, even if a person feels guilty after Action A, why on the basis of evolutionary naturalism should he or she avoid Action A to avoid guilt feelings? What if the problem is not with Action A but rather with the *feelings*? Why avoid Action A because I feel a certain way when Action A is most desirable? And how, given the purported blindness of natural selection, can a person be certain to see that actions that produce guilt feelings may be just the actions the person needs to act on in order to survive? Darwin does provide another motive beyond the reflective capacity for avoiding guilt-producing actions. But we will see whether this motive brings him any closer to answering the question, why *ought* we regret?

5.2. The desire to be esteemed by others causes humans to experience guilt.

If the reflective capacity is not enough on its own to cause guilt, then is this capacity combined with social sympathy enough to explain moral guilt? As discussed above, Darwin believed that humankind's reflective capacity explains why humans experience moral guilt. However, his second explanation for why humans experience moral guilt is the felt need to be esteemed by others. As sympathetic social beings, humans have an innate longing to be admired by others, and to fall short of such admiration may serve as an occasion to experience moral guilt. In fact, the greater a person's sympathy has evolved toward others, the more that person will desire to be esteemed; and in turn, the more a person desires to be esteemed, the more susceptible he or she is to guilt. "If he has no such sympathy," Darwin (1874, p. 116) reasons, "and if his desires leading to bad actions are at the time strong, and when recalled are not over-mastered by the persistent social instincts, and the judgment of others, then he is essentially a bad man." Fortunately, most people are not bereft of sympathy.

Such instinctive sympathy quickens our human desire for moral approval. "Consequently," Darwin notes, "man would be influenced in the highest degree by the wishes, approbation, and blame of his fellow-men, as expressed by their gestures and language" (p. 109). To fall under the blame of one's community is to be rendered guilty in their sight, something worth avoiding.[29] In the event that a person succumbs to his self-gratifying impulses at the expense of considering others, following his

[29] In his book *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, Darwin (1872, p. 333) includes a speculative section about blushing entitled "Moral Causes: Guilt," where he writes,

> It is not the *conscience* which raises a blush, for a man may sincerely *regret* some slight fault committed in solitude, or he may suffer the deepest *remorse* for an undetected *crime*, but he will not blush. "I blush," says Dr. Burgess, "in the presence of my accusers." It is not the sense of *guilt*, but the thought that others think or know us to be guilty which crimsons the face. A man may feel thoroughly *ashamed* at having told a small falsehood, without blushing; but if he even suspects that he is detected he will instantly blush, especially if detected by one whom he reveres. (emphasis added)

To reinforce my earlier argument, notice how Darwin uses "conscience," "regret," "remorse," "ashamed," and "guilt" all in the context of committing a moral trespass. The act of being found out, of being found guilty by those whom a person respects, causes one to blush at the thought of his personal value dropping before his or her eyewitnesses. Losing credibility and the loss of esteem renders a person red in the face.

In addition, Darwin (1872, pp. 262–263) details how guilt can be detected through the guilty party's eyes.

> My correspondents almost unanimously answer in the affirmative to my query, whether the expression of guilt and deceit can be recognised amongst the various races of man; and I have confidence in their answers, as they generally deny that jealousy can thus be recognised. In the cases in which details are given, the eyes are almost always referred to. The guilty man is said to avoid looking at his accuser, or to give him stolen looks. The eyes are said "to be turned askant," or "to waver from side to side," or "the eyelids to be lowered and partly closed." This latter remark is made by Mr. Hagenauer with respect to the Australians, and by Gaika with respect to the Kafirs. The restless movements of the eyes apparently follow, as will be explained when we treat of blushing, from the guilty man not enduring to meet the gaze of his accuser. I may add, that I have observed a guilty expression, without a shade of fear, in some of my own children at a very early age. In one instance the expression was unmistakably clear in a child two years and seven months old, and led to the detection of his little crime.

Despite Darwin's observations and thoughts on blushing as an indicator of guilt, Katchadourian (2010, p. 23) writes, "There are no reliable physical manifestations of 'looking guilty,' despite Darwin's claim that the expression of guilt could be recognized across cultures. Studies based on photographic expressions of self-conscious emotions have so far failed to find distinctive features of guilt."

fleeting pleasures, Darwin notes further that "by his deep regard for the good opinion of his fellows, retribution will surely come. He will then feel remorse, repentance, regret, or shame" (p. 114).[30] Such a response is necessary to be relationally restored to the community. Darwin says further,

> The nature and strength of the feelings which we call regret, shame, repentance or remorse, depend apparently not only on the strength of the violated instinct, but partly on the strength of the temptation, and often still more on the judgment of our fellows. How far each man values the appreciation of others, depends on the strength of his innate or acquired feeling of sympathy. (p. 114)[31]

Responding to Darwin, Linville (2015) writes, "According to Darwin, the sense of guilt is the natural experience of anyone who spurns the prompting of any of the more enduring social instincts." If the individual is to be spared from numerous episodes of guilt feelings, he must consider the thoughts and feelings of his surrounding community and refuse to spurn the promptings of his social instincts. This will require him to act socially fashionable so as to avoid guilt and retain his social moral esteem. What might be said in critique of Darwin's second explanation for why humans experience moral guilt?

5.2.1. A critique of Darwin's link between guilt and the esteem of others

Here are three points of critique. A first problem with Darwin's second explanation of why we feel moral guilt is that while it may be true that humans desire to be esteemed by others, such a desire is less than an ideal motive for moral behavior. If the motive to avoid guilt springs purely from a desire to be esteemed or highly appraised by others, subsequent problems are sure to follow. For example, living for the approval of others can be the source of much inner frustration, as seeking to obtain

[30] Here Darwin uses a cluster of synonymous terms that all relate to the concept of guilt.

[31] However, as Darwin (1874, p. 114) acknowledges, "Another element is most important, although not necessary, the reverence or fear of the Gods, or Spirits believed in by each man: and this applies especially in cases of remorse." While such supernatural beliefs to Darwin have no scientific or naturalistic basis, these beliefs do contribute to his overall interest in the moral sense. Moral beliefs brought on by an enchanted world have arrested untold millions with moral guilt, yet to Darwin such belief is unnecessary.

acceptance based on performance is no easy task. The solution to quieting one's guilt under this condition lacks appeal. To eradicate guilt people either have to meet the standard by which they maintain a high approval rating, or they may conclude that the true solution to dispelling guilt is to become socially indifferent to the opinions of others. That is to say, the way to avoid guilt is to rid oneself of sympathy.[32] Like the Buddhist striving to quell all desire to avoid suffering, on this view a person may cease to care what others think so as not to experience guilt. Obviously, this would be a drastic move.

A second problem with Darwin's second explanation of why we feel moral guilt is the observation that the motive for good actions is not for the good actions in and of themselves, nor for the well-being of others, but the deeper motive is the desire to be esteemed. This seems self-serving.

A third problem with Darwin's second explanation of moral guilt is that it creates an entire host of morally naturalistic dilemmas for each individual living within *eclectic* cultures. For example, who is this person hoping to be esteemed by? Which group? Which person? Which culture within the culture? In morally hybrid cultures where values and customs are highly textured and nuanced, it would seem that the opportunity to experience guilt is unlimited. This presents no small challenge for Darwin's explanation of the moral sense. Unless there is a cohesive explanation justifying why one ought to perform action *x* that surpasses a mere subjective moral grounding, then moral guilt will remain a pure illusion. This is because Darwin's second explanation fails to explain why the moral features of an individual or a given culture *are* moral. In Darwin's view it appears that one individual is made to feel subjectively guilty at the expense of another individual's (or other individuals') subjective judgments. This inevitably leads to moral relativism, undercutting moral realism. This problem was no doubt recognized by Darwin, which will become evident as we consider his third explanation of why we experience moral guilt.

[32] To rid oneself of sympathy would be to become sociopathic. Obviously, this personality disorder is not something a person decides to become. Sociopaths lack sympathy, and while such individuals may not experience guilt feelings like that of non-sociopaths, striving to become indifferent to the opinion of others is not the pathway toward well-being.

5.3. The various cultural values expressed by different cultures cause humans to experience a gradation of moral guilt.

For Darwin, values vary on the moral map. The diverse reasoning skills among various social groups produce moral relativism as each culture charts its own moral course. The more primitive and tribal cultures derive their values exclusively from their own tribes and tend to be morally indifferent to those outside their social context. This is why things such as lying, stealing, or even murder may be considered legitimate if directed toward those beyond their own tribe.[33] Darwin (1874, p. 119) maintained that the low view of morality among "savages" was caused first by "the confinement of sympathy to the same tribe.… Secondly, powers of reasoning insufficient to recognise the bearing of many virtues.… And, thirdly, weak power of self-command." This explained the clash of inconsistencies among humans experiencing moral guilt. Due to the wide spectrum of variegated moral values, what triggers guilt for one group may actually serve as an occasion for celebration to another.

Darwin thought this could be seen by simply comparing tribal groups with civilized communities.[34] Among these various cultures exists a moral trajectory that Darwin believed would strengthen with time. It would work like this: The longer humankind exists and the more fine-tuned their social sympathies and intelligence become, the more their conscience will be refined. As a result, the more they habituate to act according to their conscience, the greater moral beings they will become and the less they will be inflicted by moral guilt (see Darwin [1874], pp. 100–103).[35] Therefore, depending on where a person is on the moral landscape will

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[33] Darwin (1874, p. 117) maintained that "No tribe could hold together if murder, robbery, treachery, [etc.], were common." Just as courage, prudence, self-sacrifice, and other such virtues serve to glue a culture together, so these guilt-producing actions tear culture apart. In this sense, moral guilt serves as a survival tool reminding the people of a given culture which actions to avoid for their own good and the good of the community.

[34] See Darwin (1874), p. 90, where he compares the tribal and civilized actions as it relates to saving a person's life.

[35] Darwin (1874, p. 122) writes, "As man advances in civilisation, and small tribes are united into larger communities, the simplest reason would tell each individual that he ought to extend his

determine what actions produce guilt. This variation inevitably results in a gradation of moral guilt.

5.3.1. A critique of Darwin's diverse views of guilt and cultures

Here are two points of critique. First, if the moral sense is relative to one's culture, so too is moral guilt. If a person is only guilty when he or she violates a cultural norm, then guilt is relative to each culture, which then would mean that there is no such thing as objective moral guilt; morality fluctuates based on each culture and its mores. And if each culture serves as the moral standard for what is right and wrong, then it seems that culture rather than biology offers the superior explanation to account for morality. Second, and in similar fashion to the previous point, at first glance Darwin's moral trajectory as it relates to tribal groups and more civilized groups seems like a reasonable observation, namely that some are less intellectually evolved than others. But upon further thought, it does not follow that morality has evolved biologically because of the cultural differences observed between the tribal and the civilized. Rather, if you take the smartest civilized individual and the not-so-smartest individual from the tribe and swap them at birth, will the wiser among the two overcome his tribal raising, and will the tribal-born individual succumb to more civilized views? I remain unconvinced. In the end, it is not that they are at different stages on some evolutionary trajectory, but rather they are influenced by different cultures.

Up to now in this chapter, I have claimed that Darwin offers at least three explanations for moral guilt. These explanations are that moral guilt is the result of reflective capacity and the desire to be esteemed by others, and depending upon where one is on the moral trajectory, the experience of moral guilt varies from one culture to the next. Having discussed these explanations and offered brief intervening critiques, I will now make some further assessments regarding Darwin's naturalistic explanation of moral guilt.

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social instincts and sympathies to all the members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him. This point being once reached, there is only an artificial barrier to prevent his sympathies extending to the men of all nations and races." Certain tribes that once devalued outsiders, now with the right perspective will avoid committing such guilt-inducing atrocities against their neighbors.

6. Final Assessments of Darwin's Naturalistic Explanation of Moral Guilt

Though much could be said in terms of assessment, I will confine myself in this final section with the following six concluding assessments of Darwin's naturalistic explanations for moral guilt.

6.1. Darwin's explanation of moral guilt was heavily influenced by his own Victorian moral context.

Having set out to provide a naturalistic understanding of morality that could be squared with his theory of natural selection, Darwin seemingly failed to recognize his own built-in moral presuppositions. It is easy to understand how one can do this, as everyone has blind spots. And far be it from me to accuse him of ill-intent, but I am not alone in recognizing his Victorian ethics at play. Other naturalists have also detected a melding of Darwin's contemporary moral influences within his naturalistic theory of morality. For example, consider philosopher Michael Ruse's (2001, p. 170) indictment of Darwin: "It is true that, in the *Descent of Man*, Darwin makes moral judgements and prescriptions—of an entirely conventional upper-middle-class Victorian ilk." Or naturalist philosopher Richard Joyce's (2006, p. 229) assessment of Darwin: "He remains apparently confident in his own Victorian moral opinions, happily referring to the 'low morality of savages,' calling slavery 'a great crime,' and freely using words like 'noble,' 'evil,' and 'barbarous.' It remains obscure why Darwin thinks that the human moral sense, when shaped by the particular cultural trajectory of the British Empire, results in moral opinions that humans living in large groups will eventually align upon." Despite such criticism, atheist philosopher James Rachels (1990, p. 159) comes to Darwin's rescue, stating that "Darwin seems to have naively assumed the truth of a particular moral philosophy, utilitarianism, without realizing how controversial and open to objection that moral philosophy is." But this would be too unsympathetic a reading. Darwin was not trying to prove what is right and what is wrong; nor was he trying to promote a contentious philosophical theory. He begins by formulating a conception of what morality is because he had no choice but to start there.

Rachels goes on to defend his statement by conceding that you have to begin somewhere. And for Darwin, he began with his own moral context. But this seems to let him off the hook too easily. It was not as if Darwin was limited to squaring

utilitarianism or Kantian rule-based ethics with natural selection any more than Nietzsche was confined to his context in his genealogy of morality. Though Darwin was not necessarily trying to prove a particular moral theory per Rachels's point, nevertheless it seems inescapable that if his aim was to show on the basis of natural selection how humans became moral, and hence why they experience guilt, then whichever moral theory he begins his project with will also influence his overall findings. That is to say, Darwin's conclusions are apt to vary depending on the moral theory guiding his analysis, as one might suspect. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that instead of leaving his readers with a compelling account of how natural selection explains morality, Darwin leaves us with more questions than answers.

6.2. Setting aside all supernatural explanations for moral guilt, on the basis of naturalism alone Darwin was far from solving the moral enigma. In fact, among naturalists there remains to this day widespread disagreement.

For example, consider English biologist Thomas Huxley (1825–1895), a contemporary of Darwin and an advocate for ethics, yet he denounced the idea of a moral sense as a derivative of natural selection. In his *Evolution and Ethics* lectures, Huxley (1893, p. 66) asserts, "Cosmic evolution may teach us how the good and the evil tendencies of man may have come about; but, in itself, it is incompetent to furnish any better reason why what we call good is preferable to what we call evil than we had before." Natural selection as a mindless mechanism thinks nothing of right and wrong; rather, it does not even think. It is a mindless, purposeless process.[36] Like Huxley, another contemporary of Darwin, Irish social reformer Francis Cobbe (1822–1904) in her essay "Darwin in Morals" ([1871] 1872) refuted Darwin's explanation for the moral sense as offered in the *DOM*, arguing that such an explanation undercuts all authoritative force to moral obligations. Then there is English utilitarian philosopher Henry Sidgwick (1838–1900), another contemporary, whose article "The Theory of Evolution in Its Application to Practice" (1876) indicates that he thought little of Darwin's attempt to explain morality via natural selection. Fast forward to our present time and the debate plays on to the tune of

[36] One dictionary defines *chance* along the same lines: "the assumed impersonal purposeless determiner of unaccountable happenings" (*Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary*, 2003).

Michael Ruse and Edward O. Wilson's (1985, pp. 51–52) famed declaration that "morality, or … ethics as we understand it is an illusion fobbed off on us by our genes to get us to cooperate." Ruse (1986, p. 99) also went on record to say, "Our moral sense, our altruistic nature, is an adaptation—a feature helping us in the struggle for existence and reproduction—no less than hands and eyes, teeth and feet. It is a cost-effective way of getting us to cooperate, which avoids both the pitfalls of blind action and the expense of a superbrain of pure rationality." Contra Darwin, morality is not value-directed on the basis of natural selection, nor is a cosmic creator the final explanation; rather, the moral sense is a useful fiction.[37] Joyce (2006) remains equally skeptical that humans are equipped with any real moral knowledge; however, like Ruse he believes there is a practical purpose, for social cohesion, to act as if there are real moral truths. This is just a sampling of the clash of moral views among Darwin's contemporaries and today's Darwinian naturalists, not to mention that the beliefs Darwin subscribed to on his own account would have been different had humans evolved under a different set of circumstances.[38]

To this day, there exists no account on the basis of naturalism that satisfactorily explains the emergence of humanity's moral sense. In fact, according to biologist Jeffrey P. Schloss (2014, p. 83), who committed himself to a thorough review of the literature on evolutionary theories of morality, "Not only do we lack currently a fully adequate account of morality, but the manifold accounts we do have are also disparate and are often represented by prominent exegetes as having resolved issues that are still in dispute." In personal correspondence, philosopher William Lane Craig (2015) cites Schloss who further expresses that

> the evolutionary debunking argument … assumes that moral beliefs are in fact adequately explained by natural selection.… There is little

[37] Ruse (1986, p. 218) could not be clearer in his assertion about evolution and its relationship to morality than when he states, "There is nothing moral in the process of evolution, and there is no morality in its effects."

[38] Darwin (1874, p. 99) illustrates this point by taking hive bees as an example: "If … to take an extreme case, men were reared under precisely the same conditions as hive-bees, there can hardly be a doubt that our unmarried females would, like the worker-bees, think it a sacred duty to kill their brothers, and mothers would strive to kill their fertile daughters; and no one would think of interfering."

> question that they are not. Dispositions toward certain behaviors … (reciprocity, parental care, etc.) do have fairly compelling evolutionary explanations. But … we don't actually have a plausible evolutionary proposal for the moral beliefs associated with these behaviors. I've done a fairly recent review of the literature …, and I can't find any coherent account for moral beliefs or even normative intuitions. (Jeffrey Schloss letter to William Lane Craig, 17, 22 September 2015)

Schloss's words should cause anyone to pause next time a person hears someone claiming that a widely accepted account is available that demonstrates how natural selection explains our moral sense. That is not the case.

6.3. Darwin's explanation for moral guilt is better explained through the lens of cultural evolution than through the lens of biological evolution.

According to natural selection, survival is the real aim, and anything not interpreted through that explanatory filter misses the target. But given natural selection's brutish nature, one is hard-pressed to construct a moral theory that in the end is truly moral. Therefore, even if there is no supernatural explanation for morality, it is reasonable to suggest that the stronger explanation for morality is cultural evolution rather than biological evolution. A morality based on nurture rather than nature produces the superior explanation. The evolution of culture is easier to grasp than the evolution of biology given the gradation of moral guilt and the highly texturized moral diversity among various human cultures. Moreover, the fact that no other animals have evolved with a comparable moral sense to that of humans makes it seem plausible that Darwin's position would have greater explanatory power had he focused primarily on the role of cultural evolution in shaping moral sensibility. As Stanford professor of psychiatry and human biology Herant Katchadourian (2010, p. 168) writes in his study on guilt, *Guilt: The Bite of Conscience*, "According to the theory of evolution, modern humans appeared about 100,000 years ago. Since then, what has shaped us is primarily our culture. The cultural evolution of the moral emotions like guilt has been an integral part of that process."

6.4. Even if Darwin's assumption is valid that socially instinctive animals will develop a moral sense through increased intellectual capacity, that does not necessarily mean they will sense moral guilt as a result of their immoral behavior.

Darwin (1874, p. 98) believed that it was highly probable "that any animal whatever, endowed with well-marked social instincts, the parental and filial affections being here included, would inevitably acquire a moral sense or conscience, as soon as its intellectual powers had become as well, or nearly as well developed, as in man." This is purely speculative, however. Replying to Darwin's statement, evolutionary biologist and philosopher Francisco J. Ayala (Ayala and Arp, 2009, p. 319) maintains that "this is a hypothetical issue, because no other animal has ever reached the level of human mental faculties, language included." That is not to say that animals exhibit no moral behavior, but it is presumptuous to infer that animals are headed for a more sophisticated morality or would inevitably acquire a similar moral sense if they inherited greater intellectual capacity. Not only that, but even when animals do exhibit moral qualities such as altruism, sympathy, and reciprocity, this does not entail that the same animals are guilty of immoral behavior when they fail to act in a moral fashion comparable to human behavior. Rather, in Darwin's view it appears that actions are only wrong when the intellect says so or when one's mind (or conscience) is set in such a way as to measure the moral worth of one's decisions and choices.

6.5. Darwin's dismissal of all supernatural explanations as unnecessary was not necessary.

Darwin (1874, p. 114) notes that a certain cause especially responsible for remorse, "although not necessary," is "the reverence or fear of the Gods, or Spirits believed in by each man." It would have been more modest had Darwin said "*perhaps* not necessary." While his purpose was to give an explanation for the moral sense on the basis of naturalism, it does not follow that just because this was his purpose, therefore all other supernatural explanations for moral guilt *are* in fact unnecessary. Certainly it is the case that many supernatural explanations are misguided due to their contradictory claims, but it does not follow that just because many supernatural explanations are misguided, therefore *all* supernatural claims for remorse and guilt are in fact unnecessary. If indeed there is a moral God, it should not be surprising to think that a moral standard, independent of the human mind, exists as grounded in the moral

character and being of that God, which is what many have contended through the centuries. However, as Linville (2015) properly notes, "There is nothing in Darwin's own account to indicate that the ensuing sense of guilt—a guilty *feeling*—is indicative of *actual* moral guilt resulting from the violation of an objective moral law."

In Darwin's view, though he recognizes the problem of moral relativism, there is nothing in his moral theory even within the culturally bound values he subscribes to, that would allow him to objectively ground moral claims. Had Darwin not precluded all supernatural explanations for the moral sense, he could have left room for a theistic explanation within his theory that might have strengthened his case for explaining humanity's sense of *ought-ness*. Not only that, but little did Darwin apparently realize (as discussed above) how many contradictory reports would develop regarding the moral sense based on his own theory of evolutionary naturalism. It follows according to this reasoning that if all supernatural explanations are to be dismissed because of contradictory claims, then so too should all explanations according to natural history be disregarded due to contradictory claims. As mentioned, still to this day Darwin's moral theory is far from a "one-size-fits-all" explanation. And when the naturalistic explanation is juxtaposed with the supernatural explanation, it becomes apparent that the theist has greater resources to explain the moral facts of human existence and experience.

6.6. Darwin's explanations fail to answer the question of why we ought to feel guilty.

Even if we assume for the sake of argument that Darwin's three explanations for moral guilt are correct, Darwin's overall explanation for moral guilt is left wanting because in the end, even if his explanations are correct in explaining *why* we feel guilty, they still fail to answer the more fundamental question, why *ought* we feel guilty?

In answering the question "Why then does man regret?," Darwin never answers the question "Why *ought* we do something?" or "Why *ought* we regret?" If there is no real "ought," then no one "ought" to really regret. And if everything is determined, then there is no free will, and if there is no free will, then there is no real guilt for which one is culpable. In reply to the question of whether acceptance of a Darwinian view of human origins requires abandoning the idea of human dignity,

Rachels (1990, p. 92) says, “No, for the facts of evolution do not, by themselves, entail any moral conclusions. Darwin’s theory, if it is correct, only tells us what *is* the case with respect to the evolution of species; and so, strictly speaking, no conclusion follows from it regarding any matter of value.” Similarly, Linville (2015) notes, “What Darwin never asks—and thus never answers—is why a man *ought*, in fact, to obey the one rather than the other. The best that he offers here is the observation that *if* instinct A is stronger than B, then one *will* obey A. What he does not and, I suggest, *cannot* say is that one *ought* to obey A, or that one *ought* to feel the force of A over B.” As Linville clearly detects, any attempt to enlist a moral explanation absent of God, in the end dismisses all explanations of a *metaphysical* “ought.” Consequently, Darwin’s non-metaphysical idea of “ought” is emptied of force.

In Darwin’s view, instinct or impulse is the neo-*ought*. This reduces the metaphysical sense of *ought* down to an emotional urge. In Darwin’s view, *urge* is the new *ought*. This urge is impulse or instinct. But within a metaphysical framework, ought and urge fail to make good siblings. Ought is “I have to” whereas urge is “I want to.” The strength of an impulse or instinct is no reliable arbitrator for moral decision-making; and even though certain impulses appear to be served up with added force, it does not follow in Darwin’s account that they contain the force of *ought*.

On final analysis, Darwin’s explanation for moral guilt fails to answer with any moral force the question he set out to answer of why *ought* we regret. Absent of a metaphysical grounding for morality, one is left on the basis of natural history to conclude that morality minus God equals guilt minus objectivity. Hence, left to natural history alone, morality as Ruse and Wilson (1985, pp. 51–52) say, “is an illusion fobbed off on us by our genes to get us to cooperate.” And therefore from a natural history perspective, moral guilt is simply a useful fiction.[39]

7. Conclusion

In this chapter, my aim has been to highlight Darwin’s naturalistic explanation of moral guilt. This was shown first by clarifying certain terms Darwin uses

[39] Interestingly enough, if my observations concerning Darwin’s view of moral guilt are correct, then not only did he provide the first explanation from natural history of the moral sense, but he also provided the first explanation of moral guilt on account of natural history.

synonymously, second by defining what Darwin means by the moral sense, and third by displaying how guilt can be derived from the moral sense. With those pieces in place, I provided three explanations that Darwin gives to explain why humans experience moral guilt along with intervening critiques: First, the reflective capacity of humans enables them to experience guilt. Second, the desire to be esteemed by others causes humans to experience guilt. Third, the various values and mores expressed within different cultures cause humans to experience moral guilt. Finally, I concluded the chapter with some brief final assessments regarding Darwin's moral theory, noting that in the end, Darwin may have explained *why* we experience guilt, but from the standpoint of naturalism and its limitations, Darwin does not best explain why we necessarily *ought* to experience guilt.

Even if through reflection the reflective person is able to tune in to the actions that produced his or her sense of guilt, this still does not answer the question of what it is about reflection that has moral authority. Reflection may offer people a wiser approach for future living and leave them with a sense of "better luck next time," but it still fails to address whether or not people *have* to feel guilty for their actions. Perhaps a change of mindset about the conditions that led to their guilt is enough to assuage them. Not only that, there is no universal guarantee that everyone who commits the same action in similar circumstances will feel guilt upon reflection. Perhaps some other reflective persons may conclude that there was nothing wrong with their actions, but instead their response of feeling guilty was wrong. Maybe the next time they commit the same set of actions, they will refuse to concern themselves with feeling of guilt. This is problematic for Darwin, confining his explanation to moral relativism, lacking the universal answer we are in search of. While Darwin may feel guilt upon reflection, this is no guarantee that I will, and therein lies the problem.

In the next chapter, we will consider Friedrich Nietzsche's explanation of guilt. Like Darwin, Nietzsche was a naturalist, but unlike Darwin, Nietzsche took the theory of evolution to its logical conclusion and consequentially emptied morality of all guilt. In taking this position, Nietzsche was adamantly opposed to Darwin and his explanation of guilt, which makes his take on morality now worthy of consideration.

Chapter 2

NIETZSCHE'S NATURALISTIC EXPLANATION OF MORAL GUILT

1. Introduction

We now turn our attention to a well-known contemporary of Charles Darwin, the famed German classical scholar, philosopher, poet, philologist, and critic of culture Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). In the previous chapter, I presented Darwin's view of moral guilt. Similarly, in keeping with the purpose of part I of this thesis, my aim in this chapter is to present Nietzsche's naturalistic explanation of moral guilt. Nietzsche puts forth this explanation most prominently in the second essay of his moral masterpiece, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887),[40] published less than two decades after Darwin's *The Descent of Man* (1871). This work of Nietzsche's was so influential that in philosopher Aaron Ridley's (1998, p. 1) assessment, "*On the Genealogy of Morals* is the most important piece of moral philosophy since Kant." While the influence of this work is without question, knowing how to interpret it is not, and this is particularly true of the second of its three essays entitled "'Guilt,' 'Bad Conscience,' and the Like."

The reason for this interpretive difficulty is partly due to the complexity of Nietzsche's writing style, which is often challenging to decipher. It is no secret that Nietzsche can exasperate the brightest of minds, but toss a few unexpected puzzle pieces into the mix and one can see why readers mentally scramble to piece together a cohesive picture of his big idea. Though a gifted wordsmith, his non-lucid and intentionally inconspicuous style challenges the linear mindset, and this is especially the case in his second essay in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (hereafter cited as *GM*), which as a result has garnered the least amount of attention compared with that given

[40] Unless otherwise noted, all citations are from Kaufmann and Hollingdale's translation of Nietzsche's (1989b) *On the Genealogy of Morals* and Kaufmann's translation of Nietzsche's (1989a) *Ecce Homo*, published together in *On the Genealogy of Morals; and Ecce Homo* (1989). See also Clark and Swensen's translation of Nietzsche's (1998) *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic*. Their helpful introduction (Nietzsche, 1998, pp. xv–xvii) includes a justification for their translation's use of "morality" instead of "morals," a decision that follows Kaufmann and Hollingdale's translation.

to his first and third essays. Much of the interpretive enigma results from Nietzsche's incendiary way of putting things, his tendency to rapidly call numerous beliefs into question, and a hefty dose of aphorisms, combined with a nonanalytic and often cryptic yet philosophic/poetic writing style. Add to this an array of seemingly contradictory statements, some misleading slogans, and the encyclopedic knowledge of historical literature typical of a polymath and it is no wonder readers remain puzzled by Nietzsche's writings.

Such dismay has resulted in no shortage of interpretations for scholars to work through when trying to piece together Nietzsche's moral stance. That is not to say that Nietzsche is incoherent or beyond one's epistemic grasp. Rather, it is to acknowledge that his work takes time to comprehend. Therefore, whether one finds Nietzsche confusing, charming, or a bit of each, the influence of his writings, and in particular *GM*, has made its mark on history. Anyone desiring to understand humanity's moral trajectory, and in particular moral guilt, must set aside some time to slowly digest Nietzsche's moral philosophy.

Nietzsche's *GM* includes three essays, each containing a unique message that interlocks with the others to provide an overall naturalistic picture of morality from its beginnings, to its historical development, to its present condition, and culminating with a future envisioned by Nietzsche that transcends morality.

In this present chapter, I offer an exegesis of the second essay after first mentioning Nietzsche's first and third essays for context. In his first and most recognized essay, "'Good and Evil,' 'Good and Bad'" (hereafter cited *GM* I), Nietzsche refutes the moral assumptions of his time, challenging the prima facie assumption of his contemporaries that terms like *good*, *bad*, and *evil* are fixed, whereas for Nietzsche these terms are fluid. He wants to peek behind the philological curtain and discover the etymological stage that such words first appeared on. To do this, he starts from scratch by erasing modern moral assumptions and scrutinizing and dismantling cherished beliefs. By shunning the perceived static morality of his time, Nietzsche envisions morality in motion, as an evolving process, always organic. He hopes by unsheathing his philological scalpel that he can cut his way through the linguistic past and expose the etymological soil where the concepts of morality first took root.

To do this, Nietzsche claims that people in times past were bifurcated into two classes: the nobles and the slaves. The noble upper class was the strong, healthy,

privileged, and free class; they were the masters who thought themselves "good." The lower class was the weak, unhealthy, underprivileged, and slave class; they were considered "bad." At this time, "good" and "bad" were not moral terms. The nobles perceived their own happiness as "good" and perceived the slaves unhappiness as "bad." This superior/inferior wedge created resentment in the lower slave class, which paved the way for the great slave revolt. The comfortable upper class became lazy-minded, while the uncomfortable lower class became highly creative, and using their creative resentment to their advantage, they formulated a new set of values that devalued the valued class and eventually they revolted.[41]

At last, with a great flip in power after the slave revolt, the slave conferred upon himself the label "good" and branded the nobles "evil." The good/bad distinction that once rested with the noble class was seemingly forgotten due to the large success of the slave revolt, and the value system developed by the slave class was retained.

Briefly skipping to the third essay, "What Is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?" (hereafter cited *GM* III), Nietzsche explains how "the priests' ideal" has enslaved people to morality. By confining humanity to act in a democratic fashion, and hence rejecting creative, individualized expression, humans racked by moral guilt, moral customs, and moral codes are in desperate need of a counter-ideal, a future ideal that is beyond good and evil; an ideal where humanity comes full circle as the overcomer. Now enriched by conscience and an ability to self-govern, they are at last their own master, their own governor, their own moral maker, those who are able to act out or

[41] Nietzsche does not offer specifics in regard to a date or place for the revolt he describes, but he seems to refer to the pre-Christianized Roman Empire, from around AD 100 to 300 prior to Constantine's reign when Christian slaves were still at the mercy of Roman masters. In his autobiography and final original work *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche (1989a, p. 312) encapsulates the message of each essay in *GM*, here writing about his first essay: "The truth of the *first* inquiry is the birth of Christianity: the birth of Christianity out of the spirit of *ressentiment*, not, as people may believe, out of the 'spirit'—a countermovement by its very nature, the great rebellion against the dominion of *noble* values."

go without; this is the renewed humanity free from the underpinnings of the ascetic ideal.[42]

We turn now to Nietzsche's second essay, which is more neglected yet also the most important essay for coming to terms with his naturalistic understanding of moral guilt. This essay, entitled "'Guilt,' 'Bad Conscience,' and the Like" (hereafter cited *GM* II), is composed of twenty-five sections and captures the primary thrust of Nietzsche's explanation of moral guilt. Thus, it will be the primary focus for the remainder of this chapter. For the sake of simplicity and flow, I will follow the sectional sequence of this second essay and reserve most of my attention for the portions that explain Nietzsche's developmental explanation of moral guilt. As the essay's title suggests, it is not merely about guilt and bad conscience, but also "and the Like" (i.e. related topics such as justice, *ressentiment*, and punishment).

Subsequent to this review, I will summarize six contemporary readings of *GM* II by briefly reviewing the widely regarded works of Simon May (1999), Mathias Risse (2001), Christopher Janaway (2007), Aaron Ridley (2005), Bernard Reginster (2011), and Brian Leiter (2015). The order in which I will arrange these interpreters of Nietzsche's explanation of moral guilt will be explained in section 3. Finally, I will conclude with an overall assessment, featuring four pertinent observations, followed by a brief conclusion.

Before examining Nietzsche's second essay, one additional note is worth mentioning. Nietzsche was evidently in no hurry to expose the answer to the question I am posing in this chapter, namely what is Nietzsche's naturalistic explanation of moral guilt? The puzzle must first be put together, one piece at a time, in order to understand how this perplexing German philosopher, poet, and philologist arrived at his explanation. That said, I now turn to Nietzsche's second essay.[43]

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[42] Nietzsche (1989a, pp. 312–313) explains in *Ecce Homo*, "The *third* inquiry offers the answer to the question whence the ascetic ideal, the priests' ideal, derives its tremendous *power* although it is the *harmful* ideal *par excellence*, a will to the end, an ideal of decadence. Answer: not, as people may believe, because God is at work behind the priests but *faute de mieux* [lacking something better]—because it was the only ideal so far, because it had no rival. 'For man would rather will even nothingness than *not* will.'—Above all, a *counterideal* was lacking—*until Zarathustra*."

[43] Concerning the second essay, Nietzsche (1989a, p. 312) writes in *Ecce Homo*, "The *second* inquiry offers the psychology of the *conscience*—which is not, as people may believe, 'the voice of

2. "'Guilt,' 'Bad Conscience,' and the Like" (*GM* II)

*2.1. The prehistorical setting from which moral guilt eventually emerged (*GM *II, 1–3)*

Nietzsche believed that humanity had to evolve in certain key areas before moral guilt was possible. To begin, he imagines a place in times past where the real problem for humans was their inability to keep promises—a necessary ability for cultures to cooperate and adhere to cultural customs, and also essential for a person to become a sovereign individual. The problem was that human forgetfulness made promise-keeping virtually impossible.[44] Therefore, to assist humanity's natural propensity to forget, another trait had to be bred, namely memory. Following a long, arduous trek to become equipped with memory, humans now could keep promises.[45] This memory-making process paved the way for society to cohesively function, and "with the aid of the morality of mores and the social straitjacket, man was actually *made* calculable" (*GM* II, 2, p. 59).

But how was this memory bred?[46] Not with ease. Nietzsche (*GM* II, 3, p. 61) writes, "If something is to stay in the memory it must be burned in: only that which never ceases to *hurt* stays in the memory." Burning memory into the conscience is

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God in man': it is the instinct of cruelty that turns back after it can no longer discharge itself externally. Cruelty is here exposed for the first time as one of the most ancient and basic substrata of culture that simply cannot be imagined away."

[44] Not that all forgetfulness was bad. For Nietzsche, a little amnesia served humanity well. Forgetfulness enabled them to persevere through life's difficulties. He refers to forgetfulness as a "doorkeeper" to our conscience, permitting limited experiences to absorb into one's psyche (*GM* II, 1, p. 58). Admitting that much would be gladly forgotten, there was something that must be remembered—i.e. one's promises.

[45] This is because memory ensures that the ability to remember what we said means that promises can be remembered. The fruit of memory then paves the way for responsible behaviors (e.g. the ability to measure how the immediate impacts the future).

[46] Leiter (2015, p. 182) asks, "It might seem curious, of course, that Nietzsche thinks an explanation of the phenomenon of memory is even necessary: is it not simply an innate capacity of creatures like us?"

what Nietzsche deemed the *beginning of psychology*. The price tag was costly as pain-inflicted people developed severe emotional and mental trauma through the tortuous development of memory. And the more pitiful one's memory, the more extreme were the customs developed to eradicate remnants of foggy thinking.[47]

Not until the pain of forgetfulness had sufficiently burned its way into the psyche, thus creating a memory, would the ability to keep promises finally be actualized. As Nietzsche (*GM* II, 3, p. 62) reasons, "With the aid of such images and procedures one finally remembers five or six 'I will not's,' in regard to which one had given one's *promise* so as to participate in the advantages of society—and it was indeed with the aid of this kind of memory that one at last came 'to reason'!" To which he exclaims, "How much blood and cruelty lie at the bottom of all 'good things'!" As the saying goes, *Kein schmerz kein gewinn* (No pain, no gain).

Armed with memory and reasoning capacity, forgetfulness met its match. Humans could now make promises. But a problem remained. They could also break them. For Nietzsche, such knowledge provides critical background knowledge that must first be addressed in order to understand both the process that memory serves and the purpose for which memory was bred in prehistorical times. Such information offers his readers a pair of historical binoculars to look into the freshly discovered rational world that moral guilt would *eventually* emerge from, but not yet.[48]

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[47] In the event that his own German readers felt above such barbaric behavior, Nietzsche reminds them to contemplate their own blood-strewn path to becoming "a nation of thinkers" by reflecting on a little history of their own former codes of conduct. Nietzsche (*GM* II, 3, p. 62) writes, "These Germans have employed fearful means to acquire a memory, so as to master their basic mob-instinct and its brutal coarseness. Consider the old German punishments; for example, stoning (the sagas already have millstones drop on the head of the guilty), breaking on the wheel (the most characteristic invention and specialty of the German genius in the realm of punishment!), piercing with stakes, tearing apart or trampling by horses ("quartering"), boiling of the criminal in oil or wine (still employed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries), the popular flaying alive ("cutting straps"), cutting flesh from the chest, and also the practice of smearing the wrongdoer with honey and leaving him in the blazing sun for the flies."

[48] At the beginning of his second essay, Nietzsche (*GM* II, 2, p. 59) frontloads it by revealing the outcome: "If we place ourselves at the end of this tremendous process, where the tree at last brings forth fruit, where society and the morality of custom at last reveal *what* they have simply been the means to: then we discover that the ripest fruit is the *sovereign individual*, like only to himself,

*2.2. On the origin of non-moral guilt (***GM** *II, 4–15)*

Having discussed how humans developed memories capable of making and keeping promises, Nietzsche (*GM* II, 4, p. 62) now releases his frustration on his philosophical contemporaries, these "*genealogists of morals*." He believed these modern thinkers were misguided and lacking historical insight, concerning primitive humanity's modus operandi of instinct. Nietzsche felt that by superimposing a modernistic understanding of moral guilt upon primitive humanity, his uninformed fellow philosophers claimed more than guilt was ready to supply in that ancient-day context. On his account, there was a time when man held no moral views: pre-moralized humanity. This was when humans lived by unrestrained instinct. By explaining guilt in terms of its prehistorical milieu, Nietzsche believed he could avoid the clumsy mistakes that he accused others of making. When the genesis of guilt is misunderstood, philosophers develop faulty moral models to explain it. This was a problem for Nietzsche. Therefore, before setting out to construct his own genealogy of morals and to explain how guilt became moralized, he first deconstructed the moral genealogy of his time by de-moralizing guilt in the pre-civilized era. To do this, Nietzsche points his philological finger at his contemporaries' delinquent use of language and turns his attention to the etymological landscape where he believes non-moral guilt first took root.

Nietzsche (*GM* II, 4, pp. 62–63) writes, "Have these genealogists of morals had even the remotest suspicion that, for example, the major moral concept *Schuld* [guilt] has its origin in the very material concept *Schulden* [debts]?" Nietzsche held that guilt was first understood as debt. Not *moral* debt, but *material* debt as depicted in the contractual relationship between the creditor and debtor. Under these contractual relationships, debtors made promises to their creditors to assure them that they would make good on their loans. In the event that the debtor was unable to fulfill

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liberated again from morality of custom, autonomous and surpramoral." Therefore, the purpose (I use this term loosely) of this entire process, including the role of moral guilt, is to provide a necessary means to a greater end—the sovereign individual, the emancipated individual, the self-regulated individual. The development of bad conscience is a stage in the progress toward becoming a sovereign individual, and the longer humans perceive their instincts as "sinful," the longer humanity will enslave itself from progressing toward this Nietzschean ideal of the sovereign individual.

his promises, the creditor could receive compensation in the form of cruelty towards the debtor, be it by dismembering or some other sadistic form of torture that supposedly gave the creditor a kind of pleasure. This enjoyment of pain infliction could settle the debtor's accounts. Nietzsche (*GM* II, 6, p. 65) explains, "It was in *this* sphere then, the sphere of legal obligations, that the moral conceptual world of 'guilt,' 'conscience,' 'duty,' 'sacredness of duty' had its origin: its beginnings were, like the beginnings of everything great on earth, soaked in blood thoroughly and for a long time."

Absent of morality, this crimson-stained, primeval past knew no guilt in the moral sense for breaking one's promises. Both creditor and debtor to Nietzsche were by all means *sinless*. Inconsiderate of ethical demands, he even maintains that the primeval peoples, who were given to unconstrained instinct, were happier than us modern people, who are racked by guilty feelings, unlike our predecessors.

By arguing this way, Nietzsche (*GM* II, 4, p. 63) sought to construct a genealogy of morals that was dated much later than his contemporaries claimed: "The idea, now so obvious, apparently so natural, even unavoidable, that had to serve as the explanation of how the sense of justice ever appeared on earth—'the criminal deserves punishment *because* he could have acted differently'—is in fact an extremely late and subtle form of human judgment and inference: whoever transposes it to the beginning is guilty of a crude misunderstanding of the psychology of more primitive mankind." For Nietzsche the only thing guilty about the prehistorical setting was his philosophical cohorts' alleged false understanding of it. The assertion Nietzsche quotes from his opponents, that "the criminal deserves punishment" for being guilty in that "he could have acted differently," will have an explanation soon enough in the discussion that follows.

Before transitioning to section 16 and following, sections 9–15 require some brief attention. Nietzsche scholars are divided on how to interpret the material found within this portion of sections in light of the essay at large. Some even take the portion or parts of it to be a bit ancillary.[49] At minimum, sections 9–15 explain how

[49] E.g. Leiter (2015, p. 180) comments that these sections are "somewhat tangential to the argument of the Second Essay." Risse (2001, pp. 57–58) similarly argues that punishment is culpable for repressing the instincts and the cause of internalization. On the contrary, Janaway (2007, p. 134) defends a reading of these sections that suggests that consciousness of guilt is a means of self-

key features such as justice, *ressentiment*, and punishment relate to guilt in pre-moral times.[50] By demonstrating how these features functioned in pre-moral history, Nietzsche envisions their utility within the trajectory toward moral guilt.

First, regarding justice. Nietzsche has already demonstrated how payments were settled within the creditor-debtor relationship by discussing the price tag of making and keeping promises. Justice was then the action that allowed culture to *come to terms* and agree on proper settlements (see *GM* II, 8). Second, regarding *ressentiment* (see *GM* II, 11), this refers to the master-slave class morality, where we learn about how the slaves felt inferior to their masters and resented their power. In time, the slaves successfully inverted the societal values to assume their power. Finally, regarding punishment, insofar as citizens complied with the standards of their culture, they could experience the protection, care, and peace that come with societal alignment. Such protection allowed cultural participants to dwell without fear (unlike punished exiles). In the event that citizens became debtors by violating their societal pledge, they rendered themselves worthy of punishment by their creditor.

Through punishment, debtors are reminded that a pledge has been broken and consequentially they have forfeited the benefits of their culture, being cut off and now

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punishment. He seems to concede a disconnect of punishment and guilt in sections 14 and 15, but due to the larger role punishment plays in Nietzsche's second essay, he is content to maintain a connection to accomplish an overall cohesive understanding of Nietzsche's explanation. His view is discussed in more detail in section 3.2 of this chapter.

[50] Westphal (1984, p. 79) challenges Nietzsche's view that punishment fails to awaken the feeling of guilt amongst criminals: "When he says that the sting of conscience is extremely rare among criminals and convicts, he confuses guilt with repentance …. My own experience with those who have served time in prison does not suggest that they have come through the experience with an unscathed sense of personal worth …. From the point of view of public policy the problem is not that our penal system fails to awaken guilt, but rather that it fails to engender repentance." Obviously, not everyone in prison is a sociopath. While large numbers of people may have justified their wrong, there are countless others who struggle to move beyond their guilt. In fact, to some inmates, their punishment may even serve as an ascetic balm, helping guilt-ridden victims to cope with their guilt. They may reason as follows: "I deserve to serve this time for my wrongful action," and such reasoning—that of paying a price, namely punishment—helps some assuage their guilt.

treated like an enemy.[51] Powerful cultures are secure cultures that are able to dispense with mercy. They are apt to operate, as Nietzsche (*GM* II, 10, p. 73) states, "beyond the law."[52]

It took time for cultures to enjoy this luxury. Until then, punishment was continuously enforced upon the lawbreaker. In a passage whereby Nietzsche synonymously connects "bad conscience" with a "guilty person," one sensing "inward pain" (i.e. guilty feelings), he is clear that punishment during pre-moral history brought about no such sentiment.

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[51] Punishment varied in its degree of severity. Nietzsche thought of punishment in primeval cultures as follows: To be punished by such measures was normative for weaker and less stable cultures that could not afford a breach of community. However, as the tribe strengthened, such offenses were taken less seriously. That is because the society was more secure and less threatened by an individual's actions. At the crest of cultural power, no action was deemed *irremediable*. Not that some violators were never dealt with, but they were handled more peacefully. Nietzsche (*GM* II, 10, p. 72) writes, "The 'creditor' always becomes more humane to the extent that he has grown richer; finally, how much injury he can endure without suffering from it becomes the actual *measure* of his wealth. It is not unthinkable that a society might attain such a *consciousness of power* that it could allow itself the noblest luxury possible to it—letting those who harm it go *unpunished*." Punishment on this account is more about dealing with those who threaten social security than it is about teaching a lesson to wrongdoers (i.e. the guilty).

[52] Nietzsche argued that the dispensing of justice or acting justly are actions that happen subsequent to the law in contrast to one's *reaction* of being wronged. He argued this way because he did not believe actions such as justice or acting justly are actions "*in themselves*." To him, one's life, or biological machinery, happens *essentially* and is deterministic, not freely based upon the will of some person *x*. Persons are bent on a will to power, not the will of equality, which he considers a recipe for human destruction (see *GM* II, 11, p. 76). Nietzsche blamed this failure to understand punishment on the genealogists of morals because they sought to find some "purpose" or teleological aim to correspond to such treatment. For him, their obsession with utility blinded them from seeing that punishment was not designed for punishing as if it was some thought-out thing "*in itself*." Rather, purpose was assigned to it *after* the arrival of a thought-out law. In Nietzsche's view, understanding the origin of something offers nothing to say about its teleology. Each successive culture is a new interpreter of purpose and hence obscures prior interpretations of intention; just as the hand was not invented for grasping, so too punishment was not designed for punishing, for there is no *ultimate or prior purpose*. This was Nietzsche's contention. For a litany of the various uses of punishment, see *GM* II, 13, pp. 80–81. Nietzsche apparently compiled this list to obliterate the idea that there is one supposed purpose "*in itself*" that is detectable for punishing.

> The "bad conscience," this most uncanny and most interesting plant of all our earthly vegetation, did *not* grow on this soil; indeed, during the greater part of the past the judges and punishers themselves were *not at all* conscious of dealing with a "guilty person." But with an instigator of harm, with an irresponsible piece of fate. And the person upon whom punishment subsequently descended, again like a piece of fate, suffered no "inward pain" other than that induced by the sudden appearance of something unforeseen, a dreadful natural event, a plunging, crushing rock that one cannot fight. (*GM* II, 14, p. 82)

The creditor was simply dealing with the debtor, collecting his payment in the form of punishment. Not for being morally guilty, but for being legally irresponsible in failing to keep his promise to repay his debt.[53]

*2.3. The origin and decline of bad conscience (***GM** *II, 16–20)*

On Nietzsche's account, the bad conscience originated during the primeval context of the creditor-debtor relationship. In order for humans to achieve cohesive community, they restrained their natural instincts to act out by turning their instinctive urge upon themselves. Nietzsche (*GM* II, 16, p. 84) succinctly writes, "All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly *turn inward*—this is what I call the *internalization* of man." In another passage, Nietzsche (*GM* II, 17, p. 87) adds, "This instinct *for* freedom forcibly made latent—we have seen it already—this instinct for freedom pushed back and repressed, incarcerated within and finally able to discharge and vent itself only on itself: that, and that alone, is what the *bad* conscience is in its beginnings." The beginning of bad conscience was also the beginning of the *soulish* person: the inner world that learns to consider the other in light of the newly created soul. From this point forward, humanity was confined, living according to custom. People warred within themselves as old instincts were directed inward. According to Nietzsche, this internalization was not a happy advancement for humanity, but rather a transition that produced great angst as people suffered, as it were, the "birth pangs" of becoming civilized.

[53] It's worth asking, is not there a moral component to promise-breaking? For example, are not the elements of moral guilt ostensibly apparent in that moral guilt and breaking a promise each include a "thou shall not" and a recognition that "I shouldn't have?" But of course, this apparent *ought* is also not, according to Nietzsche, a thing "in itself."

But how did this process of internalization, namely the inherent bad conscience, reach its most awful state? Nietzsche (*GM* II, 19–20, pp. 88–90) describes three stages of development. Beginning with the creditor-debtor relationship in the primeval era as the first stage, humanity set out on a trajectory toward its present condition. According to Nietzsche, earlier generations lived with a sense of indebtedness to previous generations, especially to their deceased tribal founders who by their own sacrifice paved the way for their tribes to exist. The tribes came to believe that these tribal founders now demanded payment. And the greater the tribe, the greater indebtedness the tribe felt to their ancestors. To compensate, sacrifices were given, and in particular *blood* sacrifices. Fast-forward the process to the second stage and the debt continues to grow, until eventually the ancestors are deemed *gods*. Fast-forward one last time through considerable development to the third stage and the trajectory of human indebtedness has reached its peak with the dawn of monotheism and what Nietzsche believed to be the most crushing form of monotheism, namely the Christian God, whose demand for repayment is to be met by the grim prospect of eternal hell.

Despite this trajectory, Nietzsche (*GM* II, 19, p. 88) remains optimistic as he envisions this struggle leading to a brighter future, a vista brimming with hope at the great promise ahead: “The bad conscience is an illness, there is no doubt about that, but an illness as pregnancy is an illness.” The internalization that seeded the soul ends in a long gestation process that in time gives birth to the true overcomer. But first, Nietzsche has a question to answer: “From whence did moral guilt originate?” Stated differently: How did the moralization of guilt take place? He has to this point used roughly twenty of the twenty-five sections of his essay to deconstruct the moral theories of his philosophical contemporaries and lay a new foundation before advancing his argument by answering the question before us. Nietzsche is now ready to show his cards.

*2.4. The moralization of guilt (**GM** II, 21)*

How can one know that up to this point Nietzsche understands guilt as devoid of morality? Nietzsche (*GM* II, 21, p. 91) says so himself: “I have up to now deliberately ignored the moralization of these concepts (their pushing back into the conscience; more precisely, the involvement of the *bad* conscience with the concept

of god).” At this point, the reader should be attuned to the confusion naturally created by Nietzsche, since he says in *Ecco Homo* as noted earlier that this second essay (i.e. *GM* II) is not about the voice of God in man (Nietzsche, 1989a, p. 312).[54] With the process of internalization, a trajectory toward moral guilt *was* initiated, beginning with a growing sense of non-moral guilt before ancestors, then tribal gods, and ultimately the monotheistic God of Christianity. With the arrival of Christianity, the conditions for guilt to be *maximally* moralized were firmly in place. The ideas of debtor/creditor, agreements, and consequences for violating contracts were already in motion. All that was left was for these ideas to reach their moral peak. Christianity enabled just that. Within Christianity there were the laws, the lawgiver, and the lawbreakers.

By imagining a God as the object of their self-torment, Nietzsche believed that Christianity paved the way for humanity to reach the height of moral guilt. By setting themselves up as the antithesis of a holy God, people now reckoned humanity as utterly sinful, decadent, and even loathed their natural instincts, which they considered immoral before God. At last, when anguished souls could foresee no remedy to their guilt before God, they sought to wiggle their way out of their moral dilemma by reversing the process that had been set forth with a journey back toward the externalization of their instincts.

This reversal happens when debtors realize the impossibility of paying their debts. Upon recognizing that no self-punishment could ever suffice to atone for moral guilt, humanity envisioned an eternal hell to compensate for its immoral state. Admitting defeat, guilty victims thwarted the prospect of everlasting despair by reversing the process that led them there to begin with and effectively placed their debt upon the creditor. Enter Christianity, and in comes God the creditor, who in the person of Jesus Christ sacrificed himself on a cross to cancel out humanity’s *moral* debt.

For Nietzsche (*GM* II, 22, p. 93), this solution of juxtaposing a holy God against sinful humanity is pure madness: “Here is *sickness*, beyond any doubt, the

[54] See last note in section 1 of chapter 2.

most terrible sickness that has ever raged in man."[55] Guilt had now been exaggerated to its fullest extent through being moralized by the concept of God. However, contrary to what Nietzsche expected, guilt did not remain moralized exclusively upon the belief in a god. Nietzsche surmised that the death of God would produce the death of moral guilt, yet oddly enough, that has not been the case (see *GM* II, 21, p. 91).[56] People with or *without* a belief in God or gods still remain confounded by moral guilt.

*2.5. The Apex of Moral Guilt: Guilt before God (***GM** *II, 22–23)*

In an ever-increasing attempt to find himself guilty, says Nietzsche (*GM* II, 22, p. 92), "this man of the bad conscience has seized upon the presupposition of religion so as to drive his self-torture to its most gruesome pitch of severity and rigor. Guilt before *God*." A thought so overwhelming that it serves to torture him beyond reprieve. For Nietzsche (*GM* II, 22, p. 93), the notion of humanity's moral guilt before God is repulsive: "Here is *sickness*, beyond any doubt, the most terrible sickness that has ever raged in man.… Too long, the earth has been a madhouse!" Fed up with the madness, this madhouse, and the weakness of guilty humanity, he longs for humans to consider another way. A way beyond God *and* guilt.

*2.6. Beyond God and Guilt (***GM** *II, 24–25)*

In these final two sections, Nietzsche's puts his finishing touch on this second essay, creating suspense for what's to come. Nietzsche (*GM* II, 24, p. 95) demonstrates his readiness to move beyond God and guilt, since from his vantage

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[55] Nietzsche reminds his readers that there is a nobler use for the gods than inventing them for the purposes of self-torture and ridicule, which he asserts is the case with Christianity; for an example of this nobler invention, he offers the Greek pantheon, whom the Greeks blamed for the origination of evil (see *GM* II, 23, pp. 93–94).

[56] Acknowledging Nietzsche's naturalistic attempt to ground morals apart from God, Clark and Swensen (Nietzsche, 1998, p. xxii) in the forward to their translation of his *On the Genealogy of Morals* write, "The project of a genealogy of morality is thus to explain in purely naturalistic terms, without appeal to the voice of God or an immortal soul in touch with eternal values, the origins of morality: how it came about that human beings are guided by morality. The question is not why we are morally good, but why it is that human animals accept (hence act on the basis of) specifically *moral* reasons or values."

point, both hinder humanity: "Man has all too long had an 'evil eye' for his natural inclinations, so that they have finally become inseparable from his 'bad conscience.'"[57] To remove bad conscience, guilt, and the like will require an arduous process that appears unlikely anytime soon. While reversing the process is *possible*, it will require something short of omnipotence. Great fortitude will be necessary for the one acting contrary to the acceptable ways of culture. For such strength, Nietzsche looks ahead to the future where after a long, treacherous journey, humanity is enabled at last to resist the reigning moral ideal. And for that, he employs *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883–1892).

At this point, perhaps a summary of Nietzsche's argument is now in order. The development of his conception of moral guilt is as follows:

1. Moral guilt emerged subsequent to an extended process of events that began in prehistorical times.
2. Originally, humans functioned non-morally, acting out on their instincts.
3. In time, the unrestrained instinct to act out became restrained by turning inward in order for society to function properly. This was the beginning of bad conscience.
4. Non-moral guilt became moralized once indebted humans composed a moral ideal that was met with punishment when not attained. This was bad-bad conscience.[58]

[57] Nietzsche is not a full-fledged fatalist. Rather he envisions good resulting from this epoch of moral history, when in time a new age will dawn and freedom will at last reign for those overcomers who are able to shed the vestiges from their morally oppressive past.

[58] Once moral guilt arrives, it is fair to refer to it as "bad conscience," insofar as bad conscience is not limited to moral guilt. Moral guilt is a component of bad conscience, but not the whole of it. Bad conscience provides knowledge to the individual regarding guilt, while also providing other elements of knowledge. A person's conscience may be "guilty," but the same person can also have a "clear conscience" or a "depressed conscience" or a "paranoid conscience," etc. Lastly, the true *nature* of moral guilt for Nietzsche is *non-objective*, what he refers to as "the bite of conscience," i.e. the feeling of guilt—or subjective guilt.

5. The moral ideal that set the standards for moral guilt reached its *maximal* end with the rise of Christianity.
6. In this way, the concepts for moral guilt already emerged *before* God and moral guilt reaches its peak after the invention of gods/God.
7. To absolve oneself of moral guilt is to reverse the process, both rejecting the end, namely God, and the means that led there, namely moral guilt.
8. When the strong-willed man is ready to cast aside both God and moral guilt, he is en route to becoming the autonomous individual.
9. Therefore, the naturalistic explanation of moral guilt follows this progression: guilt was moralized after a series of events, the severest experience of it comes with belief in the God of Christianity, and in order for it to be eradicated, the process that led to moral guilt needs to be reversed for the health of humanity.

With this exegetical review of *GM* II in place, I will now provide a brief summarization of six different commentators' understanding of Nietzsche's view of moral guilt.

3. Six Interpretations of Nietzsche's Explanation of Moral Guilt

While interpretive theories on Nietzsche's conception of moral guilt vary, as will be seen below, they can be boiled down to two schools of thought. Either moral guilt existed *before* people conceptualized God and with this conception guilt is maximized (the view I understand *GM* II to present), or moral guilt arrives on the scene only *after* God is conceptualized. Therefore, the question is this: When did bad conscience become guilty conscience, *before* or *after* people conceived of God? Of these two schools of thought, the former position is the most common interpretation of Nietzsche's explanation of moral guilt. And for this reason, my sampling will admittedly represent this imbalance. In favor of moral guilt before God are the views put forth by: May (1999), Janaway (2007), Reginster (2011), Leiter (2015), and

Ridley (2005).[59] And in favor of moral guilt coming to fruition after God is Risse (2001). The goal of this assessment is not to provide an exegesis of each author's interpretation, but rather to highlight each interpreter's distinctive approach to Nietzsche's *GM*. This will be helpful not only for appreciating the difficulty of pinning Nietzsche down, but also for bringing readers up to speed on some of the more authoritative readings of Nietzsche's view of moral guilt, while also affording me the opportunity to draw together some of the similarities and differences found among the various interpretations before concluding the chapter with an overall assessment of Nietzsche's view of guilt.

3.1. May's Debtor-Creditor Theory

In English-born German philosopher Simon May's (1999) view, Nietzsche is not against the concept of guilt. He writes, "In a Nietzschean ethic, the possibility of guilt and bad conscience is central to any *description* of, respectively, ethically responsible individuals and a cohesive society. Indeed, the possibility of guilt exists wherever an agent feels genuine ethical commitments—i.e. a sense of personal accountability to standards (whether these are social or individual) which is not sustained simply by external threats, rewards, and monitoring and which, therefore, functions as an internal censor, as in any feelings of obligation structured by the debtor-creditor model" (May, 1999, p. 74). When guilt is solely caused by external threats, rewards, and monitoring rather than a sincere desire to make good on one's obligations, it becomes tainted. Having said this, according to May, Nietzsche is not writing to undercut guilt but rather trace how it has become abused. May writes, "Nietzsche's attack is not on a basic concept employed by Christian morality, such as 'guilt', but rather on the *use* to which it is put in life-denial" (p. 55). This depreciation of man as sinful, as taught by the priests, only serves to perpetually enslave humanity. When taken to its extreme, as in the case of Christianity, guilt renders humanity as a bill of bad goods. This is bad guilt. Life-denial. And it must be overcome.

On reading Nietzsche, May (p. 56) differentiates between "non-moral" and "moral" forms of guilt and bad conscience by depicting three distinctives of these two

[59] Due to the debate between Ridley and Risse, I have arranged the position of Ridley's work last for the sake of argument flow.

types of guilt. First, unlike the non-moral forms of guilt where it is customary to experience guilty indebtedness and self-cruelty in a developed society, when guilt is moralized it takes on the form of needing to be overcome or transcended. Second, these two forms of guilt are phenomenologically different. Non-moral guilt results from an experience of failure and the subsequent desire to make good on one's obligation, whereas bad conscience in the pre-moral world emerged to keep one's instincts in check through self-disciplining them into shape so as to not lose status among one's society. And third, the non-moral forms can be "life-enhancing," whereas the moral forms as already seen are "life-denying," devaluing, and limiting to one's life; hence the need for moral guilt to be transcended.

For May, the debtor-creditor model contains the conceptual framework from which guilt existed in both its pre-moral and moral forms. Qualities such as accountability and responsibility in promise-keeping as depicted under the debtor-creditor relationships are carried over and fit naturally within a context of moralized guilt. He writes, "On the debtor-creditor model, non-moral guilt and bad conscience both presuppose the agent's feeling of respect for the contractual relationship between debtors and creditors and for the discipline of promise-keeping that it demands" (p. 57). For guilt to transpire there must be some norm that has not been kept in order to account for the guilt. The difference is that in the non-moral world, guilt is experienced more as inadequacy in failing to make good on one's promises, whereas once guilt is moralized, while people may continue to experience such inadequacy, they now see themselves as *bad*.

As to the three types of creditors to whom the debtor can become indebted, it begins with any individual with whom a debtor is obligated; the second type are the cultural ancestors to whom society feels indebted; and the final creditor are the gods, culminating in the Christian God, where moral guilt reaches its zenith.

So how exactly is guilt moralized? May elucidates, "Bad conscience and guilt are moralized, Nietzsche seems to suggest, when they are blamed on, or interpreted in terms of, some putatively innate corruption of human nature (or, more generally, of 'life' or 'the world') which one must therefore strive to suppress, extirpate, or 'transcend'" (p. 70). May explains that this corruption happens when the non-moral form of guilt, i.e. general guilt, is at last pushed back into bad conscience; it is then moralized. These two once distinct states, namely bad conscience and guilt, are now indistinguishable and experienced as a perpetual state of feeling guilty (p. 70). May

adds, "It is clear that moralization is defined (critically though not exhaustively) by the idea that one's human nature is essentially and undischargeably guilty and *hence defective*" (pp. 70–71). While the concept of moral guilt exists apart from any conception of God, the belief in God, in particular the Christian God, only serves to exacerbate one's guilt (p. 71).

To overcome this defective state, May argues that humans must turn to the resources found in the ascetic ideal and to free will in order to unloose oneself from this tormented enslavement.[60] Together, these components can embark one upon a pathway toward reversing the innate human corruption brought about by bad guilt.

3.2. Janaway's Punishment Theory

Philosopher Christopher Janaway (2007) takes the theme of punishment in Nietzsche's second essay (or treatise) as providing the interpretive clue for making sense of Nietzsche's otherwise ambiguous essay. To accomplish this, he gives a unifying explanation of Nietzsche's two separate accounts of the origin of guilt-consciousness as depicted by the debtor-creditor relationship and the internalization of instincts. He argues that when each account is observed on its own, it fails to arrive at Nietzsche's explanandum. Therefore, Janaway (2007, p. 133) states, "If we are to regain coherence for the central train of thought in the Second Treatise, the 'two explanations' of the origin of guilt-consciousness must be parts of a single more subtle story."

To accomplish the unified explanation Janaway proposes, it is important to recognize that, according to Nietzsche (*GM* II, 5, pp. 64–65; cf. *GM* II, 16, pp. 84–85), humans have an instinctive need to exhibit their power—i.e. their will to power in the form of cruelty. Through internalization, this cruelty serves as a means of self-punishment. Now to reconcile this double account into a single storyline, Janaway (2007, p. 133) argues that insofar as one interprets the internalization as the *legitimized* punishment to exact payment for an observed wrongdoing, then one can capture the interpretive clue provided by Nietzsche to reconcile both accounts. Janaway writes,

[60] For how this unloosing of oneself is to be accomplished, see May's (1999, pp. 81–103) chapter entitled, "Asceticism in Life-Enhancement and Life-Denial."

> The reading I wish to defend is, schematically, as follows: the consciousness of guilt is a means of punishing oneself, and punishment originates in the debtor–creditor relationship.… Hence, if consciousness of guilt is a form of *self-punishment*, then Nietzsche can intelligibly claim both that it originates in internalization of the instincts and that it originates in the debtor–creditor relationship. (p. 134)[61]

At this point, it becomes clear that Janaway believes that Nietzsche strove to offer a *naturalistic* explanation for moral guilt and that the two accounts can be reconciled by taking *just punishment* as the unifying clue.[62] By drawing a connection between *warranted* self-punishment as it originated in the debtor-creditor relationship and the internalization of instincts, Janaway shows how Nietzsche reasoned that victims could make sense of their suffering. While Janaway admits that Nietzsche saw the good that was obtained through the process of internalization (see *GM* II, 16, 18), he argues that it was not until the rise of Christianity that moral guilt was seen as good. Janaway (2007, p. 141) says that "implicit in [Nietzsche's] account is that no one prior to Christianity conceived self-cruelty or self-punishment as a good per se. It is, I suggest, the supposed *goodness* of feeling guilty that Nietzsche thinks requires metaphysical underpinning." Here he concedes then that Nietzsche believed that people experienced guilty feelings prior to a divine grounding. But Janaway also states that it was more specifically a theological grounding where Christianity made sense of those guilty feelings by introducing laws and a lawgiver with such a high standard that in receiving punishment, human lawbreakers would always feel that their punishment was not only deserved, but right and good (p. 142). Therefore, Janaway adds, "Moralization is the elevation of feeling guilty into a virtue" (p. 142).

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[61] Janaway (2007, p. 134) acknowledges that in sections 14 and 15 of *GM* II, Nietzsche minimizes the role of punishment as instrumental toward making people feel guilty and thereby leads us down a bit of a "blind alley." Yet, given the wealth of Nietzsche's material on punishment in the second essay, Janaway believes the essay reads more cohesively if punishment serves as a necessary link for explaining the development of guilt-consciousness.

[62] Janaway (2007, p. 131) unfolds his argument under the following assumptions: "(1) internalization of the drive to express power and hence to inflict cruelty is one crucial component in the genesis of guilt-consciousness; (2) such internalization is not identical to guilt-consciousness proper; (3) guilt-consciousness proper is the most fully developed form of bad conscience and the true target of Nietzsche's critique."

By depicting a God who is so lofty as the moral ideal such that all humans are to aspire to become like this God in virtue, they encounter a standard that allows them to perpetually feel good about their self-punishment of feeling guilty, by acknowledging that it is deserved due to their own evil in that they always fall short of the ideal.[63]

3.3. Reginster's Perverted Guilt Theory

According to American philosopher Bernard Reginster (2011), Nietzsche's goal in *GM* II is to explain how original guilt became perverted through belief in the God of Christianity. His aim is not "to offer the *complete* account of the emergence of the ordinary feeling of guilt that commentators have been at pains to extract from it, simply because it describes only those features that are relevant to his diagnosis of Christian guilt as a perverted use of it" (Reginster, 2011, p. 57). This perversion, to Reginster, "*presupposes"* a non-perverted view of guilt (p. 57), what he refers to as "original guilt" (p. 77).

Original guilt provides the necessary ingredients for guilt to be perverted. Those ingredients are things such as indebtedness, contractual obligations, punishment, and the internalization of one's instincts. Factor in the additional belief in God coupled with the deprecation of one's moral worth, and a perverted form of guilt is produced.

While original guilt feelings may contribute in formulating the bad conscience, it is not until these feelings are self-condemned that they become moralized. This happens when one's instincts are pushed back or internalized, and this internalization is vexed by the additional belief in God. Reginster argues that the feeling of indebtedness in the pre-moral world becomes a perversion of guilt "when they take on a *categorical*, as opposed to merely *prudential*, character" (p. 66).

As a result, a new relationship between the guilty party and God now causes one's self-worth to be challenged. Adding to the perversion of original guilt, one's guilt becomes pervasive in that such guilty persons under a theistic framework can no

[63] Janaway (2007, p. 137) says of the narrative, "A noteworthy feature of Nietzsche's account is that the need to inflict cruelty on oneself comes first, the incentive to conceive oneself as a legitimate recipient of cruelty comes second as a way of giving meaning to self-cruelty, and the invention of reasons why one deserves cruelty comes last in the story."

longer expiate their guilt by undergoing a certain amount of punishment, as in times past. The reason expiation is impossible is that no one can adhere to the moral expectations imposed on individuals by God.[64] Here is how Reginster (2011, p. 69) captures Nietzsche's argument:

> According to the interpretation I am proposing here, "moralization" is not the process whereby the non-moral concepts of indebtedness and contractual obligation become the moral concepts of guilt and duty. It is rather a different process whereby the concepts of guilt and obligation, already understood in a generic moral sense, are enrolled in the service of the aims of morality understood in a specific sense, namely, as "slave morality" or "Christian" morality. According to my interpretation, therefore, Nietzsche takes the Christian representation of guilt to be not a particular account of the ordinary feeling of guilt, but a perversion of the susceptibility to that feeling.…
>
> … He suggests that feeling guilty is feeling indebted in a way that decreases my worth as a person—it is a feeling of "personal obligation" (*GM*, II, 8). What requires explanation is therefore what my worth as a person amounts to, and how it could have come to be at stake in the fulfillment of my contractual obligations.

Reginster sets out to provide the explanation, the heart of which is this: For one's worth to be called into question requires moral norms to be fixed in place that can also be trespassed, and as a result of such a moral lapse, one's worth is greatly reduced. Therefore, in the end, not only is guilt perverted, but the guilty are perverted as well. And this is Nietzsche's burden; to expose this perversion with the goal of constructing a new aesthetic ideal that one can aim for with the hope of ridding oneself of perverted guilt.

3.4. Leiter's Aesthetic Ideal Theory

American philosopher and legal scholar Brian Leiter (2015, p. 178) interprets Nietzsche's second essay to be a naturalistic explanation of moral guilt when he writes, "As always, Nietzsche wants to find a naturalistic explanation for this change, one that would replace supernatural explanations like those which would explain

[64] This position misses the idea, however, that Christian people do not envision themselves without the possibility of their guilt being expiated. The atonement accomplishes this very concern—that of ridding individuals of their guilt.

conscience as 'the voice of God in man.'"[65] According to Leiter, the thrust of this second essay is to provide an account of how conscience turned into guilty feelings. To accomplish this, Nietzsche (*GM* II, 19–20, pp. 88–90) gives an account of the three stages of the development of conscience. Leiter (2015, p. 179) reconstructs these stages as follows: the first stage begins with the emergence of conscience and its initial ability to recall debts, the second stage offers an account of the *bad* conscience resulting from the internalization of cruelty, and the third stage explains how internalized cruelty results in feelings of *guilt*. However, to fully appreciate the effects of moral guilt upon humanity, Leiter (2015, p. 180) contends that it is necessary to connect the ascetic ideal as seen in the third essay (*GM* III) to have a complete account of Nietzsche's argument. This interpretive twist is what makes his specific approach a unique take on *GM* II.

Leiter (2015, p. 195) believes that Nietzsche's fullest expression of moral guilt is not realized apart from the third essay: "Bad conscience alone gives us only 'guilt in its raw state' (*GM* III, 20); real guilt requires bad conscience to be put in the service of the ascetic ideal, and it is only the Third Essay that will explain why that should come to pass." To explain this, Leiter argues that the ascetic ideal is the key to solving the mystery of Nietzsche's fuller explanation of moral guilt. Leiter (2015, p. 227) remarks that "it would seem that [Nietzsche] has explained why bad conscience became attached to the ascetic ideal: for only such a use of *guilt* could relieve the suffering of the 'majority of mortals' who could not, otherwise, bear their senseless suffering." Therefore, guilt was the cause of suffering, but apart from the ascetic ideal, one's suffering was rendered meaningless, and therefore nihilism was humankind's dilemma. Now with the ascetic ideal, humans no longer had to suffer without meaning. For with the priestly class in place, people were able to make sense of all suffering.

3.5. Ridley's Guilt before God Theory

Philosopher Aaron Ridley (2005, p. 36) maintains that the answer to the question Nietzsche (*GM* II, 4, p. 62) asks, "But how did that other 'somber thing,' the

[65] The "change" Leiter (2015, p. 179) refers to is humanity's development of bad conscience, what he refers to as a "*guilty* conscience."

consciousness of guilt, the 'bad conscience,' come into the world?" is discovered in two stages. The first stage is "the internalization of man," where the instincts of humanity turn inward. As treacherous as this stage is, it lacks the categorical punch of moral guilt with the worst still yet to come. Nevertheless, while the second stage still fails to produce moral guilt, it prepares the way for the third stage by creating the infrastructure of the debtor-creditor relationship that in time sets the conditions from which moral guilt would be realized.

In the pre-moral phase of human history, humanity experienced inward torment caused by internalization, but not guilty torment. It was not until the sensation of inward pain, coupled with the realization that one's action ought not to have been done, that humanity at last encountered moral guilt. Ridley (2005, p. 37) writes, "The moralization of debt into guilt involves the augmentation of an outwardly caused pain (that of punishment, repayment) by an inwardly caused one (of 'guilt'), by a sense that one is somehow a worse person for doing what one did. And certainly, this captures something of what Nietzsche means by the moralization of guilt." Yet, there's one last caveat: the recognition that wrongdoing is not just wrong, but reprehensible. Ridley (2005, p. 37) states, "This emphasis helps explain what Nietzsche means elsewhere when he speaks of the 'morbid softening and moralization through which the animal "man" finally learns to be ashamed of all his instincts' (*GM* II.7 [p. 67])."

Therefore, Ridley's account can be summarized as follows: At first, during the creditor-debtor culture, debt was simply a fact, but not a guilt-producing fact. In time, however, humans came to see that their debt was reprehensible because they could have acted otherwise. Through indebtedness, the debtor, namely the slave, now held himself accountable by punishing himself with the torment of guilt. Debt was now moralized. This is Nietzsche's explanation, according to Ridley. Such an interpretation then situates the moralization of guilt before the rise of Christianity or God and instead, says Ridley (2005, p. 38), "regards the concept of guilt as one of the conditions that make the invention and success of Christianity so much as

intelligible."[66] In other words, Christianity had a ready-made infrastructure to begin its own moral project.

3.6. Risse's God before Guilt Theory

To understand how German-born American political philosopher Mathias Risse (2005, p. 46) frames Nietzsche's explanation of guilt in *GM* II, it is helpful to see how he distinguishes two notions of guilt. The first, he refers to as "*locally-reactive guilt*." This is the kind of guilt one encounters after failing to act according to perceivable culturally binding expectations. Here the reprehensible deed stimulates a response of feeling guilty upon violating a local norm. The second notion, "*existential guilt*," is severer in that the constant awareness of having fallen short of some standard of moral perfection is next to impossible to obtain. Consequently, this latter notion of guilt not only leaves its victims feeling guilty in the locally-reactive sense, but its severity is viscerally experienced in the existential sense as victims are *perpetually* consumed by feelings of imperfection. Risse (2005, p. 46) writes, "Existential guilt manifests itself especially in locally-reactive guilt, but there can be locally-reactive guilt without existential guilt." The reason it is important to distinguish these two notions of guilt is because Risse believes Nietzsche's account of guilt in *GM* II is *not* aimed at providing a naturalistic explanation of moral guilt that is in place before God, but rather he aims to explain how the emergence of existential guilt is explained by the arrival of the Christian concept of God, where feelings of guilt reach their zenith upon failing to obtain God's perfect standards.[67]

To defend this reading of Nietzsche, Risse recognizes he would be hard-pressed to do so utilizing *GM* alone. Therefore, he employs three arguments, utilizing both external and internal evidence to make his case. First, arguing from external evidence, Risse discusses a postcard Nietzsche wrote to Franz Overbeck in 1888, a year after the publication of *GM*, where he clarifies that one of his goals in *GM* was to

[66] For further reading, see Ridley's (1998) *Nietzsche's Conscience: Six Character Studies from the Genealogy*.

[67] One might wonder as to the nature of Risse's locally-reactive guilt if it is non-moral. The question worth asking is, what does it mean to speak of non-moral guilt? Does not guilt contain a moral element?

add perspective as to the origins of Christianity and also to elaborate more on the roots of morality. Second, he argues etymologically by drawing attention to how translators have not been much help in identifying Nietzsche's use of the German word *Schuld* (meaning "debt" or "guilt") with the correct contextual translation. Depending on the way one translates *Schuld* leaves room for one to interpret the word to mean either "debt" or "guilt." If *Schuld* is used only to refer to debt up until *GM* II, section 21, then a case can be made that guilt is not moralized until that time; on the contrary, if *Schuld* is used to indicate guilt before *GM* II, section 21, then the argument stands that guilt emerged before God. Obviously, context is the key to solving this interpretive dilemma. While these first two arguments are of some importance, it is Risse's third argument that is most crucial for understanding Nietzsche's intent in *GM* II. Risse argues that section 21 is the pivotal section for unlocking Nietzsche's view of moral guilt. For this reason, Risse reserves the bulk of his attention to focus on that section. He does so by arguing that it is not until this point, well into *GM* II, that Nietzsche reveals his interpretation and details how the first ancestors were transformed into gods and how the God of Christianity arrived on the scene and serves as the mechanism to account for the moralization of guilt *after* God. Granted, while Risse (2005, p. 53) is quick to admit that the moralization of guilt does not require the Christian God necessarily, it is from within this context that Nietzsche speaks. In this section, Risse highlights the way in which bad conscience in its present form (i.e. bad conscience as a feeling of guilt) emerges from an earlier form of bad conscience (i.e. indebtedness lacking feelings of guilt). Risse (2005, p. 56) understands Nietzsche's two stages of bad conscience to include an earlier form and the latter form. They differ in that the latter stage emerged with the concept of the God of Christianity inflicting his victims with feelings of guilt.

Thus, Risse does not discount the presence of locally-reactive guilt, but he shuns the idea that existential guilt was in full flower before the emergence of Christianity. With Christianity, the seeds were sown for the internalization to reach its height and no longer did the indebted suffer meaninglessly, but at last their suffering was endowed with meaning through the knowledge that everyone encounters when falling short of God's moral requirements. Indebtedness at this stage experiences a metamorphosis of sorts as debt turns into feelings of guilt. Here the guilty search for a remedy to assuage their guilt by looking to God to atone for their sins and to reprieve them of their suffering.

4. Summary

Having briefly considered the thrust of each argument, how might we summarize these six views? One helpful way is to recap the distinctive contribution of each writer, to remember how each one argued for the moralization of guilt, and to consider the ongoing relevance of this discussion to contemporary moral philosophy.

First, by means of recap, the distinctive contribution each interpreter offers of Nietzsche's *GM* II is as follows: May builds on the debtor-creditor model of the pre-moral world in order to trace the historical origins of guilt and to demonstrate how guilt was moralized. Janaway constructs a unifying explanation of the two separate accounts of guilt consciousness provided by Nietzsche and accentuates the idea of punishment in order to stress how humans came to recognize their guilt through wrongdoing. Reginster claims that Nietzsche's aim was to show how guilt became perverted through the rise of Christianity. Leiter contends that *GM* III and Nietzsche's use of the aesthetic ideal is needed in order to make sense of Nietzsche's account of how guilt was moralized. Ridley takes the main theme of *GM* II to be bad conscience, which is corrupted in two stages—through internalization and the recognition that one's actions are deplorable. This is *bad* bad-conscience, i.e. guilty conscience. And finally, Risse contends that Nietzsche's goal was not to offer a naturalistic account of guilt, but rather to demonstrate how Christianity ushered in existential guilt.

Second, each contributor takes a different approach to demonstrate how guilt was moralized. May argues that guilt was moralized when the non-moral form of guilt feelings were pushed back into bad conscience and persons considered themselves corrupt in nature. Janaway claims that guilt was moralized when the feeling of guilt and its punishment became elevated into a feeling of virtue. In contrast, Reginster says that guilt was moralized when one's instincts were pushed back or internalized, and this internalization coupled with the belief in God causes a person to consider himself or herself as corrupt in nature. Leiter contends that guilt was moralized after internalization caused bad conscience and one experienced internal cruelty. Ridley stresses the moralization of guilt by the occasion of its internalization coupled with an awareness that certain actions are not only wrong, but reprehensible. Finally, Risse's argument claims that Christianity moralized guilt. Understandably, it is no wonder that students scratch their heads trying to properly interpret Nietzsche. But the project

is too important to skirt over, which leads to one final thought before offering my concluding assessments.

Third, as to the nature of Nietzsche's relevance concerning the topic of morality, and in particular moral guilt, of the six views discussed above, no one is as bold as Risse in rejecting the interpretation that Nietzsche's intent in *GM* II was to provide a naturalistic account of guilt. Risse's is an interpretation of such consequence that it does not go unnoticed and unchallenged by Ridley (2005, p. 35) because of the high cost involved in how one comes down regarding "the transformation … of the concept of debt into the concept of guilt." In his article that attempts to refute Risse's (2001) "moral guilt *after* God" interpretation, Ridley (2005, p. 35) writes that "our disagreement is a disagreement about Nietzsche's continuing importance."[68] The stakes are this: If Nietzsche wrote his second essay to demonstrate that moral guilt was in place before God, then moral guilt has a role to play within naturalism. However, if he wrote this essay to say that moral guilt only results from a belief in the divine, then Nietzsche's writings in *GM* have little to nothing to say to a post-Christian world.

5. Final Assessments

Much more could be said of Nietzsche's argument. On a positive note, his highly creative rhetoric is persuasive and makes for an engaging read. His willingness to challenge the status quo and to think outside the acceptable box of his time allowed him to offer up fresh thought as to the origins of morality. For example, Nietzsche was correct to challenge the unnatural overlay of utilitarian ethics wedded to Darwinian naturalism. By doing so, he was able to push morality to its natural subjectivist conclusion based on naturalism.

On other occasions, Nietzsche's overreliance on autonomous thought perhaps blinds him to the insights of others. While such thinking has certainly produced the fruit of many creative insights, it has also been the seedbed for making certain

[68] In this helpful article, Ridley (2005, p. 35) challenges the three assumptions Risse makes to develop his argument. Those assumptions are: (1) an insightful postcard written by Nietzsche to lend credence to Risse's interpretation, (2) a translation issue of critical importance, and (3) the stance that Nietzsche does not moralize guilt until section 21 in his second essay.

ungrounded statements. For example, how does Nietzsche know that people were happier before they experienced moral guilt? Or how does he know that human beings acted more according to instincts before the period of internalization that he describes? It seems to me that humans are not as dismissive of their instincts due to moral guilt as he seems to indicate. Or how does Nietzsche know that humanity's tendency to forget needs to be met by branding the individual with pain, or as reviewer Dan Geddes (1999) puts it: "Only excruciating pain could brand the first few moral laws into men's memories." Is it not possible for memory to be innate, like breathing? Moreover, without evidence Nietzsche's claim that the ancient Greeks failed to experience moral guilt seems ungrounded. Rather, it seems clear that Socrates was considered *morally* guilty on account of "impiety" and "corrupting the young," and as a result, he was sentenced to death. Obviously, Socrates considered himself morally innocent, but seemingly just as obvious, his accusers found him not just guilty as charged, but *morally* guilty as charged. If this is so, then here is one clear example, contra Nietzsche, of the concept of moral guilt residing in the ancient Greek world. And even if the Greeks failed to experience feelings of guilt, they seemingly understood the concept of moral guilt. Was not Socrates given hemlock because he was found guilty by a jury of five hundred fellow Athenians? Not only that, but why look to the Greeks alone; is that not myopic? What about all the other cultures? Did they not experience moral guilt? And if so, why grant special status to the Greeks? Such inquiries are fair questions to ask, but answering them falls outside the scope of this chapter's purpose. In terms of providing some specific critique, I now offer four personal assessments of Nietzsche's explanation of moral guilt.

5.1. Nietzsche's claim that moral guilt needs to be eradicated on account of it constricting human happiness seems unwarranted.

Certainly many people have been the victims of unfounded guilt, but does *all* moral guilt need to be eradicated? Obviously, there is no sense beating oneself up with pseudo guilt. However, if the guilt is real, if there is a moral law that one has transgressed, then perhaps our guilt is trying to say something to us. Perhaps a question to ask is this: Is the problem the guilt one feels or the action that led to one's guilty feelings? In other words, should a person never experience moral guilt for one's

actions? Is the real solution to just overcome the sensation of guilt as an autonomous person?

It seems that there are certain actions that produce certain feelings, and it is a bit myopic to try to eradicate the corresponding feelings of guilt with a particular action and then embrace other emotions with entirely different corresponding action-emotion sequences. Perhaps feelings such as guilt and shame do reduce our happiness, but what if those guilty feelings are humanity's friend, triggered to warn and protect us, so that people can ultimately experience greater happiness? Nietzsche (*GM* II, 7, p. 67) writes, "Let me declare expressly that in the days when mankind was not yet ashamed of its cruelty, life on earth was more cheerful than it is now that pessimists exist." Apart from the fact that we cannot be certain that this claim is in fact true to human experience, even if the claim was true, then that would not necessarily mean that there is no room for *some* guilt feelings insofar as the guilt corresponds to breaking a real moral law. Eradicating moral guilt is not the solution; rather, evaluating our guilt is. Not all guilt is bad guilt. Regardless of God's existence or nonexistence, one can see a proper role for guilt in interpersonal relationships. For example, in those instances where a person violates a relational boundary, the sting of guilt can serve as a teacher that reveals one's trespass or a flaw in one's character, whereas Nietzsche's egoism blinds a person from seeing the need for healthy expressions of altruistic behavior and the benefits of working in moral concert with others.

5.2. Nietzsche minimizes the role of guilt, failing to see the positive place for it in our relationship to others.

Granted, Nietzsche does see the benefit that moral guilt has served, but only in that the development of conscience and bad conscience has made way for humanity to realize its fuller self in its journey toward becoming the overcomer or the self-willed person. This is a selfish benefit in that it helps the individual. For Nietzsche, the birth of bad conscience and internalization along with the accompaniment of moral guilt forces humanity to creatively find its *own* way, the *self*-made way. Only insofar as moral guilt helps humanity reach Nietzsche's goal of the self-made man can he concede some short-term benefits of moral guilt, but he sees the benefits from the narrow-minded perspective of selfishness.

Is this the only true benefit of moral guilt? I do not believe so. Nietzsche's self-serving vision brims with toxins of narcissism that are far more damaging than moral guilt. Katchadourian (2010, p. 282) says, "Nietzsche does not want a one-size-fits-all morality enforced by guilt. Slave morality may have had its uses but it should not be imposed on everyone. It is this vision of personal freedom and autonomy in Nietzsche that appeals to his admirers and followers." Nietzsche's self-reliant vision is a recipe for anarchy. The self should always consider other selves. When properly experienced, moral guilt can play a positive role in human relationships by informing boundaries, engendering mutual respect, and protecting humans from selfishness. As such it can serve as an indicator of human compassion, which in my opinion offers a much richer vision of the future than Nietzsche's self-vision.

5.3. Nietzsche's moralless and guiltless society is an egotistic and anarchistic cultural vision.

It is worth considering what a true Nietzschean society would look like. Imagine a society where there was no such thing as moral guilt, a self-autonomous culture where wrong actions fail to produce moral guilt, where morality is up to the individual. Would not *some* people say this sounds more like a sociopathic society? If everyone arbitrates their own decisions without consideration of their community, there would be more anarchy than genuine community.

5.4. There are other emotions besides guilt that could have satisfied the mechanistic need to self-inflict suffering, yet why does Nietzsche choose guilt?

If humans have a deep-seated need to inflict themselves with suffering in the form of punishment in order to feel gratified, it is interesting why the emotion of guilt happens to serve as the chosen instrument in bringing about this satisfied state. Janaway (2007, pp. 131–132) astutely invites his readers to imagine the following:

> Internalization of cruelty means that we must discharge power somehow by inflicting suffering upon ourselves in a manner that produces gratification. But there are plenty of imaginable ways in which such a mechanism could work without the suffering's being the specific one of feeling *guilty*. Human beings, when faced with society's confines, could have aggressed against themselves by inflicting the pain of *fear* on themselves, becoming afraid of one another or of the untamed natural environment or of some imagined

> predatory beings. Or they might have made themselves suffer from painful *jealousy* of other beings whose instincts did not need to be curbed. Or they might have suffered from crippling *shame* or been *angry* at their own impotence.… So even if we accept that internalization of hostile instincts dictates that socialized human beings must gratify themselves through self-inflicted suffering, we still do not have to accept that such human beings must feel guilt, have guilt-consciousness, or indeed that they must suffer the pangs of bad conscience in any unusual sense. And that creates a gap for Nietzsche to bridge. If the internalization of cruelty is not yet the feeling of guilt, then how do we reach there from here?

Here Janaway non-exhaustively employs four plausible candidates that just as conceivably could have met the requirements for finding satisfaction through self-inflicted punishment. These candidates are (1) fear, (2) jealousy, (3) shame, and/or (4) anger. Obviously, it would not take much thought to add other candidates to the list, but his point retains. During the initial stages of human development, why was guilt chosen as the instrument of cruelty over other viable candidates?

6. Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to provide Nietzsche's naturalistic explanation of moral guilt. To do this, I focused primarily on the second essay of his *GM*. My approach was to provide an exegesis of this essay's twenty-five sections, with special attention given to Nietzsche's development and moralization of guilt. I contended that Nietzsche envisioned a moral world with guilt before God, but then with the additional conception of God, namely the Christian God, guilt reached its moral zenith. Following this assessment, I briefly explained the views of six contemporary interpreters of *GM* II and from a big-picture point of view contended that any interpretation of Nietzsche's *GM* could be placed into two schools of thought: the moral guilt *before* God interpretation or the moral guilt *after* God view, while acknowledging the variegated interpretive nuances among the six readers I examined. Finally, I issued four points of assessment of Nietzsche's explanation of moral guilt.

With these thoughts in mind, we are now ready to turn to the next chapter, where I will explore a third naturalistic explanation of moral guilt, namely the explanation of Sigmund Freud, whose work on guilt was prevalent throughout much of his career.

Chapter 3

FREUD'S NATURALISTIC EXPLANATION OF MORAL GUILT

1. Introduction

Having reviewed Darwin and Nietzsche's naturalistic explanation of moral guilt, we now turn to our attention to Austrian neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). Of Freud, psychoanalyst Roberto Speziale-Bagliacca (2004, p. 1), writes "Sigmund Freud never actually wrote a book dedicated entirely to guilt, but the various comments he made on the subject throughout his work make him the true initiator of the study of the sense of guilt and certainly the first person to approach the question systematically." Certainly, in the field of psychoanalysis Freud's work on guilt instigated a lot of discussion moving forward. His writings are of special importance in providing a psychodynamic account of guilt based on naturalism.[69] To Freud, the problem of guilt was so severe that he diagnosed it as the single most important development of civilization—a problem so acute that it is responsible for our unhappiness (1961, p. 97).[70]

In this chapter, I will examine his account of this development as taking place in two stages by limiting my focus primarily, but not exclusively, to *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1961). Then I will present four consequences to the sense of guilt

[69] Jonathan Lear (2015) discusses the two ways in which genealogies are classified. He shares how they can be *legitimating* or *delegitimating*. That is to say, the account seeks to support or not support the argument. The other classification is genealogies can be *naturalistic* or *supernatural*. Lear (2015, p. 192) writes, "In Freud's view, society's justification for its moral practices is a legitimating supernatural genealogy. In response, Freud is going to offer a naturalistic, delegitimizing genealogy of those same practices. Freud's account of the rise of a moral capacity in humans is broadly Darwinian in structure: he gives an account of how the moral capacity comes to be selected in humans." Freud's expressed disdain toward *legitimating supernatural* explanations of moral guilt are evident, especially as it relates to Judeo-Christianity.

[70] Unless otherwise indicated, all citations of *Civilization and Its Discontents* (hereafter cited as *CD*) are from Strachey's translation, part of the 24-volume *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*.

followed by Freud's twofold solution to the problem of guilt. After reviewing Freud's account of guilt, I will offer a personal assessment before concluding the chapter with a brief summary.[71]

2. The Development of Humanity's Sense of Guilt

Freud, like Darwin and Nietzsche, develops a naturalistic account of guilt. To Freud, the sense of guilt ultimately became humanity's way of restraining civilization from destroying itself with its aggressive instincts.[72] For the sake of social harmony, people inflict themselves with guilt, hoping to curtail their aggressive desires by safeguarding them from the fear of two authority figures; this comes to fruition in two stages. In stage one, Freud's explanation of guilt begins individually or within the family structure through fear of the *external* authority, namely the primal father, whom the sons eventually kill. Here Freud examines guilt in two sagas of history:

[71] In this chapter, I limit my assessment to Freud's latest exposition of guilt as discussed in chapters 7 and 8 of *CD*. As Freud's foremost biographer, Peter Gay (2006, p. 551) notes, "Freud wove together in *Civilization and Its Discontents* the principle strands of his system. The book is a grand summing up of a lifetime's thinking." That is not to say other works are irrelevant but to simply acknowledge that Freud's essential stance on the sense of guilt can be gleaned from these two chapters.

[72] Freud understood the human psyche (personality) to exist in three parts: the *id*, the *ego*, and the *super-ego*. These three descriptions are not *actual* parts of the brain's anatomy but rather provide a way of conceptualizing the human psyche. The most primitive of the three parts is the id. The ego strives to mediate between the instinctual desires of the id and the super-ego's moral enforcement. In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud (1960, p. 56) writes, "From the point of view of instinctual control, of morality, it may be said of the id that it is totally non-moral, of the ego that it strives to be moral, and of the super-ego that it can be super-moral and then become as cruel as only the id can. It is remarkable that the more a man checks his aggressiveness towards the exterior the more severe—that is aggressive—he becomes in his ego ideal." Herant Katchadourian (2010, p. 148) adds, "The superego is a mixed blessing. It is an ally of the ego in restraining the id. Yet it can be just as irrational as the id. If its harsh and uncompromising demands are not reined in, it ruins one's life. Thus the id must be controlled but not crushed; the superego must be attended to, but not blindly obeyed. It is a balancing act where the instinctual demands of the id, the strictures of the superego, and the dictates of society must be reconciled. Guilt is a key player in bringing this about, but it too may be a blessing or a bane."

before and after the killing of the father.[73] Before the sons killed their father, the sense of guilt manifested itself in acts of aggression that were *abstained* from, and after killing him, the sense of guilt manifested itself in consequence of the action.

Following this primal crime, a great transition takes place with the development of a new authority, an *internal* authority, known as the super-ego. With the addition of the super-ego in stage two, Freud tracks how the sense of guilt shifts from the individual family to civilization at large—from the super-ego to the cultural super-ego. It is because of the super-ego that humanity's aggressive instincts are kept in check and civilization can experience cohesion. In this way, the sense of guilt as administered by the super-ego serves as a survival mechanism created by humans to protect themselves from themselves. We will now explore each of these stages more closely.

2.1. Stage One: Fear of the External Authority

2.1.1. The Sense of Guilt Before Wrongdoing

At this time, the sense of guilt emerged from a fear of one's external authority, whom Freud referred to as the father. To act contrary to the father's wishes was to risk what the sons feared most—the loss of his love. Rather than instigate the father's aggression and be punished, the threat was circumvented by renouncing their instinctual cravings. Inevitably this tension created frustration and discomfort, but even worse, it created a sense of guilt, which according to Freud (1961, pp. 100–101) at that time "is the immediate expression of fear of the external authority, a recognition of the tension between ego and that authority. It is the direct derivation of the conflict between the need for the authority's love and the urge towards instinctual satisfaction, whose inhibition produces the inclinations to aggression."

Here the sense of guilt expresses itself as fear toward the external authority. The expression bubbles up whenever the sons find themselves in the unfortunate dilemma of wanting to satisfy some instinctual urge but abstain because they fear the

[73] Freud believed people in prehistorical times were organized into hordes. Each horde was ruled by an authoritarian primal father who kept all the women to himself, thus frustrating the libido of his sons, who sexually desired their mothers. This frustration led the brothers to band together and kill the primal father. This act was commonplace among the various hordes.

consequences. At this stage, the sense of guilt is experienced *before* wrongdoing—apart from their actually acting out.[74] Guilt as typically understood follows a misdeed, but here a lively dose precedes the action. Only through renouncing their desires that run contrary to the father's wishes can the sons assuage their guilt.[75] So again, during the first part of stage one the sense of guilt is not the consequence of committing some bad action *x*, or even thinking some bad action *x* is *really* wrong, but rather it emerges from desiring action *x* in tension with weighing the consequences of what they fear the most—losing their father's love. As Freud (Freud, 1961, p. 85) informs his readers, "What is bad is whatever causes one to be threatened with loss of love." Not surprising, the abstaining grows old, and eventually their inhibitions form within them an aggressive determination to eradicate the object of their frustrations and guilt. Something has to give. Inevitably, something does give.

2.1.2. The Sense of Guilt After Wrongdoing

As the father's overly strict expectations continued to encroach on the sons' aggressive instincts, thus confining them to a life of unhappiness through perpetual renunciation in fear of incurring his wrath and losing his love, they knew something had to be done. In unified determination the sons banded together to cast aside their restraining influence once and for all. Instead of denying their desires, this time they aimed their aggressive urges toward their external authority figure and murdered their father. Here is where the Oedipus complex comes into play.[76] This is an event so

[74] Freud (1961, p. 100) writes, "At one point the sense of guilt was the consequence of acts of aggression that had been *abstained* from" (emphasis added). Christianity also teaches that people can be guilty apart from acting out, but considered guilty on desiring to commit a wrong deed (see e.g. Matt 5:27–28).

[75] There was no universal moral code for distinguishing good from bad or right from wrong. As Freud (1961, p. 85) writes, "At the beginning, therefore, what is bad is whatever causes one to be threatened with loss of love. For fear of that loss, one must avoid it."

[76] The term derives its name from the character in Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* who kills his father and then marries his mother. The killing of his father is accidental because he was abandoned at birth and does not know who his parents were. Only after he marries his mother does he learn his parents' identities. Similarly, Freud saw the fathers of ancient times as harsh in their demands. The

pivotal regarding the history of guilt that Freud (1961, p. 93) writes, "We cannot get away from the assumption that man's sense of guilt springs from the Oedipus complex and was acquired at the killing of the father by the brothers banded together."[77]

Freud is not blind to the apparent contradiction this poses during this initial stage of guilt. He knows his readers are left wondering, "So which is it? Does the sense of guilt originate before or after the killing of the father?" In each case he recognizes the source of guilt as an act of aggression be it suppressed or carried out (Freud, 1961, p. 93). As to guilt after wrongdoing, at least the guilt corresponds to a misdeed, whereas formally it was sensed apart from acting out. Freud (1961, p. 94) recognizes the quandary and explains, "When one has a sense of guilt after having committed a misdeed, and because of it, the feeling should more properly be called *remorse*. It relates only to a deed that has been done, and, of course, it presupposes a *conscience*—the readiness to feel guilty—was already in existence before the deed took place." Perhaps it would be helpful to consider it like this: After the killing of the father, the sense of guilt maturates and is accompanied by remorse following the deed. Prior to the killing there was no remorse experienced through suppressing the deed. This is not so after the killing, where guilt is amplified as remorse attaches to it. For Freud, the remorse, as a component of guilt, was rooted in ambivalence.[78] On the one hand, the sons hated their father, and on the other, they loved him. Their hatred was depicted through their aggression in acting out against him, and their love was featured by their remorse. What the sons thought would resolve their guilt, by eradicating the object of their tension in killing their father, now only heightens it.

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sons grew to resent their fathers and desire their mothers. To secure their mothers, they killed their fathers.

[77] For more about the primal crime, see chapter 4 of Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1950).

[78] The killing of the father failed to eradicate the sons' guilt. Rather, the guilt intensified as it was coupled with remorse and, still greater yet, the formation of the unrelenting super-ego. The sense of guilt is seemingly inescapable. Concerning the predicament the sons find themselves experiencing guilt on both sides of the killing (through suppression or acting out), Freud (1961, p. 95) writes, "One is bound to feel guilty in either case, for the sense of guilt is an expression of the conflict due to ambivalence, of the eternal struggle between Eros and the instinct of destruction or death."

2.2. Stage Two: Fear of the Internal Authority

As we have seen, in stage one the sense of guilt expresses itself as fear of losing the father's love. The occasion for this was brought about each time the sons had an instinctual desire to act out. By not succumbing to these instincts the sons had a remedy in place, through renunciation to remove their guilt *before* the action was committed. However, after the killing of the father, far from removing their guilt, the sense of guilt met the sons on the other side of the crime with the addition of remorse. Not only that, but after eliminating the external authority as described in stage one, now in stage two the sense of guilt intensifies with the development of a new authority, an internal authority: the super-ego. As Freud (1961, p. 89) states, "Thus we know of two origins of the sense of guilt: one arising from fear of an authority, and the other, later on, arising from fear of the super-ego." It is to this authority, the super-ego, we now turn our attention.

2.2.1. The Arrival of the Super-Ego

In stage two, after the killing of the father, the primal family and eventually all of humanity realize that if civilization is to survive then something must be done to tame their aggressive instinct toward one another. A mechanism emerges from the human psyche to inoculate the aggressive instinct among the sons and eventually all civilization. But what type of mechanism, Freud (1961, p. 83) queries: "What means does civilization employ in order to inhibit the aggressiveness which opposes it, to make it harmless, to get rid of it, perhaps?" An instinct so aggressive that without this mechanism, humanity's very existence and civilization itself is threatened with extinction.[79] Freud (1961, p. 84) answers,

> His aggressiveness is introjected, internalized; it is, in point of fact, sent back to where it came from—that is, it is directed towards his own ego. There it is taken over by a portion of the ego, which sets itself over against the rest of the ego as super-ego, and which now, in the

[79] As the super-ego advanced from the immediate family to civilization at large, it did so to ensure the survival of humanity. Humans realized they could never build an advanced civilization without some form of compromise on behalf of its people. If everyone acted according to his or her own selfish instincts, the chances of survival would be grim. Therefore, the super-ego, though harsh, serves as a survival mechanism to ensure the advancement of civilization.

> form of "conscience", is ready to put into action against the ego the same harsh aggressiveness that the ego would have liked to satisfy upon other, extraneous individuals. The tension between the harsh super-ego and the ego that is subjected to it, is called by us the sense of guilt; it expresses itself as a need for punishment.

Note the development. In stage one the tension existed between fear of losing the external authority's love and the desire to act out. Now in stage two, the tension is amplified as the sense of guilt exists between the aggressive ego and the even more aggressive super-ego. While the tension experienced in stage one remains (people still fear losing love or being punished by their authorities), the tension in stage two becomes unbearable. True, the super-ego helps constrain humans from acting out, but not without consequence, as will be soon discussed. The super-ego is first experienced by the sons following the killing of their father. Overcome by remorse for their deed, the brothers agree to confine their aggressive instincts lest they destroy again. To do so, they establish a new authority. But here, instead of aiming their aggression outward, as they did with their father, they now direct it inward against themselves. And by erecting the super-ego, the sons give it the power to punish them as the father would have had he known of their intent to kill (Freud, 1961, p. 95).

2.2.2. The Severity of the Super-Ego

This new internal authority, the super-ego, surpasses the father's severity. Unlike the father, who remained ignorant of his sons' suppressed desires, the super-ego is seemingly omniscient in its scope of perceiving people's thoughts, intentions, lusts, and motives. Nothing is hidden. Under the old authority the sons feared losing their father's love, but the fear subsided once they renounced their inclination to act. If only it was so easy with the new authority, which sees what the father missed—the interior, with all of its thoughts, motives, desires, and renunciations. The super-ego misses nothing. It sees *all*. Depicting this severity, Freud (1961, pp. 89–90) writes:

> Originally, renunciation of instinct was the result of fear of an external authority: one renounced one's satisfactions in order not to lose its love. If one has carried out this renunciation, one is, as it were, quits with the authority and no sense of guilt should remain. But with fear of the super-ego the case is different. Here, instinctual renunciation is not enough, for the wish persists and cannot be concealed from the super-ego. Thus, in spite of the renunciation that has been made, a sense of guilt comes about.… In this second situation bad intentions are equated

> with bad actions, and hence comes a sense of guilt and a need for punishment.

Intentions are no longer hidden. The secret life is gone. And adding to the difficulty, the intention to act and the action are deemed equivalent. Both are experienced as a need for punishment, thus consigning humanity to a perpetual state of anxiety. Adding to ego's plight, the super-ego continues to increase in intensity.[80] With each new renunciation the super-ego lengthens the "thou shall not" list and persistently becomes more burdensome. Each new renunciation sharpens the edge of one's conscience, thus further inhibiting the ego. Freud (1961, p. 87) observes a peculiarity under this new authority.

> At this second stage of development, the conscience exhibits a peculiarity which was absent from the first stage and which is no longer easy to account for. For the more virtuous a man is, the more severe and distrustful is its behaviour, so that ultimately it is precisely those people who have carried saintliness furthest who reproach themselves with the worst sinfulness … external frustration—so greatly enhances the power of the conscience in the super-ego.

Putting it all together, the super-ego's role is clear: (1) police actions and intentions, (2) in the event of an aggressive act, or even the *intent* to act, punish severely, (3) torment the sinful ego with a sense of guilt and anxiety,[81] (4) create fear in the ego of the super-ego, (5) issue stricter demands with each new renunciation, and *ultimately* (6) preserve humanity at large and prevent any aggressiveness that seeks to destroy civilization. For civilization to advance, a mechanism was needed to resist the aggressive instinct. Freud (1961, p. 84) writes, "Civilization, therefore, obtains mastery over the individual's dangerous desire for aggression by weakening and disarming it and by setting up an agency within him to watch over it, like a garrison in a conquered city."

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[80] The super-ego's severity is most merciless to those suffering from obsessional neuroses and in particular those inflicted with melancholia. These victims are threatened even more so by the death instinct, which seeks to drive the ego into death in order to be free from misery. For more on this, see Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (1960), pp. 52–56.

[81] Remarking on the connection between anxiety and the sense of guilt, Freud (1961, p. 99) writes, "The sense of guilt is at bottom nothing else but a topographical variety of anxiety."

However, despite the super-ego's cruel role, Freud (1961, p. 86) comments, "The new authority, the super-ego, has no motive that we know of for ill-treating the ego, with which it is intimately bound up; but genetic influence, which leads to the survival of what is past and has been surmounted, makes itself felt in the fact that fundamentally things remain as they were at the beginning. The super-ego torments the sinful ego with the same feeling of anxiety and is on the watch for opportunities of getting it punished by the external world." In other words, the super-ego performs the job it was created to do: keep human aggression in check. But the super-ego works a little too well. Humans have paid a high price to have their aggressive instincts tamed. According to Freud, the super-ego's role in compounding the sense of guilt has not been without consequence.[82]

[82] In his discussion of guilt, Freud used several related terms. By doing so, he is acutely aware of the ease by which his readers can lose sight of how the words are to be distinguished. Freud's summary (1961, pp. 100–101) clarifies this, and I quote at length:

> Though it cannot be of great importance, it may not be superfluous to elucidate the meaning of a few words such as 'super-ego', 'conscience', 'sense of guilt', 'need for punishment' and 'remorse', which we have often, perhaps, used too loosely and interchangeably. They all relate to the same state of affairs, but denote different aspects of it. The super-ego is an agency which has been inferred by us, and conscience is a function which we ascribe, among other functions, to that agency. This function consists in keeping a watch over the actions and intentions of the ego and judging them, in exercising a censorship. The sense of guilt, the harshness of the super-ego, is thus the same thing as the severity of the conscience. It is the perception which the ego has of being watched over in this way, the assessment of the tension between its own striving and the demands of the super-ego. The fear of this agency (a fear which is at the bottom of the whole relationship), the need for punishment, is an instinctual manifestation on the part of the ego, which has become masochistic under the influence of a sadistic super-ego, it is a portion, that is to say, of the instinct toward internal destruction present in the ego, employed for forming an erotic attachment to the super-ego. As to a sense of guilt, we must admit that it is in existence before the super-ego, and therefore before conscience, too. At that time it is the immediate expression of fear of the external authority, a recognition of the tension between the ego and that authority. It is the direct derivative of the conflict between the need for the authority's love and the urge towards instinctual satisfaction, whose inhibition produces the inclination to aggression. The superimposition of these two states of the sense of guilt—one coming from fear of the *external* authority, the other from fear of the *internal* authority—has hampered our insight into the position of conscience in a number of ways. Remorse is a general term for the ego's reaction in a case of sense of guilt. It contains, in little altered form, the sensory material of the anxiety which is operating behind the sense of guilt; it is itself a punishment and can include the need for punishment. Thus remorse, too, can be older than conscience.

3. The Sense of Guilt and Its Consequences to Civilization

In this section, we will explore some of the consequences guilt has brought upon humanity. These include a loss of happiness, a limitation of one's freedom, an increase of guilt, and the emergence of various types of neuroses.

3.1. The sense of guilt has eradicated happiness.

The super-ego's restraining influence may have helped civilization advance, but by plaguing its people with guilt, this advance has been met with little happiness. On this dreadful plight Westerink (2009, p. 258) states, "The tragic conclusion Freud was forced to reach was not only that the sense of guilt was 'the most important problem in the development of civilization,' [(Freud, 1930, p. 134)] but also that this inescapable feeling constituted the most important reason for the impossibility of happiness." It is hard to be happy and simultaneously plagued by guilt. Regretfully, Freud (1961, p. 97) writes, "The price we pay for our advance in civilization is a loss of happiness through the heightening of the sense of guilt." An unhappiness that started externally has now become a fixed internal unhappiness. Freud (1961, p. 89) explains the process as follows: "A threatened external unhappiness—loss of love and punishment on the part of the external authority—has been exchanged for a permanent internal unhappiness, for the tension of the sense of guilt." An obvious misfortune.

3.2. The sense of guilt has limited freedom.

To purchase the advancement of civilization, its people pay with their freedom. Every suppressed desire serves as another reminder of one's lack of freedom. The sense of guilt is a necessary evil because on the one hand it helps ensure the progress of civilization, and on the other it imprisons its citizens. This obvious tension is why Freud attributes a loss of happiness and freedom to the sense of guilt. Like prisoners hoping to escape only to remember the guard is watching with gun in

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Later he adds, "A great change takes place as soon as the authority has been internalized by the development of the super-ego. The manifestations of conscience are then raised to a new level; to be accurate, one should not call them conscience and sense of guilt before this" (Freud, 1961, p. 108).

hand, so too humans long to act out but are then reminded that the internal guard—the super-ego—is always on watch. At least under the old dispensation the ego had a free thought life, but not anymore. Now the super-ego keeps twenty-four-hour surveillance on the actions and thoughts alike. As mentioned above, nothing is hidden. No one is free.

3.3. The sense of guilt has increased.

Unsuspectingly, forfeiting freedom fails to decrease the sense of guilt. Rather the more people limit their freedom, the more their sense of guilt increases as each fresh renunciation serves to sophisticate the conscience, that part of the super-ego that enforces behavior, with the readiness to remind the ego each time the growing list is ignored. One would think these renouncements would foster greater freedom, but according to Freud the opposite is the case. He claims, "In spite of the renunciation made, feelings of guilt will be experienced and this is a great disadvantage economically of the erection of the super-ego" (Freud, 1961, p. 112). Here is how it works: "The effect of instinctual renunciation on the conscience then is that every piece of aggression whose satisfaction the subject gives up is taken over by the super-ego and increases the latter's aggressiveness (against the ego)" (Freud, 1961, p. 91). This is why Freud could claim that it is those who take saintliness the furthest who are most familiar with the sense of guilt. To Freud the sense of guilt may reward civilization with progress, but its people are overburdened (Gay, 2006, p. 551).

3.4. The sense of guilt has led to various types of neuroses.

To better understand this, it is important to distinguish between conscious and unconscious guilt, especially relating to various types of neurosis. Freud distinguished between conscious and unconscious guilt. Conscious guilt, which he calls "remorse," results from wrongdoing. For example, the sons killed their father and were conscious of their guilt and remorse. Then there is unconscious guilt, which is caused by repressed feelings and thoughts of which we are unaware. This was Freud's real interest with guilt. As to conscious guilt, it can lead to obsessional neurosis where "the sense of guilt makes itself noisily heard in consciousness; it dominates the clinical picture and the patient's life as well, and it hardly allows anything else to appear alongside of it" (Freud, 1961, p. 98). Then there are those stricken by neurosis

caused by an unconscious sense of guilt. Here Freud (1961, p. 98) says, "Our patients do not believe us when we attribute an 'unconscious sense of guilt' to them." How then are patients made aware of their condition if they are unconscious of it? Freud (1961, p. 98) says, "In order to make ourselves at all intelligible to them, we tell them of an unconscious need for punishment, in which the sense of guilt finds expression." This form of guilt often plagues those frustrated by the moral life as they are caught between civilization and its expectations and their desires for instinctual satisfaction.

The shift from consciousness to unconsciousness takes place as follows: At one time, an instinctual urge is desired but is repressed. Subsequently, the idea behind the repressed urge remains in the mind until at some point it slips into the unconscious and there continues to inflict its victims in the form of punishment. Consequently, they must connect the dots that their self-punishment is in reality an unconscious sense of guilt. According to Freud, apart from this there is little hope of remedying the neurosis. Therefore, what was once conscious needs to be made conscious again. He believes so strongly in the connection between neuroses and the sense of guilt that Freud (1961, p. 103) writes, "In the course of our analytic work we have discovered to our surprise that perhaps *every* neurosis conceals a quota of unconscious sense of guilt, which in its turn fortifies the symptoms by making use of them as punishment" (emphasis added). The various types of neurosis caused by both the conscious and the unconscious sense of guilt are things such as inner torment, fear, remorse, anxiety, paranoia, depression, self-condemnation, and various compulsions. These various emotional states are responsible for much of the neuroses people encounter today, and the super-ego, with its obsession to inflict its victims with the sense of guilt, is right there to blame.[83]

In light of these consequences, no wonder Freud (1961, p. 97) refers to the problem of guilt as "the most important problem in the development of civilization." Freud has stated the problem, but does he have a solution? In the next section we consider his antidote to guilt.

[83] Katchadourian's (2010, p. 120) comments are helpful: "Most behaviorist psychologists currently do not accept the idea of unconscious guilt. Like much else in psychoanalytic theory, unconscious guilt cannot be verified by empirical or experimental studies. However, more recently, neuroscientists have confirmed the presence of unconscious thoughts and feelings in the brain, but they call them 'subcortical' rather than unconscious."

4. Freud's Solution to the Problem of Guilt

As a therapist who worked with patients debilitated by the consequences discussed above, Freud was not lacking persons whose mental constitution was neurotically impaired by the sense of guilt. To normalize his patients' neuroses, at least to a degree, he confronted the super-ego for its failure to consider the ego's happiness and inability to fulfill its moral demands. Based on these observations, Freud's therapeutic solution was to (1) oppose the super-ego by (2) lowering its demands (Freud, 1961, p. 108).[84] As we have seen, the super-ego's obsession of inflicting humanity with the sense of guilt is never satisfied. Renunciation fails to remedy. Therefore, the super-ego itself must be renounced if there is any hope of overturning the consequences discussed above. To do this, the ego must lower the demands of the super-ego.

While the super-ego appears omniscient in its ability to police behavior, apparently it is ignorant of the ego's capacity to obey its demands. Freud (1961, pp. 108–109) admits, "It issues a command and does not ask whether it is possible for people to obey it. On the contrary, it assumes that a man's ego is psychologically capable of anything that is required of it, that his ego has unlimited mastery over his id. This is a mistake.… If more is demanded of a man, a revolt will be produced in him or a neurosis, or he will be made unhappy." What was conceived as a solution to inhibit the aggressive instinct has now surpassed humanity's capacity to cooperate. As a result, people are unhappy and neurotic and must revolt against the unrealistic demands. Now a solution to the solution is needed.

To begin, the demands of the super-ego must be challenged. After all, it and its use of the sense of guilt is the reason for civilization and its discontents. Freud recommends a starting place to confront the super-ego by pointing his finger at Judaism's injunction to "love thy neighbor as thyself." He considers this command an

[84] Freud saw a way to reduce one's sense of guilt by teaching his patients to confront their super-ego's unrealistic demands. By doing this, he hoped to reduce the tension between the ego and its super-ego. But it is no surprise to learn the solution was often far more complicating, in particular for those neurotically tangled up by unconscious guilt. For Freud, these patients had to come to terms with the fact that a large part of their neurosis was due to unconscious guilt caused by repression. To quell the neurotic condition meant getting beneath the surface of one's conscious-level experiences in the hope of recovering past regressions that hid behind one's conscious awareness.

example of futility because it is impossible to fulfill (Freud, 1961, p. 109). The super-ego, or perhaps better here referred to as the cultural super-ego, has shown its ignorance in calling its adherents to participate in what he deems impossible. True, Freud concedes the command *would* work to settle humanity's aggressiveness toward each other if it *could* work. But he rejects the sentiment. Only by limiting unrealistic moral demands can people experience less guilt and in turn feel more happiness.[85]

In the end, he hopes more therapeutic solutions will emerge to help sick humanity, but in the meantime, he offers no final thoughts on the future destiny of civilization.

5. An Assessment of Freud's View of Moral Guilt

5.1. Freud reduces guilt to a need for punishment but fails to appreciate that guilt also says the punishment is deserved.[86]

This distinction is important. Feeling the need to be punished because an authority thinks some action *x* is wrong is different from saying, "I was wrong." During both stages of development, the sense of guilt expresses itself as a need for punishment. The difference is that during the first stage the external authority could not see what the internal authority would later see: the intentions. In either case, this does not mean the person who feels guilty believes he or she *is* guilty.

At first glance the following quote by Freud may incline his readers to think the guilty person believes he or she *is* guilty after all, but such initial inclinations are bound to fall by the wayside as his thoughts unfold. Freud (1961, pp. 84–86) writes:

[85] Martin (2006, p. 41) explains further: "Therapy can help individuals, but the ultimate solution is to lower society's unrealistic moral demands, to soften the 'cultural ego.' In particular, the Christian ideal of loving one's neighbor as oneself is an unrealistic ideal because it imposes impossible demands and dissipates our limited capacities for love."

[86] Although according to Freud, the super-ego inflicts the ego with exaggerated guilt, what the ego may rightly perceive as false guilt, it would still stand, I would argue, that the ego is right to feel guilty for some things such as stealing, taking a life, etc. In such cases, the guilty party should not only fear punishment but believe that punishment is deserved for stealing or taking a life.

> If we ask how a person comes to have a sense of guilt, we arrive at an answer that cannot be disputed: a person feels guilty (devout people would say "sinful") when he has done something which he knows to be *"bad"*. But then we notice how little this answer tells us. Perhaps, after some hesitation, we shall add that even when a person has not actually *done* the bad thing but has only recognized in himself an *intention* to do it, he may regard himself as guilty; and the question then arises of why the intention is regarded as equal to the deed. Both cases, however, presuppose that one had already recognized that what is bad is reprehensible, is something that must not be carried out. How is this judgment arrived at? We may reject the existence of an original, as it were natural, capacity to distinguish good from bad. What is bad is often not at all what is injurious or dangerous to the ego; on the contrary, it may be something which is desirable and enjoyable to the ego. Here, therefore, there is an extraneous influence at work, and it is this that decides what is to be called good or bad. Since a person's own feelings would not have led him along this path, he must have had a motive for submitting to this extraneous influence. Such a motive is easily discovered in his helplessness and his dependence on other people, and it can best be designated as fear of loss of love. If he loses the love of another person upon whom he is dependent, he also ceases to be protected from a variety of dangers. Above all, he is exposed to the danger that this stronger person will show his superiority in the form of punishment. At the beginning, therefore, what is bad is whatever causes one to be threatened with the loss of love. For fear of that loss, one must avoid it. This, too, is the reason why it makes little difference whether one has already done the bad thing or only intends to do it. In either case the danger only sets in if and when the authority discovers it.… Consequently, such people habitually allow themselves to do any bad thing which promises them enjoyment, so long as they are sure that the authority will not know anything about it or cannot blame them for it; they are afraid only of being found out.

The transition to stage two hardly helps the matter as the super-ego knows all. Being armed with such knowledge may heighten the sense of guilt in fear of punishment, but fearing the punishment and feeling the punishment is deserved still remains out of the picture for Freud. In *The Evolution of Morality*, Richard Joyce (2006, p. 103) writes,

> Freud (1929, p. 123) claimed that guilt "expresses itself as a need for punishment"—an astute comment from someone who said a lot of harebrained things about the development of guilt. Note how different this is from the *fear of* punishment. One can fear punishment without feeling guilty, and one can feel guilty without fearing punishment. A person may know that she has broken some rules, and fear that punishment is looming, but unless she in some sense endorses those rules (even if she doesn't all-things considered endorse the rules) she won't feel guilty. Guilt requires that she judge not that she might be

> punished but that she deserves to be. This, I think, is an improvement on Freud's view of guilt as involving *the need* for punishment, for one might feel the need for punishment without judging it to be deserved, and one might judge it to be deserved without feeling the need for it.

A welcomed improvement indeed. The sons grew frustrated toward their primal father and today the ego grows progressively frustrated by its super-ego. Both the external and the internal authorities have established non-endorsed rules. Freud's moral relativism is subject to the authority. It is a non-objective morality. And while it cultivates a fear of consequences, it fails to compel its participants of any *real* right or wrongdoing. So here during stage one the sense of guilt presents itself more like paranoia, with its "fear of being found out" than the better response, "What I did was wrong." And now, with the arrival of the super-ego, this paranoia factor is all the more burdensome because of the feeling of always being watched. According to Freud, we have not done anything wrong; we are only afraid of being found out.

Are there no other motivations for the moral life besides the fear of getting caught? Is it really as easy as diminishing the super-ego's harsh rule and at once the anxiety vanishes and the moral-free lifestyle can begin? Freud seems to think so. He writes, "Consequently such people habitually permit themselves to do *any* bad deed that procures them something they want, if only they are sure that no authority will discover it or make them suffer for it; their anxiety relates only to the possibility of detection" (Freud, 1961, pp. 107–108, emphasis added). This is surely the case for *some* people, but is it the case for *all* people, or even the majority of people?[87] Is there nothing moral about morality in and of itself that makes it worth abstaining from wrongdoing? Is there no virtue without the all-seeing eye of the super-ego? While most of us would be a little less tamed than we are at present, especially when in distress, if we could ensure a free escapade now minus the consequences, but this is a

[87] Thinking further, one might wonder, would all married couples really cheat on each other if only they could guarantee their affairs would go undetected? Would every drunk who promises to never drink again always choose to become drunk in the event that his instinctual desires flared if he could appear to have kept his promise? Would every covetous heart steal if the object of his or her desire could be obtained without consequence? I would think plenty of spouses desire to be faithful and find joy in keeping their vows, and many drunkards enjoy sobriety, and many with covetous hearts value the people whose belongings they covet more than they value the acquisition of their covetous desires.

far cry from Freud's egoistic vision where everyone is solely motivated out of fear of being found out. Virtue is rewarding for those who love virtue, and it even provides happiness for the lover of virtue. Morality is not "preach[ed] in vain" (Freud, 1961, p. 109) because it is accompanied by reward in the here and now.

5.2. Admitting guilt is not always accompanied by a fear of losing love.

This may be the case in certain relationships, but it is not true of all relationships. For example, consider Christianity, which Freud rejects. It is not a loss of love that a Christian encounters upon admitting his or her guilt, but rather it occasions the opportunity to encounter God's love in a deeper way as the person realizes he is loved even though God's moral commands were not kept.

5.3. The lack of historical evidence fails to support Freud's theory.

Freud has often been accused of distorting evidence to fit his theory, and his fabricated setting used to construct his theory lacks historical support. For example, in *Moses and Civilization: The Meaning behind Freud's Myth*, Robert A. Paul (1996, p. 10) writes:

> What renders Freud's theory indefensible is its grounding in the attempt to reconstruct actual historical events. Not only have these events not been discovered by independent research but even if they had been, they would still leave us with two insoluble problems in Freud's formulation. The first is that we would be forced to make an invalid analogy between the development cycle of an individual and the history of civilization. Second, we would have to believe that later generations, even down to the present day, are powerfully motivated by repressed memory, not of something that happened to them in their own early childhoods but of something that happened eons ago, something that has led a continued, undiminished but latent existence in the collective psyche by some mechanism that we can hardly imagine within the confines of our contemporary views of mental and cultural life.

Following this thought, Jonathan Lear (2015, p. 207) adds, "In effect, Freud constructs his own myth of origins. He hides this from himself by cloaking his myth in the garb of a naturalistic account of human development." Furthermore, history provides no evidence to ground Freud's theory of the killing of the primal father. Lear (2015, p. 206) writes, "Freud is making a bold assertion, but there is really no basis for it."

If this is true, then Freud's theory of guilt crumbles.[88] And at last, the most valid point one can make is the sense of guilt, which he claims springs from the Oedipus complex, has sprung out from a historical vacuum. Katchadourian (2010, p. 150) states, "Psychologists in particular are skeptical that the Oedipal conflict represents a universal stage in human development or is the basis of the development of human moral agency. They cannot empirically confirm these claims, and thus they remain neither proven nor disproven." In the end, the lack of evidence leaves the legacy of Freud's theory of guilt unsupported.

6. Conclusion

To recap, in this chapter I sought to explain Freud's naturalistic understanding of the sense of guilt. To do so, I showed how he argues that the sense of guilt developed in two stages: first, by a fear of losing the love of the external authority, and second, by erecting the super-ego to punish the aggressor with a sense of guilt. After viewing his development of guilt, I explored four consequences by which Freud believed the sense of guilt has negatively affected civilization by leading to a loss of happiness, freedom, increased guilt, and neurosis. I then discussed Freud's solution to the problem of guilt: resist the super-ego and reduce the moral demand. And finally, following a summary of Freud's explanation, I offered three observations: first, if one is guilty then the punishment is deserved; second, admitting guilt does not equate to losing love; and third, the lack of historical evidence fails to support Freud's theory of guilt. In the next chapter, I will invite Darwin and Nietzsche back into the picture along with Freud in order to draw out some helpful comparisons regarding their naturalistic explanations of guilt.

[88] Even Freud's psychoanalysis regarding the super-ego is widely rejected, as Katchadourian (2010, p. 150) notes, "The concept of the superego has no purchase on the thinking of behavioral scientists and clinicians outside the Freudian fold."

Chapter 4

COMPARING EXPLANATIONS

1. Introduction

Having spent three chapters seeking to understand the naturalistic explanations of moral guilt from Darwin, Nietzsche, and Freud, we now turn our attention to compare their work before transitioning to theistic explanations of moral guilt in chapter 5. Obviously, each of the aforementioned authors have in common a rejection of God's existence, supernatural revelation, heaven and hell. They also hold to an evolutionary explanation for the universe we find ourselves in. Though they share various points of interest, they do differ in their evolutionary stories regarding the origins of guilt. And yes, while all three are obvious naturalists and both Nietzsche and Freud were influenced by Darwin's theory of natural selection, I will limit my comparisons to juxtapose the work of Darwin to Nietzsche and then consider Nietzsche and Freud together as each of their theories lend themselves to be compared. Nietzsche especially for how he takes the theory of Darwinian evolutionary and its moral implications to their logical conclusion, unlike Darwin who sought to accommodate the utilitarian ethics of his day with his theory of natural selection. After this, I will offer a comparison of Nietzsche to Freud as especially fitting in that Nietzsche's influence on Freud is easily discernable and worthy of mention. By the end of this chapter readers will better see how their works influenced each other and have a better grasp of where these writers are both aligned and where they part ways as well as their ultimate inadequacy to provide an objective grounding for our guilt. To these considerations we now turn.

2. Darwin vs Nietzsche

Scholars of history and philosophy typically argue that Nietzsche never read Darwin's work, and yet their general consensus nevertheless is that Nietzsche was

familiar with Darwin's teachings.[89] Our discussion to this point has confirmed that both were naturalists, but each of a different order. While sharing many things in common, there is a clear departure in mindset between them as it pertains to their fundamental explanation of moral guilt. To explore these differences, I will first make a general point relating to the difference in Darwin's and Nietzsche's stance or sentiment toward morality. I will then make three additional points concerning the differences between them regarding their explanation of moral guilt.

First, unlike Darwin, as discussed in chapter 1, Nietzsche was troubled by the thinkers of his day who sought to naturalize or even supernaturalize morality. In an article elucidating Nietzsche's contempt for Darwinists of his time who were trying to reconcile the struggle to survive with ethics, and in particular Christian ethics, philosopher Catherine Wilson (2013, p. 366) writes:

> Nietzsche was engaged in a three-cornered argument. In one corner stood the traditional Christians with their commitment to repression of sensuality as evil and sin, and their supernaturalism. In another corner were the agnostic or atheistic philosophers who wanted to assert, preserve, and even extend Christian values in the face of science, including Kant, Schopenhauer, Darwin, Strauss, and Spencer. In the third corner, there was Nietzsche himself, aesthetically repelled by the masses and their unhealthy propensities, distressed by the suffering of superior individuals, and hostile to traces of asceticism and Orientalism in his contemporaries.

For Nietzsche, the way forward will not be accomplished by holding fast to the moral traditions of the day, but in letting go of them. Nietzsche is far more interested in transcending morality as a goal than he is in developing a theory of morality. For Nietzsche, the self-directed individual is guided by his own determination, not some morality of the masses as Darwin taught or by some fixed moral system. He embraced a customized approach in lieu of a one-size-fits-all

[89] Philosopher Catherine Wilson's (2013, p. 355) assessment is typical: "Nietzsche, all agree, is unlikely to have read either Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) or his *Descent of Man* (1871). However, he had a basic if not entirely accurate grasp of Darwinism derived from popularizers and synthesizers, and his direct engagement with the evolutionary theory of Spencer, in the latter's three-volume *System of Synthetic Philosophy* (1862–67), is evident." Wilson refers to Herbert Spencer's first three volumes of a ten-volume series, i.e. Spencer's *First Principles* (1862) and Spencer's two-volume *Principles of Biology* (1864–1867).

utilitarian or deontological style of ethics. His was a morality of the fittest. As long as humans sought to retain altruistic moral systems of bygone eras, they would continue to remain in a moral straitjacket. For that reason, he was ready to do more than explain how the straitjacket was put in place, but even more so, he was ready to strip it off and reconstruct and new way forward.

Second, whereas Darwin believed the development of reflective reasoning made guilt possible, Nietzsche believed a rebellion of one's instincts was the primal cause. No one would argue that Nietzsche was a strong proponent of reason, but his moral explanation of guilt discovers its historical root in instinct, not reason. Reason would later inform the instinctive natures of humankind and extra burden the moral code with further reasons to act in such and such a way. This coupling of both instinct and reason would in time strengthen the moral punch, eventually leading the guilty to despair without remedy. Therefore, for explanations of origin, both Darwin and Nietzsche turn to a different source to get the process started. For Darwin, reason holds the key to the explanation and for Nietzsche instinct does.

Third, Darwin argued that human desire for admiration caused people to feel guilty when they failed to live up to certain expectations or failed to exhibit altruistic behavior, whereas Nietzsche believed that living for others' expectations is part of the problem, and the way forward is not through altruistic behavior that is chained by human expectation, but rather through egoistic behavior, humanity can shed moral guilt once and for all and find its way toward individuals becoming autonomous persons.

This difference in moral aspiration makes sense considering that Darwin was a cultural relativist, whereas Nietzsche was an autonomous relativist. Darwin was altruistic, but Nietzsche was egotistic. Darwin believed that humanity felt guilt at the expense of failing moral expectations. While Nietzsche would agree with this sentiment, he also believed that a large part of the solution to moral guilt was to become indifferent to the expectations of others and to live for the expectation of one's self. These differences are not minor. It only takes a little imagination to envision how drastically different a Nietzschean culture would be from a Darwinian one. In a Nietzschean culture, autonomous individuals may find themselves stripped of guilt, but I am not sure the culture would be better off for an entire race whose motto is, "to each his own." Nevertheless, while Darwin's moral theory may make for a better culture, his moral explanation is hard to square with his biological theory.

Given that, Nietzsche's naturalistic explanation of moral guilt seems truer to evolutionary theory than does its founder, Darwin.

3. Freud vs Nietzsche

Both Freud and Nietzsche are towering figures of their time and literature giants. Freud, the insightful psychoanalyst, and Nietzsche, the astute philosopher, were no strangers to both criticism and acclaim for their work. Read together, Freud is refreshingly lucid compared to the seemingly cryptic writings of Nietzsche. Notwithstanding, both made significant contributions to their respective fields of literature, especially regarding the topic of guilt. While Darwin's writings anticipated Nietzsche and Freud, Nietzsche's writing on guilt helped pave the way for Freud to furnish his ideas. Taken as a whole, the similarities and the differences each have concerning the topic of guilt are easy to identify. Here are some of them, beginning with the similarities.

First, both Nietzsche and Freud, unlike Darwin, constructed theories of guilt that were more consistent with the implications of naturalism. Nietzsche and Freud were ethical egoists whereas Darwin, as discussed above, adopted a utilitarian ethic to mesh with his theory of natural selection. Their ethical approach to life is more consistent with naturalism's worldview in that they construct a theory that aligns with human nature's inclination toward selfishness and survival. Whereas Darwin adheres to a more positive understanding of guilt, Nietzsche and Freud struggle to see past its consequences, thereby seeking to minimize it or even eradicate it in full.

Second, both Nietzsche and Freud consider guilt as the culprit of reducing human happiness. Obviously, guilt is not a blissful state. However, when a person feels guilty for wrongdoing, the admission of guilt can bear the fruit of happiness. Such an admission is often accompanied by relief, which also serves as a reminder to avoid the action that caused the guilt in the first place. Having said that, one's moral motivation should not be to simply avoid feelings of guilt but rather to live in light of standards and choices that are universally recognized as adding value to one's life. Rather than simply envisioning morality as shunning wrongdoing in order to pursue the egoistic drive, it should be seen as contributing to a richer life experience. Eradicating human guilt simply to pursue egoistic desires is not a vision for human happiness but a recipe for anarchy. A more modest ethical approach to life would be

to recognize that curbing one's moral appetites is not necessarily a bad thing and holds out promise not only for human flourishing, but also for human happiness. Lear (2015, p. 192), honing in on Freud's shortsightedness adds, "Freud was not a philosopher. He seems ignorant of the Ancient Greek approaches to ethics, in which the virtues—or excellences of character—are seen as contributing to a happy life." The *eudamonia* of these ancient Greek philosophers was one in which the prize of virtue was happiness. Something both Nietzsche and Freud seemed to miss in their quest for the autonomous man. Nevertheless, it has not been missed by less fatalistic atheists who have welcomed a little immoral restraint and in return would readily contend they have found some extra happiness along the way.

Third, both Nietzsche and Freud failed to provide a universal explanation to ground morality. Freud and Nietzsche believed humanity limited itself by succumbing to moral demands. In their egoistic view, morality is relativistic and the field of ethics is merely the result of weaker systems of thought that have only served to oppress humankind. Instead of minimizing morality and guilt, their arguments would have better served humanity by tracing the moral threads that transcend both their individual and cultural relativism to bond the world together. Instead of shunning the precept, "love your neighbor as yourself," perhaps greater consideration of the nobility of this ideal, versus shunning it at the thought of our inability to obtain it, warranted more attention. Instead their ethic looks a lot like, "love yourself as yourself," which seemingly missed the consequences to such a moral mindset.

Finally, taken all together, Freud and Nietzsche failed to see the positive role of guilt for the individual. Admittedly, both Nietzsche and Freud rightly captured some of the negative consequences of guilt, but in doing so they failed to appreciate the positive role of guilt for the individual beyond its contribution of preserving civilization. Mike W. Martin (2006, p. 39) reinforces this point, writing, "Both thinkers attack traditional morality as unhealthy and sick—as psychologically unrealistic in its demands to care about others, neglectful of human needs for self-affirmation, and the source of needless depression and anxiety. Both identify guilt as the culprit: society generates 'the deep sickness' of guilt (bad conscience) and lessens happiness 'through the heightening of the sense of guilt.'" Consequently, Martin (2006, p. 48) adds, "Freud and Nietzsche caution about the excesses of guilt and blame conventional morality, yet they underestimate the positive role of guilt." By underestimating the positive role of guilt by overly focusing on the negative role of

guilt, they missed the opportunity to glean valuable lessons humanity has to learn by observing our guilt as a potential moral teacher of objective right and wrong. This is one aspect of guilt I will consider in my final chapter. Now let us consider some differences between Freud and Nietzsche.

First, Freud sought to show how humanity's aggression turned inward. Like Nietzsche, Freud believed the aggressive instinct reversed itself. But unlike Nietzsche, Freud's theory explained how this process transpired. Lear (2015, p. 193) writes, "What makes Freud's case distinctive is his account of *how* human aggression is deployed in the service of curbing aggression.… In *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche argues that guilt and bad conscience result from human aggression turned in on the self. But he gives no account of how this transformation occurs. Freud, by contrast, tries to work a dynamic psychological account of how this reversal of aggression comes about." He does this by introducing his readers to the formation of the super-ego as the mechanism that keeps humanity in moral check. While Freud's tri-personal understanding of the ego, the id, and the super-ego are largely dismissed by modern-day scholarship, his attempt at the time of writing to supply a mechanism like the super-ego to account for this inversion makes his account bolder on this point.

Second, Freud's thoughts concerning the future were less optimistic than Nietzsche's utopian vision. Unlike Nietzsche, who sounded the prophetic bell with his Übermensch vision, Freud fails to play the prophet, unsure whether civilization will rid itself of its discontents. His cautionary note regarding civilization's fate (Freud, 1961, pp. 110–111) was expressed as follows:

> The fateful question for the human species seems to me to be whether and to what extent their cultural development will succeed in mastering the disturbance of their communal life by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction. It may be that in this respect precisely the present time deserves a special interest. Men have gained control over the forces of nature to such an extent that with their help they would have no difficulty in exterminating one another to the last man. They know this, and hence comes a large part of their current unrest, their unhappiness and their mood of anxiety. And now it is to be expected that the other of the two "Heavenly Powers" (p. 96f.), eternal Eros, will make an effort to assert himself in the struggle with his equally immortal adversary. But who can foresee with what success and with what result?

Elaborating on Freud's cautious stance toward the future, Richard Wollheim (1991, pp. 234–235), adds:

> Freud was a rationalist, but not an optimist. He thought that ultimately reason will prevail, but he saw no reason to form an estimate when the ultimate would come about, or what might happen first. And he thought it inconsistent with the scientific outlook to convert the generalized assurance that one day humanity would listen to reason into a faith in the foreseeable future. There were justifiable grounds for action, and for the pursuit of knowledge, but not for hope.… No greater disservice can be done to Freud than by those, who in the interest of this or that piety, recruit him to the kind of bland mindless optimism that he so utterly and so heroically despised.

Further confirming this train of thought, Gay (2006, p. 553) remarks on Freud's cautionary posture regarding the future as one living during ominous financial and political times as Hitler's Nazi party was on the rise. Commenting on a few of Freud's thoughts, he writes, "Freud did not fully anticipate what was to come, but he had few illusions. 'We are moving toward bad times,' Freud told Arnold Zweig late that year [1931]; 'I ought to ignore it with the apathy of old age, but I can't help feeling sorry for my seven grandchildren.'" Here we can see the force of circumstances on our outlook. Freud's context was less than ideal for promoting an optimistic outlook of the future. Dark times taint enlightened minds of which Freud was no exception. While more could be mustered up to compare among these three historical figures, there is enough here to see where their moral stories part ways.

4. Conclusion

The purpose of this brief chapter was to provide a simple sketch of the first three chapters by comparing the similarities and dissimilarities of Darwin, Nietzsche, and Freud's naturalistic explanation of moral guilt. To do this, I limited my comparisons to Darwin and Nietzsche and then to Nietzsche and Freud, as I claimed that the moral theories of the latter two were more similar to each other than to that of Darwin's. To begin, I compared Darwin and Nietzsche by offering four points of difference, before comparing Nietzsche to Freud by issuing four points of similarity and two points of difference.

Having concluded this assessment, I found studying these three historical figures enlightening, in that their work when looked at together allowed me to get a better sense of the moral options on offer given a non-theistic universe. I saw how easy it is to be blinded by our cultural mores in how Darwin failed to recognize how he was imposing the moral ilk of his day on his evolutionary theory. I saw how each

figure sought to offer an origin story of our moral experience, or at least a loose picture of how humanity began to encounter guilt. I saw how great naturalistic minds differ in their viewpoints of guilt, from casting our guilt in a positive light as in the case of Darwin who saw guilt as sort of a moral teacher for better actions next time, to viewing our guilt more grimly and denying the moral actions that led to our guilt. While I can agree that guilt has been exaggerated and has often been misplaced, I struggle to see naturalism as offering the better explanation to account for our guilt, given its failure to objectively ground morality. This issue will become clearer in the pages that follow as this objection is at the crux of my reservation to sign on to explanations of moral guilt based on naturalism.

Having said this, we are now ready to turn to our next part in our continual quest for the best explanation for the problem of guilt. In part II, I will include three more chapters, but in these chapters, I change the scene from naturalism to begin a journey of considering what theism has to offer by means of explaining morality and in particular moral guilt before continuing the quest further in search of a theistic solution to moral guilt. In the following chapters, we will see whether or not theism is able to offer a more robust explanation for moral guilt by furnishing us with an ontological grounding that satisfactorily explains the universal problem of guilt. As I will argue, theism better explains not only the fact of guilt, but also the feelings of guilt that accompany the actions that render us guilty. That is because, unlike naturalism, theism is not methodologically reductive by limiting itself to naturalistic explanations. But rather, it is willing to consider all the data, including the metaphysical information at our disposal. As American philosopher C. Stephen Evans (2013, p. 24) exclaims, “We need to recover the vision of the moral law as a gift intended for human flourishing.” In the following chapters, I will attempt to recover this vision by demonstrating how the moral law can help us better understand our guilt. By recognizing the transgressions that caused our guilt, we can learn how to do more than survive; rather, we can learn how to have a flourishing life that is pleasing to God by recognizing and living according to his good moral law. We will also see how both the moral law and our guilt can help us better understand the characteristics of a God who can account for the universal problem of guilt. I will do this by exploring the nature of a God who is a personal, all-knowing, moral lawgiver who is good and fit to hold us accountable. I will revisit these final few thoughts in the

conclusion to see how well these observations are realized in the context of Christian theism.

Part II

TOWARD THEISTIC EXPLANATIONS OF MORAL GUILT

In this next part, I begin a new section where I address various theistic explanations of moral argumentation for God's existence. I then turn our attention to develop my argument from moral guilt before concluding in a final chapter with a consideration of Christian theism and its solution to moral guilt. However, having explored the various explanations of moral guilt on naturalism as depicted by Darwin, Nietzsche, and Freud, I now want to take a few moments to zoom out of the moral picture that has been developed thus far in order to consider some of the ways in which naturalists have attempted to account for the rise of morality in general.

Although brief, my hope in this introductory sampling is to supply in a broader sense some examples of how naturalists address the phenomenon of our shared moral experience. To do this, I will discuss some of the views of atheists who subscribe to moral realism and moral anti-realism. The purpose of this overview is not to discuss the many fine nuances of each proponent's moral particularities, but rather to highlight the moral sentiments that some other naturalists hold to.

Some naturalists readily admit that in a non-theistic universe there is no room for objective morality; they could be classified as moral anti-realists. For such thinkers, without a theistic framework there exists no ontological foundation to fasten one's morality to. With his death of God sentiment, Nietzsche (1968, p. 55) boldly asserted, "There are no moral facts." Jean-Paul Sartre (1957, p. 22) made a similar statement, although not without acknowledging the tension such a pronouncement creates: "It [is] very distressing that God does not exist, because all possibility of finding values in a heaven of ideas disappears along with him." It does not take much of an imagination to see how Dostoevsky could put into the mouth of his fictional character, Ivan Karamazov, "If God does not exist, everything is permissible." One can only wonder what kind of world, if taken seriously, this mindset would create for the whole of humanity. Fortunately, not all atheists are ready to dismiss objective

morality and hitch themselves to Ivan's moral nihilism. Many are less gloomy, favoring objective moral facts, as moral realists, and recognizing that everything is not permissible in the absence of God.

1. Moral Realism

Atheistic moral realist Michael Martin (2002, p. 12), for example, denies that atheism ultimately leads to moral nihilism when he argued, "Ordinary language and common sense assume that morality is objective." For Martin, objective morality is like a fixed feature, containing within it an epistemological obviousness. On his account, some things are just intuitively right and wrong, and calling on the God hypothesis is unnecessary to satisfy one's moral sensibilities.[90] Critics would be quick to point out the difference between affirming something and confirming it, in that affirming objective morality does nothing to confirm objective morality, a problem the theist does not worry himself with in acknowledging God as the ultimate ground of moral objectivity.

Beating the same objective drum, atheist Walter Sinnott-Armstrong (2009, p. 157) closes his pithy book *Morality without God?* by claiming, "Morality has nothing essential to do with religion or with God, so atheists need not be immoral in any way. If we can get everyone to recognize this, we will all be better off."[91] Unfortunately for Sinnott-Armstrong, as with Martin, the task is not so easy. Acknowledging the reality of morality and accounting for its existence are two separate matters.

Daniel C. Dennett (2006, p. 297), also an atheistic moral realist, certainly does not think God is necessary to underwrite morality, stating, "I have uncovered no evidence to support the claim that people, religious or not, who *don't* believe in reward in heaven and/or punishment in hell are more likely to kill, rape, rob, or break their promises than people who do." I would concur. One is not hard-pressed to find

[90] See Paul Copan (1999, pp. 45–72). In this article, "Can Michael Martin Be a Moral Realist?," Copan agrees that a non-theist can epistemologically know what right and wrong is, but without God, the defender of moral realism lacks an ontological foundation.

[91] While conceding to atheism and agnosticism, as in the case when people say they cannot know for sure about the existence of God, Sinnott-Armstrong (2009, p. xvii) also identifies himself as a "relative apatheist," i.e. one who is "usually apathetic about whether or not God exists."

morally interested non-theists, but more thoughtful theists would not deny that there are moral non-theists. The claim theists make is not that one must *believe* in God for objective morality to exist, but rather that God must exist to ground objective morality, or at minimum, some Platonic grounding is needed to establish it. Any theist who has done his homework can readily come to the aid of those naturalists who claim, "Not all atheists are immoral." True. And similarly, not all theists are moral. The question, then, is one of grounding. How on naturalism does one establish an ontological root from which morality can bud? That is the question we must address. To argue for morality without supplying an adequate moral foundation is to confuse moral epistemology (i.e. knowledge of morality) with moral ontology (i.e. how we ground morality). For that matter, even Paul the apostle concedes that unbelievers have moral capacity, writing, "For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them" (Rom 2:14–15 ESV). For Paul, morality is built into the moral fabric of our internal conscience. The real issue is whether naturalism can service an ontological foundation to account for objective morality.

By drawing on the resources of moral Platonism, moral realist Erik J. Wielenberg thinks you can. While his explanation improves upon the views above, by attempting to Platonically ground morality, his explanation, as will be discussed in chapter 6, still falls short in comparison to theism and its explanations. For an atheist philosopher such as Wielenberg (2005, p. 52), morality is simply "part of the furniture of the universe." While this may tackle the grounding question, hence improving upon the claims, it still leaves one wondering why, in his account, one is morally obligated to conform to such free-floating, personal-*less* abstract objects. This will be addressed further in chapter 6.

In a world bereft of God, many naturalists find themselves less optimistic regarding the objective nature of morality. Let us now consider some of their explanations.

2. Moral Anti-Realism

Those less optimistic are the moral anti-realists. For them, opinions vary on what to do with the moral issue. But what moral anti-realists do share in common is that morality cannot be grounded in some entity external to us be it God or in some form of Platonism.

For the moral anti-realist there is no "universal obviousness" to morality. Consider the early twentieth-century sociologist William Graham Sumner (1906, p. 28), who stressed this sentiment in his *Folkways*: "The notion of right is in the folkways. It is not outside of them, of independent origin, and brought to test them. In the folkways, whatever is, is right." Morals are therefore shaped by one's milieu—set by culture. This viewpoint is ubiquitous on both European and North American continents, where the tentacles of relativistic thought have reached the moral mindset of the masses causing many to dismiss moral facts as a matter of taste, feelings, or preferences.

Or consider the moral nihilistic thought of Neo-Darwinists Michael Ruse and E. O. Wilson (1985, pp. 51–52), who claim:

> Morality, or more strictly our belief in morality, is merely an adaptation put in place to further our reproductive ends. Hence the basis of ethics does not lie in God's will—or in the metaphysical roots of evolution or any other part of the framework of the Universe. In an important sense, ethics as we understand it is an illusion fobbed off on us by our genes to get us to cooperate. It is without external grounding. Ethics is produced by evolution but is not justified by it because, like Macbeth's dagger, it serves a powerful purpose without existing in substance….
>
> …Unlike Macbeth's dagger, ethics is a shared illusion of the human race.[92]

For Ruse and Wilson, morality is nothing more than a useful fiction, but useful indeed, insofar as one's actions lead to reproductive success, his or her moral actions are considered beneficial. Nevertheless, morals are a fictitious tool—an illusionary instrument for survival. And how one applies his or her moral promptings is relative

[92] Ruse and Wilson's reference to a dagger alludes to a scene in act 2 of Shakespeare's ([1623] 1974) tragedy *Macbeth*. When Macbeth is about to kill King Duncan, he has a hallucination of a bloody dagger floating in the air. Of course, no one else is privy to this individual and personal phenomenon.

to both the individual and the culture alike. To the folkways. In the end, the one in pursuit of the moral life is simply following an illusion—something that does not exist in reality.

Another moral anti-realist is the prominent late twentieth-century Australian philosopher J. L. Mackie. He recognized the awkward place of moral properties in our universe, but was never persuaded of theism.[93] He understood, given a naturalistic framework, the difficulty in knowing what to do with the queerness of morality. But in the end for Mackie, and other moral anti-realists, there is too much moral diversity for universal objective morality to exist.

Why is it so important to eliminate the awkwardness of our moral experience? If it could be truly shown that morality is stranger than fiction, an awkward oddity but nothing objectively real, simply a relativistic part of our human experience, then the moral arguments that will be discussed in the next chapter, and the moral argument from guilt that I will develop in chapter 6 would be rendered impotent. For this reason, one can understand why the moral argument for God's existence continues to be championed by theists.

Proponents of the moral argument are right to flag those who dismiss objective morality on account of the various expressions seen in the moral world. While one can concede that variegated moral particularities among diverse cultures exist, the claim of those who believe in objective morality is not that *all* of our moral sentiments are alike, but rather *some* of them can be universally recognized. Given the many cultural differences in the world, it is not surprising to find a host of moral nuances. What is surprising, given the stance of moral anti-realism, is to discover a universal thread of values that links us together as a moral species. While applied ethics might confuse us on our quest, the normative spear has still pierced the collective conscience.

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[93] Baggett and Walls (2011, p. 17) elucidate Mackie's position, stating, "Mackie had in mind a divinely ordered naturalistic explanation rather than transcendent Platonic moral truths. His idea was that moral facts, as traditionally conceived, particularly those pertaining to obligation, exhibit features so strange that their appearance in a naturalistic world seems nothing less than miraculous. And unfortunately, miracles do not sit well in a naturalistic world! For this reason, as an atheist, Mackie himself found the notion of their existence altogether dubious."

In the chapters that follow, some of the theories discussed in this section will re-emerge to be further grappled with in relevant sections. But now I will turn to consider some of the ways in which theists have sought to explicate our moral experiences through the utilization of various features of morality grounded in theism.

Chapter 5

Features of the Moral Argument

1. Introduction

This chapter marks the beginning of part II of my thesis. In part I, I assessed three naturalistic explanations of moral guilt as understood by Darwin, Nietzsche, and Freud (chapters 1–3). In chapter 4, I tied the first three chapters together by comparing the work of these three writers. I proceeded by first showing four points of difference between Darwin and Nietzsche, and then four points of similarity and two points of difference between Nietzsche and Freud. I then concluded by sharing that my biggest reservation in response to all three writers after considering their work is their failure to objectively ground moral guilt. In the brief opening section of part II, I shared some of various ways in which naturalists attempt to account for morality through moral realism or anti-moral realism. In chapter 5, I will discuss the features of the moral argument, as explained further in the paragraph that follows. In chapter 6, I will develop a theistic argument from moral guilt before arguing for a particular type of theism in chapter 7, namely Christian theism, which promises to do more than explain our guilt, but also resolves it. There I will show how Christian theism offers a more cohesive solution to guilt than the solutions Darwin, Nietzsche, and Freud have offered us based on naturalism.

The current chapter segues from the previous chapters to my final chapters by offering an introductory sketch of various classical and contemporary theistic moral arguments given to counter naturalism with the aim of showing how an argument from the feature of moral guilt not only strengthens the moral argument at large, but also, as will be discussed in the next chapter, shows how theism better explains the phenomenon of moral guilt than does its non-theistic counterparts as discussed in chapters 1–3. To meet this goal, I begin by sketching out the moral feature(s) utilized by various developers of both classical and contemporary moral arguments to ground our moral experience. I next appeal to four reasons how an argument from the feature of moral guilt contributes to the moral argument before concluding with a chapter summary.

2. A Survey of Distinct *Features* of the Moral Argument

The use of moral arguments for God's existence is crucial for the theist attempting to demonstrate that God is the ultimate foundation for objective morality. Like non-theists, theists are not short on thinkers providing different types of moral arguments for God's existence.

The moral argument is the most neoteric of the arguments for the existence of God, and it was not until Immanuel Kant ([1785] 1993) released his moral argument that other writers began penning their thoughts in argument fashion to provide an ontological grounding for God's existence. Among these thinkers are John Henry Newman (1874), Hastings Rashdall (1907), W. R. Sorley (1918), and C. S. Lewis ([1952] 2015), whose argument had the greatest impact on a popular level. In more recent philosophical studies, moral arguments have been developed by Robert Adam (1999), John Hare (1996), Linda Zagzebski (2004), William Lane Craig (2008), Mark Linville (2012), Mark Murphy (2011), Angus Ritchie (2012), C. Stephen Evans (2010) (2013), and David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls (2011) (2016).[94]

While the following survey will not cover each of these examples, it will showcase enough of them to show how an argument from the feature of guilt can

[94] For a good overview of moral arguments, see Evans's (2018) entry "Moral Arguments for the Existence of God" in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. See also Baggett and Walls (2019) *The Moral Argument: A History*. Also, note that I am not including British idealist philosopher Alfred Edward Taylor's ([1930] 1951) work on guilt in chapter 5 of his *The Faith of a Moralist* in this survey. That is because the primary aim of his chapter is to show how guilt distinguishes us as humans from animals. Taylor ([1930] 1951, p. 170) writes, "The point I am anxious to enforce is that, in more ways than one, our human expression of wrongdoing and guilt is so singularly unlike anything we can detect in the pre-human world that we are bound to treat it as something strictly *sui generis* and *human*, not generically animal." However, he does discuss a few important factors regarding our guilt as it relates to guilt's demand for justice and God's personal nature, which I will draw out in the next chapter. Furthermore, in David and Marybeth Baggett's (2018, p. 73) *The Morals of the Story*, they offer a concise summary of Taylor's five characteristics of human guilt: "(1) Human guilt involves true condemnation of our behavior and not just because we got caught. (2) Moral guilt is indelible; even punishment doesn't do away with it. (3) We recognize that our guilt deserves punishment. (4) Justice demands punishment for our wrongdoing, but forgiveness marks love and perfection. (5) We sense that we have sinned against a person, not just against an impersonal principle." Again, I will consider Taylor's *personal* aspect of guilt in the next chapter.

nicely complement the longstanding tradition of the moral argument. To begin this survey, let me appeal to a quote by C. Stephen Evans regarding moral arguments in order to clarify how moral arguments are constructed by utilizing various *features* to argue for God's existence. Then working from Evans's clarifying quote, I will point out some of the various features that framers have used to construct their argument for God's existence. Finally, I will explain how my argument from the feature of guilt complements the literature regarding the moral argument at large.

As a rule of thumb, moral arguments vary, but in general they argue from a select trait of morality to God's existence, which C. Stephen Evans (2018) calls "features": "Moral arguments for God's existence form a diverse family of arguments that reason from some *feature* of morality or the moral life to the existence of God, usually understood as a morally good creator of the universe" (emphasis added). Evans's statement is helpful for those interested in studying moral arguments as it provides an interpretive clue for better understanding moral argumentation. It aids readers to keep an eye on the type of feature(s) each framer utilizes when developing a moral argument. Sometimes scholars focus on multiple features to argue for their case, but in this chapter, my focus will be on the primary feature (i.e. additional features). In the survey that now follows, these various features will be viewed. But before transitioning, let me mention a final comment about moral arguments. Besides building an argument from a particular feature(s), it is also helpful to note the difference between arguments that are theoretical or more practical in nature. Here is how Evans (2010, p. 107) explains the difference:

> Theoretical moral arguments, like cosmological and teleological arguments, begin with some putative class of facts, such as the claim that humans are morally obligated to act in certain ways. The proponent of the argument tries to show that such facts require an explanation. The claim might be that God provides the only possible explanation for the facts in question, or perhaps only that God provides a better or superior explanation for this type of fact than naturalistic rivals. The conclusion of the argument will be that God exists or probably exists.

In other words, after the facts are considered, the theoretical moral argument will have either a deductive or abductive conclusion. But there is another type of moral argument: a practical moral argument that argues for God's existence not from some putative class of facts but from practical necessity.

2.1. Kant's Feature of Pure Practical Reason

Such is the case as seen with influential German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). In his *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant ([1785] 1993) argued for God's existence from the feature of practical reason. For Kant, morality requires belief in the existence of God a priori. He assumes God's existence to solve the apparent paradox between our obligations and capacity. As humans, we are met with a contradiction between what we ought to do and what we can do, unless we infer, not from proof, but out of sheer practical necessity, the existence of God. Kant ([1785] 1993, p. 20) writes, "There are in the idea of reason obligations which are completely valid, but which in their application to ourselves would be lacking in all reality, unless we make the assumption that there exists a supreme being to give effect and confirmation to the practical laws."

That said, it is well known that Kant shunned traditional arguments for God's existence, and he resisted a theoretical approach for his argument, without rejecting belief in God. Of those surveyed here, Kant alone subscribed to a practical argument whereas the others developed theoretical moral arguments.

As mentioned, Kant's practical moral argument argues from morality based on the feature of practical reason. By practical reason Kant inferred the existence of God for his moral theory to work. By all practical purposes, he reasoned, if *ought* implies *can* as it relates to the moral life, but in reality one cannot perform what he or she morally ought, then that would render the moral life impractical. Therefore, denying this, Kant assumed God's existence by practical reason with his moral argument.

Kant contends for God's existence as a necessary postulate. His argument can be summarized as follows:

1. Humans are morally obligated to perfectly conform to the moral law.
2. Humans cannot be obligated to do something they cannot do.
3. This means it is possible to perfectly conform to the moral law.
4. However, the moral law is not possible to perfectly conform to in this life.
5. For humans to ultimately accomplish the moral law will require eternity and the existence of God.
6. Therefore, we are rational to postulate God's existence.

Fulfilling the moral law is the key to experiencing the summon bonum,[95] which is experienced as complete happiness in proportion to virtue. Everyone is to seek after this, but no one is able to obtain it fully in this life. Instead of denying our moral obligations, Kant reasoned from practical necessity that both God and eternity were necessary for us to fully obtain the moral life. To assist humanity in their quest of the summon bonum, Kant introduced a moral filter known as the categorical imperative. The categorical imperative was a tool for detecting God's moral will through his feature of practical reason. He believed morality could be reduced to a user-friendly system whereby one could obtain objective moral truth by means of pure practical reason. And one lives a moral life insofar as they live aligned with the categorical imperative. The obvious failure to do so equates in the opposite—an immoral life.

For Kant, there is only one categorical imperative, which he knowingly formulated in several ways. For example, his first formulation of the categorical imperative appears in his book *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals,* where Kant ([1785] 1993, p. 14) states, "I should never act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law." Here then, the categorical imperative functions as a rational filter for measuring from the feature of practical reason to the moral worth of decisions. If the decision weighed aligns with the categorical imperative—that is, the decision fits into the category of a universal law—then one is morally obligated to act. However, if the decision reasoned for cannot be made a universal law, then it fails to pass through the filter of the categorical imperative and one is morally relieved from taking action.

Not surprisingly, Kant's attempt to discover universal laws by means of the categorical imperative has not been met without criticism. For example, one can easily envision a moral standoff when some subject A wills action C for everyone, yet subject B rejects action C as a categorical imperative. Kant was not oblivious to these scenarios, knowing full well that human nature is skewed. Nevertheless, he believed universal laws could be tapped into through the proper use of non-clouded reason (i.e. the feature of pure practical reason).

[95] Summum bonum is the Latin phrase meaning, "the greatest good."

Some might say that Kant's categorical imperative is a modern example of Jesus's famous Golden Rule, "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them" (Matt 7:12 ESV). His deontological approach to life spoke of duty corresponding to happiness, believing everyone could do what they ought, but to realize this both God and immortality had to be part of the equation. Without these added components, the summum bonum morphs into a fairytale because no one can obtain such perfection in this life alone. That will take time, plus eternity, *and* God. Practically speaking, to Kant, if *ought* implies *can*, then one ought to believe in God in order to achieve moral perfection.

The antagonist to this argument is not so convinced. Just because something ought to be so does not make it so. For Kant, if *ought* does not mean I *can* do, then our sense of oughtness is trivial; therefore, one should practically believe ought implies can. While this may be practically true (given God and eternity) it does not follow that one cannot develop a rational moral argument for God's existence. Arguments of such nature were bound to come in due time. Through Kant's work, the floodgates opened for the moral argument to take on new shapes, especially moral arguments more theoretical in nature, as is the case with the rest of the arguments that will now be explored in this survey.

2.2. Rashdall's Moral Law Feature

Another name worthy of mention in tracing contributions to the moral argument is English theologian, philosopher, and historian Hastings Rashdall (1858–1924). In his two-volume treatise on moral philosophy entitled *The Theory of Good and Evil*, Rashdall (1907) advances Kant's argument by developing a rational argument for God's existence from the feature of the moral law. Rashdall contended for an objective moral law, grounded in the mind of God, who exists independent of human consciousness, and thereby reasoned that objective moral law is morally binding on all people. To quote at length from volume 2, Rashdall (1907, p. 212) states:

> An absolute Moral Law or moral ideal cannot exist *in* material things. And it does not (we have seen) exist in the mind of this or that individual. Only if we believe in the existence of a Mind for which the true moral ideal is already in some sense real, a Mind which is the source of whatever is true in our own moral judgments, can we

> rationally think of the moral ideal as no less real than the world itself. Only so can we believe in an absolute standard of right and wrong, which is as independent of this or that man's actual ideas and actual desires as the facts of material nature. The belief in God, though not (like the belief in a real and active self) a postulate of there being any such thing as Morality at all, is the logical presupposition of an "objective" or absolute Morality. A moral ideal can exist nowhere and nohow but in a mind; an absolute moral ideal can exist only in a Mind from which all Reality is derived. Our moral ideal can only claim objective validity in so far as it can rationally be regarded as the revelation of a moral ideal eternally existing in the mind of God.

A brief summary of Rashdall's argument can be structured as follows:

1. An absolute moral ideal exists that is no less real than the world itself.
2. This moral ideal cannot exist in the minds of individuals or in material things.
3. Therefore, the absolute moral ideal (i.e. moral law) exists in the mind of God.

Whereas Kant accessed the categorical imperative to detect moral truths from the feature of practical reason, (i.e. from *his* mind), Rashdall takes Kant a step further by grounding the feature of the moral law in another mind, namely in God's mind. Not only does God exist, according to Rashdall, but apart from God there would be no such feature as an absolute moral law. Morality would be relative. That is because the moral law exists in God's mind. To Rashdall, this law cannot exist independent of God and exclusively in the minds of his created beings. The law needs an ultimate grounding: in God's mind.

He distinguishes between a moral ideal and an absolute moral ideal. The moral ideal is only morally ideal insofar as it corresponds to the absolute moral ideal grounded in God's Mind. The core strength of Rashdall's argument was to argue for this feature known as the objective moral law and to state that it exists independent of man's mind in the mind of God. Of course, critics of theism might argue that God is not necessary for objective morality (e.g. atheistic moral realism), or others might question objective morality altogether saying there is no such thing as objective morality (i.e. non-moral realism). However, by grounding the feature of the moral law in one mind, namely God's mind, Rashdall hoped to strengthen the moral argument.

2.3. Newman's Conscience Feature

Another contributor to the moral argument is former Anglican priest and then Roman Catholic priest and cardinal John Henry Newman (1801–1890). In *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, Newman (1874), features conscience as the key moral indicator for understanding the kind of God that exists. I would suggest that Newman's argument[96] unfolds as follows:

1. If a just God does not exist, people would not be conscious of offending him.
2. People are conscious of offending God.
3. Therefore, a just God exists.

Newman develops his argument from the feature of conscience or moral awareness. In this essay, describing how even a child naturally understands the inner voice of conscience to be of divine sorts, he writes,

> The child keenly understands that there is a difference between right and wrong; and when he has done what he believes to be wrong, he is conscious that he is offending One to whom he is amenable, whom he does not see, who sees him. His mind reaches forward with a strong presentiment to the thought of a Moral Governor, sovereign over him, mindful, and just. It comes to him like an impulse of nature to entertain it (p. 112).

To Newman, children are moral realists. Only external destructive influences would distort a child's natural impulse to believe that his conscience points Godward.

Digging deeper into Newman's feature of human conscience, he largely defines it as the inner sense of right and wrong. He gives conscience a double explanation, claiming that conscience is a moral sense as well as a sense of duty (p. 106). In other words, morality is binding. He concedes that some may misinterpret their conscience, but according to Newman, this by no means undermines the powerful impact of his argument (p. 105). He states, "Conscience is ever forcing on us by threats and by promises that we must follow the right and avoid the wrong" (p. 106). Conscience works internally as one senses an external divine pressing. There is

[96] Newman's style is not given to syllogistic argumentation, but for the sake of consistency with the other arguments assessed in this chapter, I sought to arrange his thought into a syllogism.

a personal aspect tethered to one's conscience in that the person who has morally failed feels as if he has offended someone; it is thus personal in nature.

While the force of Newman's argument is not on the topic of guilt exclusively, he does recognize that guilt is the natural outcome when people transgress against their conscience. To Newman, conscience tracks morality and weighs the moral worth of decisions. Conscience is a teacher, carrying with it a sense of the divine (*sensus divinitatis*). For one to experience God's pleasure and avoid displeasure, he must do so by recognizing the personal nature of this inner feature of conscience and determine to follow its voice. Newman's God is not some impersonal deity; rather, from conscience we infer that God is a personal being. Newman writes, "Inanimate things cannot stir our affections; these are correlative with persons. If, as is the case, we feel responsibility, are ashamed, are frightened, at transgressing the voice of conscience, this implies that there is One to whom we are responsible, before whom we are ashamed, whose claims upon us we fear" (p. 109).[97]

2.4. Sorley's Nature and Objective Moral Reality Feature

Scottish philosopher W. R. Sorley (1855–1935) is also worth mentioning with respect to his contribution to the moral argument.[98] To Sorley (1918), the best

[97] Later in his essay, Newman (1874, pp. 390–391) explains what the conscience primarily teaches us about God according to general revelation alone:

> In consequence, the special Attribute under which it brings Him before us, to which it subordinates all other Attributes, is that of justice—retributive justice. We learn from its informations to conceive of the Almighty, primarily, not as a God of Wisdom, of Knowledge, of Power, of Benevolence, but as a God of Judgment and Justice; as One, who, not simply for the good of the offender, but as an end good in itself, and as a principle of government, ordains that the offender should suffer for his offence. If it tells us anything at all of the characteristics of the Divine Mind, it certainly tells us this; and, considering that our shortcomings are far more frequent and important than our fulfillment of the duties enjoined upon us, and that of this point we are fully aware ourselves, it follows that the aspect under which Almighty God is presented to us by Nature, is (to use a figure) of One who is angry with us, and threatens evil. Hence its effect is to burden and sadden the religious mind.

As one who embraced special revelation, i.e. the Scriptures, Cardinal Newman believed that general revelation primed the guilty conscience for the antidote of special revelation by which the hearer or reader learns that Christ atones for human sin. For further discussion of the life and thought of this influential religious thinker, see Avery Dulles's (2009) thematic survey of Newman.

[98] For an overview of Sorley's argument, see Craig (2008, pp. 104–106).

explanation for reality is a Supreme Mind, namely God. Within this reality, there is not only a tangible natural order that is self-evident, but there is also a self-evident moral order. Here then, God serves as the best *unifying* explanation for both of these features. Sorley holds that just as the natural order exists independent and prior to recognizing its existence, there also exists an objective moral reality existing independent and prior to one's awareness of its existence. Sorley (1918, p. 352) states, "The validity of these values or laws and of this ideal, however, does not depend upon their recognition. It is objective and eternal." To him, person(s) can have an idea of goodness, such as discovered in human minds, but the ideal of goodness cannot exist in finite minds. Rather, this moral ideal is established in God. Hence, since this moral ideal does not exist in human minds, humans have failed to achieve systemic agreement and flawless alignment regarding the variegated specifics of the moral law. This is certainly an explanation one might use to explain the appearance of moral relativism. It is not surprising that not only are finite persons incapable of knowing the moral law in its entirety, they are also unable to perfectly conform to the moral law.

Sorley (1918, pp. 353–354) further states, "We acknowledge the good and its objective claim upon us even when we are conscious that our will has not yielded to the claim; and we admit that its validity existed before we recognized it." However, this does not nullify the moral law. This law has a universal flair to it that mankind feels obligated to act upon despite their failure to do so.

In conclusion, Sorley credits the supreme Mind as the source of this objective moral law. Without this Mind, there would be no absolute moral law or sense of oughtness that humans share in common. There would be no universal moral facts, just a moral-less universe.

Sorley's moral argument can be summarized as follows:

1. There is an objective moral reality that exists independent of human consciousness and prior to persons recognizing it.
2. There is an objective natural order that exists independent of human consciousness and is prior to persons recognizing it.
3. God as the perfect ideal is the best unifying explanation of both of these realities.

4. Therefore, God exists.

Commenting on Sorley's argument, William Lane Craig (2008, p. 104) writes, "He admits that in a sense one cannot prove that objective values exist, but insists that in this same sense one cannot prove that the external world exists either! Thus, the moral order and the natural order are on equal footing. On the same ground that we assume the reality of the world of objects, we assume the reality of the moral order of objective value." Craig goes on to share that obviously one does not perceive these values from the five senses as one does physical objects. Rather, they are discerned non-empirically, just like the actual visible order is seen to exist beyond the senses. In the same way persons realize the reality of the natural order beyond the senses, one is justified to believe there exists an objective moral order beyond one's intrinsic sense of these values. Therefore, Sorely contributes to the moral argument by rooting morality in God as the perfect ideal and the unifying explanation of the dual features of natural and moral order.

2.5. Lewis's Feature from the Law of Human Nature

Irish-born scholar, novelist, and Christian apologist C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) is credited for having popularized the moral argument in his work *Mere Christianity* ([1952] 2015). As a literature scholar, in chapters 1–5 this giant of an intellect develops his argument from the Law of Human Nature, which he claims is self-evident. Lewis ([1952] 2015, p. 5) writes, "This law was called the Law of Nature because people thought that everyone knew it by nature and did not need to be taught it." Lewis uses various synonymous terms to describe the Law of Human Nature. Some of the terms are the Law of Nature, the Moral Law, Rule about Right and Wrong, the Law of Decent Behavior, or Standard. This law is God-given, not humanly created. Though this Law is evident, everyone has violated God's perfect standard. Lewis (p. 23) states, "We know that men find themselves under a moral law, which they did not make, and cannot quite forget even when they try, and which they know they ought to obey."

Subsequently, everyone is responsible before a personal God whom they have offended. For the person who dismisses the Law of Human Nature, Lewis reminds his readers of its obviousness, stating, "Whenever you find a man who says he does not

believe in a real Right and Wrong, you find the same man going back on this a moment later. He may break his promise to you, but if you try breaking one to him he will be complaining, 'It's not fair' before you can say Jack Robinson" (p. 6). As a result, for Lewis, all of us are blameworthy of breaking the same rules which we expect others to keep toward us. For this reason, we are all accountable to God in that each of us has broken this Law of Human Nature.

The Law is a guide, a teacher, in that it tells us what kind of universe we live in. For Lewis, ours is a theistic universe, one created by a personal God. Concerning the moral law, he writes, "The only way in which we could expect it to show itself would be inside ourselves as an influence or a command trying to get us to behave in a certain way. And that is just what we do find inside ourselves" (p. 24). So confident of his assertion, Lewis pointedly adds,

> I am not yet within a hundred miles of the God of Christian theology. All I have got to is a Something which is directing the universe, and which appears in me as a law urging me to do right and making me feel responsible and uncomfortable when I do wrong. I think we have to assume it is more like a mind than it is like anything else we know—because after all the only other thing we know is matter and you can hardly imagine a bit of matter giving instructions. (p. 25)

Of course, Lewis's argument eventually arrives at Christian theism, but at this stage his argument does not require the introduction of Yahweh, at least not yet. For Lewis, this mind is more like a person, which helps him connect the dots to Christian theism. At this stage, there are two pieces of evidence Lewis has concerned himself with. First, we live in a universe made by God. And second, there exists a moral law, which he has put into our minds, that no one has kept.

Lewis argues that the Christian God makes sense of the Law of Human Nature. On its own, the law is as hard as nails (p. 30), but the Christian God is a personal God and able to forgive by resolving our moral failings. For Lewis, only a personal God is apt to forgive (p. 30). It is only when facing the fact that everyone has broken this moral law that Christianity, for Lewis, begins to make sense (p. 31). For here, the demand of the Law has been soundly met through the person of Jesus Christ and his substitutionary work on our behalf. To summarize, I would structure his argument as follows.

1. A Law of Human Nature exists that informs humans of right and wrong.

2. Humans know what they ought to do and do not do it.
3. The Law of Human Nature is given by a personal God before whom humanity is responsible.
4. Therefore, the best explanation of the Law of Human Nature is a personal God before whom all humanity is responsible for not doing what they ought to do.

Having surveyed five historical arguments and the various moral features used to argue for theism from the likes of Kant, Rashdall, Newman, Sorley, and Lewis, I now transition to consider three contemporary moral arguments as given by Robert Adams, John Hare, and C. Stephen Evans. We will now look at the moral features used by these figures to account for God's existence, beginning with Adams.

2.6. Adams Features an Infinitely Good God

American analytic philosopher Robert Merrihew Adams (b. 1937) has given attention to the moral argument through his work on the relation between theism and ethics. Following the work of Philip L. Quinn's (1978) *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements*, Adams's (1999) "modified divine command theory" as detailed in *Finite and Infinite Goods* has captured a broad appeal for devotees to this theory of moral obligation.[99] The attraction of Adams's theory, though not an argument for God's existence per se, has indeed sought to draw a tight moral connection to God's infinitely good character as seen in conjunction to his moral commands. For Adams, God is the constitutive standard of excellence for which his commands spring from his omnibenevolent nature. This in turn cultivates a motivational appeal for the one commanded by God to willingly obey his commands as the greatest source of excellence.

One can reason that since God's nature is objectively good and loving he would not command his created persons to act contrary to his nature. Therefore, one can trust that God's commands are good because *he* is good. By explaining God's

[99] For earlier works worthy of mention that preceded Adams's (1999) *Finite and Infinite Goods*, see his groundbreaking essay (Adams, 1973) "A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness" and its sequel in a journal article (Adams, 1979) entitled "Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again."

commands this way, Adams is able to dodge the standard *Euthyphro* objection that his commands are arbitrary. Rather than random speech acts, God's commandments are purpose directed and aimed toward one's moral good. Adams also escapes the *Euthyphro* objection that claims that the good exists independent of God by claiming that God is the good. By evading the double-horned dilemma, he retains a religious foundation for morality grounded in God's good nature.

That being said, Adams's formulation of divine command theory does not require that a person be religious to recognize the objective nature of the commands. Adams (1999, pp. 263–264) writes, "For ethical obligations whose nature I propose to analyze in terms of divine commands are not just those of some particular sort of Christians, or even of adherents of all theistic religions, but those of human beings in general. For this purpose it is important to understand divine commands as cognitively accessible to human beings quite generally, and hence in a wide variety of ways." A few of the ways Adams suggests that God's commands are accessible are through "Natural Law," inclinations, conscience, and social requirements (p. 264).

Failing to act on God's commands results in moral culpability for the individual who shuns his obligations. This renders the person morally blameworthy, resulting in relational estrangement from God, which morally compromises the relationship between God and the party at fault.

By showcasing the obligations that we experience as God's divine commands and grounding these commands in the feature of God's infinitely good nature, Adams is able to contend that theism carries the greatest explanatory weight as an explanation for morality. To summarize Adams's argument could be stated as follows:

1. Objective moral obligations exist.
2. Objective moral obligations are best explained by God's existence.
3. Therefore, God probably exists.

2.7. Hare's Moral Gap Feature

British classicist ethicist and philosopher John Hare (b. 1949) has integrated Kant's deontological ethics and utilitarian consequentialism to create an ethical theory that also includes elements of divine command theory. In his book *The Moral Gap*, Hare (1996) features "the moral gap" that is wedged between God and people as a

result of humankind's failure to fulfill the moral demand upon us.[100] Hare takes Kant's ethical theory and pictures morality as a three-part structure that includes the following: the moral demand that is upon us, our natural capacities to meet the demand, and the source of the demand. There is a gap between God and humans in need of closure. Humans are in a moral bind. By featuring this gap, Hare is able to depict the chasm that exists between God and humans. There is a divide between what people ought to do and what they can do. If humankind cannot meet this demand, is it still the case that they ought to? And if so, this raises a big question for Hare: How does one close the gap?

Hare considers three strategies that people utilize to close the gap. First, exaggerating or puffing up our natural capacities. He spends quite a bit of time critiquing utilitarianism as an example of a worldview that puffs up our natural capacities.[101] The second strategy that people use to close the moral gap is to diminish the moral demand. Here Hare focuses on several common objections to the impartiality of morality. The third strategy Hare looks at for closing the moral gaps is finding some naturalistic substitute for God's assistance. After considering some of the naturalistic attempts to close the moral gap, Hare remains skeptical about the account naturalists serve up to explain the origin of morality. That is not to say there will never be an explanation from Hare's stance, but for now theism provides the greatest explanatory power. Of the strategies discussed by Hare, each of them fails to get the job done.

In the final analysis of Hare's treatment of the moral gap, he shares how with God's assistance, in particular, the God of Christianity can help bridge the gap by means of repentance, forgiveness, atonement, justification, and sanctification. Hare contends that Christianity offers a better alternative for bridging the moral gap compared to other naturalistic alternatives. His moral argument is that there is a standard of morality that no one is able to keep, yet God provides the necessary

[100] This entire book is well worth the read as Hare's (1996) argument comprehensively unfolds in three parts: Kantian ethics, human limits, and God's assistance.

[101] For a critique of Hare's approach to utilitarianism as an example of puffing up our natural capacities, see Linda Zagzebski's (1999) book review.

resources for one to be reconciled to him. Baggett and Walls (2019, p. 24) provide a syllogism of Hare's argument that can be framed as follows:

1. Morality requires us to achieve a standard too exacting and demanding to meet on our own without some sort of outside assistance.
2. Exaggerating human capacities, lowering the moral demand, or finding a secular form of assistance are not likely to be adequate for the purpose of closing the moral gap.
3. Divine assistance is sufficient to close the gap.
4. Therefore, rationality dictates that we must postulate God's existence.

2.8. Evans's Obligation Feature

American philosopher C. Stephen Evans (b. 1948) has published extensively on Søren Kierkegaard, the philosophy of religion, and the philosophy of the human sciences such as psychology. In his book *God and Moral Obligation*, Evans (2010) argues that the best ontological explanation for the feature of one's moral obligations is a divine lawgiver. Here is how I would summarize his argument:

1. If objective moral obligations exist, God is the best explanation of them.
2. Objective moral obligations exist.
3. Therefore, God's existence is the best explanation of our moral obligations.

While a non-theist may have an epistemological awareness of morality, that is not the same as being able to provide an ontological grounding for morality. To Evans, God provides the necessary grounding to explain our moral obligations.

Evans, a divine command theorist, argues that God by nature of who he is has the moral authority to issue the commands he does. These commands/obligations are requirements that entail God's moral will for humans. That is to say, they are knowledge-producing. If the person commanded by God reflects more closely on the nature of his or her moral duties, the person will be apt to develop a greater awareness of God.

Both Evans and Adams base their divine command arguments on a theory of the good. Here is where they part ways. Evans holds to a theistic natural law account aimed at a theory of virtue, while Adams offers a theistic, Platonic account of moral realism.[102] Furthermore, Evans sees no necessary rivalries between natural law theory, divine command theory, and virtue ethics when properly understood. In particular, his integrated approach shows how the theories complement each other, thus creating a more detailed approach to morality. He, like Adams, is careful to structure his argument so as to circumvent the sharp horns of the Euthyphro Dilemma. This is accomplished by grounding the scope of possible obligations in the good nature of God.

There is much to leverage from Evans's account of obligation, in particular as it relates to my project. By reflecting further on the failure to act on one's obligations, more material will surface as it relates to the topic of moral guilt.

The moral arguments reviewed above contain similarities and dissimilarities. For instance, each scholar concedes that God exists, he is the creator, his nature is morally good, and that morality can be objectively detected, while differing in the features they choose to utilize to argue for God's existence. That said, this would be a good time to recall Evans's (2018) statement regarding moral arguments: "Moral arguments for God's existence form a diverse family of arguments that reason from some feature of morality or the moral life to the existence of God, usually understood as a morally good creator of the universe." Now taking Evans's quote and working backwards, I pointed out earlier that the framers of the moral argument concede the following elements: (1) God is the creator. (2) He is good. (3) And he exists. I added an additional element: (4) Morality can be objectively detected. This final element is a claim Evans himself defends in his own work.

What I hope to have shown in this chapter are some of the various examples of how scholars have sought to frame their arguments by using a selected moral feature to argue for God's existence. The goal for each is the same: to argue that our moral experience requires God's existence, or is best explained by his existence, but the

[102] Most natural law theories are theistic, but exceptions are possible. For an example of a naturalistic theory of morality described as "natural normativity," see Philippa Foot's (2001) book entitled *Natural Goodness*.

pathway toward reaching this destination is different depending on which feature of morality they use to argue from. For example, as it relates to the classical arguments, Kant reasons from the feature of pure practical reason that moral perfection is achievable, but not without God's existence and eternity. Rashdall, contra Kant, features the moral law as grounded in the mind of God. Newman contends from the feature of conscience to a personal God, claiming that if God did not exist, people would not think they have wronged him. Sorley features a comparison between objective reality and objective morality, stating that both exist independent and prior to our recognizing them. He then utilizes his comparison to argue that God's existence is the best unifying explanation of both features of nature and morality. And Lewis, using the Law of Human Nature, argues that no one has kept this law, and consequentially we are all blameworthy before our Creator.

The contemporary moral arguments work in similar fashion. Though their arguments are nuanced differently, each framer makes a contribution to the moral argument. Adams circumvents the Euthyphro Dilemma by featuring an infinitely good God whose commands are not arbitrarily issued. Hare features the moral gap and contends that any human substitute to bridge the gap is found wanting apart from God's assistance to close the gap. And Evans features God's existence as the best explanation to account for our moral obligations by offering them a theistic foundation. Having considered some of the various ways in which these framers have utilized certain features of morality to develop their arguments, I wish to propose in the next chapter another argument to enhance the overall story. An argument that features guilt and shows how our guilt reveals to us a God who contains at least five distinct attributes.

3. How the Feature of Guilt Enhances the Moral Argument

In this section, I will share four reasons how the feature of moral guilt enhances the moral argument at large before concluding with my intention to develop a new version of the moral argument from the feature of guilt. By enhancing the moral argument, I mean that the moral story as narrated by naturalists or non-theists is not complete without including the feature of moral guilt. Whereas the moral argument has been in circulation for quite some time now and moral discourse as narrated by theists is far more complete, still even after considering the work of

contemporary thinkers there is more to say regarding guilt in order to offer a more complete story in moral argumentation.

3.1. Four Ways the Feature of Guilt Enhances the Moral Argument

3.1.1. Moral guilt as universally experienced offers a missing piece of the moral puzzle by helping us better see the full moral picture.

Guilt hits close to home, as individuals are met on a daily basis by the constant awareness of having fallen short of some moral standard. As British idealist philosopher Alfred Edward Taylor ([1930] 1951, p. 208) writes in *The Faith of a Moralist*, "It is just because so many of our modern philosophical moralists are afraid to make the idea of God frankly central in their theories of conduct that their treatment of guilt is inadequate to the actual moral experiences of men with any depth of character." To that I would reply, God or no God, there appears to be something broken in humanity's ability to maintain the standard by which they feel obliged to live. This broken standard creates guilty feelings and, if God exists, a guilty standing before him that warrants explanation. Atheists and theists alike are troubled by the problem of moral guilt, and as I will contend, theism is better situated with the resources to not only account for our guilt, but as will be seen in the final chapter, to resolve it. The concept of moral guilt has haunted many people. And of the figures studied above, while guilt is certainly implied, it is not the driving force of their argument—or the main feature. Take, for instance, the contemporary examples. Adams does devote a helpful section on guilt in chapter 10 of his book *Finite and Infinite Goods* under the umbrella of obligation. He agrees that if people fail to keep the moral law, they are guilty. And Hare's moral gap is essentially a state of guilt. He shares strategies that people will use to close the gap and recognizes the gap produces guilt, yet his approach is not to exclusively structure his work around the feature of guilt. Evans too, with his remarks on obligation and our failure to keep God's commands, also recognizes the effect this has in making us guilty. Each of the authors concede that moral guilt is caused by violating God's commands, but their aim is not to focus solely on the problem of guilt as I intend to do. Consequently, there is much more to be said and ample room for a case to be argued from moral guilt to God's existence. That is my desire—to showcase moral guilt as a lead actor in pointing to God. Without this piece, the moral puzzle is in no way complete.

3.1.2. Moral guilt adds force to the moral argument.

Divine command theory is particularly resourceful for explaining moral guilt. That is because to break an obligation to God's commandment is to incur moral guilt. Adams (1999, p. 257) realizes the force of moral guilt, stating, "It is obvious that in theistic traditions guilt has been powerfully connected with rupture or straining of our relationship with God. A divine command theory of the nature of obligation facilitates the understanding of moral guilt as involving an offense against a person." By considering moral guilt in the context of a moral argument and by looking at it more squarely, it not only complements the moral argument at large, but adds force to it. Guilt adds a sort of "*uh oh*" effect to the one who has grasped it.[103] Begging for answers to questions like: If I am guilty, what are the implications? Am I accountable? If so, to whom? Can I absolve my guilt? Is there a remedy? A clearing? If so, can one arrive at this remedy philosophically? Alternatively, do we need to look to special revelation? Several of these questions are largely ignored in the above arguments, for which an argument from guilt can wrestle.

3.1.3. Moral guilt helps clarify the character of God.

If guilt is the result of breaking God's moral law, then guilt can shed light on what displeases God. No one is morally guilty for being honest, faithful, sacrificial, loving, etc. Those are not guilt-producing qualities. Guilt may be God's way of saying to us, "You are stepping on my toes." If guilt really is God's way of getting our attention to the actions that displease him, then the "evil-god challenge" proposed by English philosopher Stephen Law (2010) may be brought into question.[104] There is no evil God if God uses guilt to poke someone out of alignment with his moral will. Rather, such moral pokes show that God is a virtuous God. By taking one's guilt and thinking about the opposite qualities of guilt (e.g. telling the truth versus lying) one

[103] For someone to grasp guilt is not merely an emotional statement. A person can have a sense of guilt feelings, but to grasp guilt is for one to recognize his stance before God.

[104] For a summary presentation of Law's "evil-god challenge," see Dawn Darbonne's (2016) article "Stephen Law's Evil God Challenge Refutes 'All-good God' Theories." For further discussion of this challenge, see section 4.2 and note in that section citing responses by William Lane Craig (2011) and Peter Forrest (2012).

can begin to detect the type of actions that displease God while also learning the type of qualities that please him. From this version of the moral argument, people can learn from their guilt because our guilt can serve as a moral teacher by revealing the type of virtuous life that God intends for his creation, while also revealing to us the type of nature God has—a good, not evil nature.[105]

3.1.4. Moral guilt points to our need for a redeeming God.

A lot goes on for the individual disturbed by guilt. Baggett and Walls (2011, p. 15) write, "When our choices fall below the dictates of morality and we know it, one response to guilt is to acknowledge our shortcoming, but another is to lower the standard, or even to deny altogether the existence of the moral standard." In a theistic world, guilt requires a certain type of God. A redeeming God! Guilt longs for resolve and invokes the question, "If I am guilty is there a means of pardon? And if so, what kind of God can best rid a person of guilt?" It is here where Christianity in particular may have something unique to say. In other words, guilt may provide not only a philosophical pathway to God, as will be discussed in chapter 6, but also the most logical route to the God who actually acts on behalf of our guilt, as will be discussed in the final chapter.

4. Conclusion

Let us recap what I sought to accomplish in this chapter. Overall my aim was to present a case to show how an argument from the feature of guilt can enhance our current literature on the moral argument. To do this, I utilized two quotes by Evans—one to distinguish the difference between practical and theoretical moral arguments,

[105] Moral guilt is instructive in leading us toward a transformed life. Working like a check engine light, guilt is God's way of getting our attention, informing us that we are acting outside of his will. God uses our guilt to show us things about our moral actions. For example, stealing results in guilt. To avoid being guilty I must avoid stealing. Before a person can experience a transformed life, that person must first come to terms with his or her guilt. That is the starting place. As Evans (2013, p. 87) writes, "Though the moral law aims at our transformation, it begins by helping us see how much we need to be transformed. It points to a problem of moral guilt and a need for atonement that requires more than a philosophical remedy." Once the guilt is dealt with, the lawbreaker is free at last to progress toward a life that not only is pleasing to God but that also leads to transformation.

and the other to show how moral arguments utilize various moral features to argue for God's existence.

With this framework in place, I provided examples of moral arguments by isolating the particular features used by various developers of the moral argument. Beginning with Kant's practical argument and his feature of practical reason, I then reviewed the theoretical arguments of Rashdall from his feature of the moral law. Next, I discussed Sorley's argument from the feature of objective nature and moral reality, then I considered Newman's argument from the feature of conscience, and next I showcased Lewis's argument from the feature of the Law of Human Nature. Then I mentioned Adams's argument from the feature of an infinitely good God, as well as Hare's argument from the feature of the moral gap, before concluding with Evans's argument using the feature of obligation. Subsequent to this discussion, I shared what each of these figures have in common before concluding that their arguments differ in the feature they each chose to use in order to develop their arguments. Each of these arguments complements each of the others and thus together further strengthens the moral argument.

Following this survey of both classical and contemporary moral arguments, I concluded by offering four reasons how an argument from moral guilt can further enhance the moral argument at large. With this understanding of how moral arguments work and how an argument from guilt can enhance the moral argument, I now turn my attention to develop a theoretical argument for God's existence from the feature moral guilt.

Chapter 6

THE ARGUMENT *FROM* MORAL GUILT

1. Introduction

As mentioned in the previous chapter, there are various versions of the moral argument. Typically, in developing a moral argument, theistic philosophers isolate some feature of morality and proceed to argue either deductively, inductively, or abductively from that particular moral feature to God's existence. Similarly, in this chapter, I will explore the feature of moral guilt in order to develop another version of the moral argument—the argument *from* moral guilt. To do so, I will first describe the type of argument I will utilize, a chain argument, as it is an argument that conflates both abductive and deductive argumentation into one argument. In the first half of the argument I will argue abductively and in the second half deductively, hence providing a chain argument that builds off of each other. After I make my case for my argument, I will develop the argument while simultaneously addressing objections. Upon completing my discussion of the argument, I will show that if my argument is successful, not only will it serve as another version of the moral argument, but it will also offer four points of improvement to the moral argument at large. In the end, I will conclude by saying that the type of God revealed in this argument as one who is (a) personal (b) all-knowing, (c) a moral lawgiver who is (d) good and (e) fit to hold us accountable is not only the best explanation to account for our guilt feelings, but also the ultimate explanation for universal objective moral guilt.

2. A Case for a Chain Argument

Moral arguments are typically constructed using a deductive approach. However, more recently moral philosophers David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls (2016) have made a compelling case for arguing abductively for moral arguments. Unlike the deductive argument, in which its conclusion cannot be false if the premises are true, the abductive argument draws a more modest conclusion, arguing from a set of observations to the best or most likely explanation. Several reasons for preferring an abductive approach are explained below. By heeding the advice of Baggett and Walls,

I first will discuss some of the advantages of abductive argumentation and then explain why I have chosen to conflate both abductive and deductive argumentation in order to present a chain argument.

As it relates to moral arguments, wielding the argument abductively offers some epistemological advantages over and above an exclusively deductive approach. Baggett and Walls (2016, p. 74) explain that

> by modifying the argument into an abductive one, when the context allows it, one need not bite off more than he can chew. By claiming slightly less, the moral apologist can sometimes accomplish more. So we would respectfully counsel replacing the deductive version with an inference to the best explanation, and rather than insisting that this world is incapable of underwriting any moral theory, we can claim, more modestly, that this world along with God provides the better account of the full range of moral facts in need of explanation than can naturalism alone.[106]

According to Baggett and Walls (2016), if the world was intelligently designed, then it makes sense that the cosmos would be replete with resources for non-theists to manufacture counterarguments absent of God to account for the variegated moral facts, in part. But by inviting the possibility of God back into the moral picture, the explanation for morality displays a fuller understanding than one can obtain by naturalism (or Platonism) alone.

This is helpful for a few reasons. First, the abductive argument enables theists to concede to naturalists that they are not surprised, given how God's world is spread out before them for inspection, that in investigating the landscape of the world they can generate a number of secular moral theories. Second, along with this concession, however, theists can also invite naturalists to add God back into the picture and ask them to reasonably consider which explanation better explains the moral facts: the world alone or God plus the world? Third, while the abductive argument creates room to concede to naturalists the ability to make a case for moral realism via naturalism,

[106] See Baggett and Walls (2016), chapter 2, "The Case For Abduction," in its entirety for more detail. During my research, this chapter was instrumental in backing me away from using an exclusive deductive approach to construct my argument. While I personally have no problem adhering to a deductive approach in particular contexts, I think aspects of the abductive argument are useful at the present time given the wide array of atheists who have fastened themselves to an objective view of morality and who also find it hard to stomach that all things are permissible without God.

contenders of the abductive argument also seek to tame the atheological premise that accompanies some deductive moral arguments. One such version of this premise that Baggett and Walls (2016, p. 67) concern themselves with is philosopher William Lane Craig's deductive argument. One of their points of contention regards Craig's (2008, p. 172) first atheological premise, which states, "If God does not exist, then objective moral values and duties do not exist." Why is this a problem for Baggett and Walls? They reason that while Craig's argument is valid, perhaps even sound, it does not advance the conversation for committed atheists who understandably may not find the atheological premise convincing.[107]

For these reasons, therefore, Baggett and Walls welcome another approach to framing the moral argument, one that does not encourage atheists to forfeit their attempts to provide moral explanations with their resources, while also encouraging them to evaluate their epistemic claims with critical scrutiny.[108] Using these two arguments, the deductive and the abductive arguments, Baggett and Walls (2016, pp. 76–77) share an example of how a theist can invite a non-theist to reflect abductively upon which worldview—atheistic or theistic—furnishes a sturdier explanation to account for the full range of moral facts:

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[107] Granted, there are also many atheistic non-moral realists (e.g. Nietzsche, Sartre, Mackie, Ruse, etc.) who concede the consequence of the atheological premise, but Baggett and Walls feel there is a better approach for interacting with atheistic moral realists.

[108] In discussing the effectiveness of the deductive moral argument, Baggett and Walls (2016, p. 72) suggest the following:

> The [deductive] argument, sound as it may well be, may not be as effective as some might suggest because, by treating the first premise as a nontrivially true counterpossible, the argument accords atheists implicit permission to use the full range of empirical realities in the actual world to build their moral arguments, and among the empirical realities of this world are the capacity for clear apprehensions of moral truths, a robust semantics for ethics, and the resources of the actual world for ontological fodder. For naturalists committed to their secular perspective, granting them such permission understandably encourages them to think that their worldview is consistent with the deliverances of those apprehensions. So when they hear the claim that if God does not exist, then morality lacks any foundation whatsoever, it tends most often to strain their credulity. The reasons for this are fairly understandable. Until they have more thoughtfully considered the range of potential moral theories at their disposal, along with the stark implications of naturalism and the range of moral phenomena in need of explanation, they perhaps remain entitled to considerable tenacity in the matter as they attempt to make full rational sense of morality in its distinctive features, or at least minimal features able to be salvaged with the resources of their materialism.

> What we see the deductive argument saying is this: Imagine that the world is atheistic. Now try to make sense of morality. Ultimately you can't, at least without watering down what is meant by morality. So if there's no God, objective moral values and duties don't exist. Since they do, God exists.
>
> The abductive approach is different, and it goes more like this: This world may well have been created and infused with meaning by God; suspend judgment on that for the moment. Take a look at this world and see what you can do by way of explaining morality and its distinctive features, and don't be surprised if you find that you can make some progress. But then, remind yourself of the fuller range of moral facts in need of explanation—values and duties to be sure, but also moral freedom, knowledge, responsibility, moral regrets, shame, forgiveness, the prescriptive power and rational authority of morality, the desire for the congruence of happiness and holiness, the needed resources for moral transformation, human dignity and equality and worth—and ask yourself this question: What better explains this full range of moral facts? This world alone? Or the conjunction of this world and its Creator, who made us in his image, created us for a purpose, invested us with the capacity for empathy and rationality and moral apprehension. This world, counterpossibly assuming its existence without God, certainly has the resources to explain some things about morality, but God and this world together better explain morality.[109]

I appreciate what Baggett and Walls are doing here. Their approach is rhetorically helpful because it avoids placing one's opponent at the outset in a defensive posture. In contrast to a deductive approach, the abductive style of argumentation invites a person into reflective dialogue. I agree that the atheological premise gets the conversation off to a turbulent start and at times can be a

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[109] Baggett and Walls (2016, pp. 77–78) identify five problems they see with the deductive argument (TDA):

1. It makes us say very uncomfortable and unintuitive and unnecessary things—"Rape isn't wrong … if God doesn't exist," for example. The abductive approach avoids any need to do so.
2. TDA, more than abduction, allows the atheist to reject the moral realism instead of the naturalism …. Abduction keeps the moral facts in question front and center as the starting data in need of explanation.
3. TDA doesn't allow enough room to acknowledge what would be the simply amazing features of a world like this if it could exist without God—whereas abduction does not deny the power of a world like this without God, *per impossibile*, to explain some of morality.
4. Deduction bases the moral argument on a premise involving a particularly intractable counterpossible. Are there nontrivially true counterpossibles? Sure. But pontificating confidently about a world in which the ground of being doesn't exist? That is problematic indeed—particularly synthetic claims like the famous Dostoyevskian counterfactual.
5. TDA can sever the bridge with our naturalist interlocutors it claims to build by focusing, and needlessly so, more on our differences than our similarities.

conversation-stopper for some people. Therefore, they argue abductively, and from a place of humility, in order to keep the conversation moving along.[110] In the end, such an approach to reasoning allows for fertile discussion and humble interaction and yet draws a bold conclusion.[111]

3. The Argument *from* Moral Guilt

In the first half of my argument *from* moral guilt, I adopt abductive reasoning, to derive in three points the intermediate conclusion that universal moral guilt exists. For the second half of my argument, I will infer through deductive reasoning in two final points the existence of a moral lawgiver from that intermediate conclusion, hence concluding a moral lawgiver (God) exists. Because I utilize both styles of argumentation, I will refer to my argument as a chain argument. Here is how the argument is formulated:

1. If universal objective moral guilt feelings exist, then the best explanation is that universal objective moral guilt exists.
2. Universal objective moral guilt feelings exist.
3. Therefore, (the best explanation is that) universal objective moral guilt exists.
4. If universal objective moral guilt exists, then there is a (a) personal, (b) all-knowing,[112] (c) moral lawgiver who is (d) good and (e) fit to hold us accountable.

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[110] Both Baggett and Walls are Christians who believe in the authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit, which grants believers an epistemic assurance (see Rom 8:16). Therefore, Christians *know* that Christianity is true (see 1 John 5:13), but through argumentation they *show* that it is true.

[111] Given such consideration then, it is not surprising to find thinkers like Darwin, Nietzsche, Freud, and other naturalists in a position to develop their own theories of moral guilt.

[112] While an Anselmian view of God points to the greatest conceivable being, one could still arrive at a God who knows *enough* to bring humanity to account without taking a fully-fledged stance of omniscience. My belief in an Anselmian God makes it easy for me to arrive at God's omniscience, but for those who cannot quite get there, my argument can still prove fruitful for those who hold to an open view of God's knowledge.

5. Universal objective moral guilt exists.
6. Therefore, there is a personal, all-knowing, moral lawgiver who is good and fit to hold us accountable who exists.

Let's take a look at each premise in the analysis of this argument that follows, beginning with premise 1 of the syllogism.

1. If universal objective moral guilt *feelings* exist, then the best explanation is that universal objective moral guilt exists (emphasis added).

Some clarification of terms is in order. First, by "universal" I am referring to moral guilt feelings that are both universally ubiquitous and timeless. Second, moral guilt is objective in that moral guilt feelings hold regardless of one wishing otherwise. Third, by "guilt feelings" I am distinguishing a person's feelings of guilt from a person's objective guilt for actually violating a moral law. Let's unpack each point.

First, by "universal" I am referring to moral guilt feelings that are both universally ubiquitous and timeless.[113] The experience of guilt feelings is systemic and not culturally bound.[114] It does not follow, however, that all cultures live by the

[113] By "universal" I do not mean to imply that *every* person feels guilt (for discussion of the psychopath, see section 2a below). However, such exceptions do not vitiate the fact that guilt feelings are universally or cross-culturally experienced.

[114] Some scholars such as moral philosopher Bernard Williams (2008) argue that the idea of moral guilt was foreign to the ancient Greeks (see chapter 1 in his work *Shame and Necessity*). However, this is unlikely. Consider Socrates, for example, whom the authorities sentenced to death by drinking hemlock after determining his guilt on two charges: impiety against the pantheon of Athens and corruption of the youth of the city-state. In this case, however, the guilt was not properly assigned by the authorities when judged from a theistic worldview because they punished him for not giving credence to the Greek pantheon of gods, which in reality does not exist. It still stands that guilt was not beyond recognition among the Greeks. They still had a system of accountability in place that surpassed shame as the explanation. I am sure it might be argued that he was convicted of legal guilt, which some might distinguish from moral guilt. I wonder if moral guilt could be entailed within legal guilt under such circumstances. That is to say, it seems likely to me that Socrates, though considered legally guilty, would have also appeared to have committed a moral wrong in the eyes of the leaders by not

same set of moral precepts or embrace the same set of values that render them guilty when disregarded. Further elucidating this thought, philosopher C. Stephen Evans in *God and Moral Obligation* (2013, p. 43) writes, "The effect of cultural traditions can certainly be seen in the differences in moral beliefs and practices found in various moral cultures. However, it is also undeniable that there are profound areas of consensus between various moral cultures, even those that developed in relative independence of each other, which might well be attributed to some common human faculty. The vast majority of human cultures have recognized duties to be truthful, to keep one's word, to practice hospitality, and many others." To account for such moral similitudes Evans points to the frequently mentioned appendix, "Illustrations of the *Tao*," in C. S. Lewis's *The Abolition of Man,* where Lewis (1947, pp. 95–121) includes a helpful list of "illustrations of the Natural Law," or "agreed-on moral practices" (Evans, 2013, p. 43n24) that are shared cross-culturally.

Second, moral guilt is objective in that the moral truths that are violated still hold regardless of one wishing otherwise. Morality is not intrinsically whipped up; rather, morality and its accompanying obligations exist independent of preferences and remain so despite how one feels about them. For example, in the event that a culture agreed that torturing babies for fun was morally right, the moral judgment that committing such atrocities is wrong would still hold, independent of what that culture believes about such matters.

Third, by "guilt feelings" I am distinguishing a person's feelings of guilt from a person's objective guilt for actually violating a moral law. A person can feel guilty and not be objectively guilty. Alternatively, a person can be guilty and not feel guilty.[115] Guilt feelings are objective insofar as a moral law has been violated. For

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submitting to the gods of his day and subsequently corrupting the minds of the youth with his philosophy.

[115] This second case could include the psychopath (see section below for discussion), but it can also include someone who has become anesthetized to guilt. The process of desensitization is put in motion when guilty persons seek to placate themselves by means of blame, rationalization, self-deception, self-medicating, denial, or making light of God's moral standard in order to minimize their guilt and to avoid facing the reality of their moral lapse(s). According to Baggett and Walls (2016, p. 15), "Morality wields authority and induces guilt, and we can begin to resent it. We start to wonder if morality is all it's cracked up to be, if it's anything more than an internalization of parental teachings,

guilt feelings to obtain an objective stamp of confirmation, there must be an external match: the guilty-feeling individual must be able to locate a corresponding link to a perceived moral transgression in order to confirm the validity of his or her guilty feelings. In the event that a match is made, the feelings are reliably objective.[116] If such feelings never had a potential for objectivity, then feelings could never be trusted. But that is not the case. Feelings of guilt can be trusted insofar as they correspond to external reality. In such cases, they are reliable.

A distinction worth making at the outset of my argument is the difference between atheistic moral realists and atheistic moral skeptics. While both of these atheistic realists may concede that universal guilt feelings exist, the moral anti-realist denies that moral guilt feelings correspond to an objective moral realm, whereas the moral realist believes that morality is objective.[117]

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social mores, or mere convention and conditioning. Unless morality continues to be understood as resting on solid foundations, its authority comes into question, and understandably so."

[116] Similarly, in discussing emotional states in her book *Divine Motivation Theory*, American philosopher and virtue ethicist Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski (2004, p. 155) explains, "If a good emotion is a state that fits the circumstances, we need some account of the circumstances that are such that the virtuous person's emotion in such a situation fits. What is it in a situation that fits her feeling that if she does not act in a certain way, she would feel guilty?" Thus, according to Zagzebski's account, a virtuous person will feel guilty if she fails to act on a moral duty in keeping with *her* standard of morality as a "truth maker," not because she fails to act upon an external obligation. Nevertheless, Zagzebski's language that the circumstances that led to a person's emotion must fit the situation parallels my correspondence view of detecting objective moral guilt feelings. If a person's emotional well-being is hijacked by guilty feelings and she assesses the circumstances that led to her guilty feelings, she may discover that a moral law was transgressed. In the event that she does, the guilt feelings are objective guilt feelings. There is a correspondence. For another example of distinguishing moral guilt feelings and objective moral guilt, see also government and philosophy professor J. Budziszewski's (2010, p. 28) *The Revenge of Conscience*, where he explains that "guilt, guilty knowledge, and guilty feelings are not the same thing; men and women can have the knowledge without the feelings, and they can have the feelings without the fact." Nevertheless, the ideal would be alignment between the guilt, knowledge of one's guilt, and the guilty feelings themselves—the grouping is meant to align.

[117] This does not mean, however, that atheistic moral realists necessarily subscribe to the idea that universal objective guilt feelings exist. This will become clear under the psychopath objection below.

The atheistic moral anti-realist will reject premise 1 of my syllogism by denying the claim that universal objective moral guilt exists. Again, it is one thing for such anti-realists to admit that guilt feelings exist, or even to admit that they exist universally, but they will deny that these feelings are in any way objective in that they correspond to violating some external objective moral law. Here I will offer three alternative approaches to morality as given by the anti-realists before relating two similar, yet distinct objections that atheistic skeptics may utilize to challenge premise 1, these include the delusional explanation and the global hallucination explanation.

Moral anti-realism is unlike moral realism, which denies that moral properties like *x* exist mind-independent. Some anti-realists reject *x* altogether, whereas others may admit the existence of *x*, while claiming *x* is not mind-independent. At the risk of oversimplifying, but also to not lose sight of the big picture of this project, those who reject *x* altogether would be non-realists, like error theorists, whereas those who admit to *x* while claiming *x* is not mind-independent are moral non-objectivists, idealists, and constructivists.

3.1. Error Theory

Australian philosopher J. L. Mackie's (1977) *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, which continues to be the classic modern refutation against objectivism, defends a view known as "error theory."[118] Mackie recognized the commonsensical belief we have as humans in objective value as it relates to ordinary moral thought and language as presenting itself to us *as if* it was objective, but upon final analysis, it turns out to be the product of our own making.[119]

Given Mackie's error theory, it is not hard to anticipate how he or another error theorist might object to my first premise by denying that universal objective

[118] For Mackie's (1977) arguments in *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, see chapter 1 and the recap on page 49. For more on Mackie's error theory, see Richard Joyce's (2007) encyclopedia article, "Mackie's Arguments for the Moral Error Theory."

[119] As a moral nihilist, Nietzsche's logic similarly follows, even condemning the naturalists of his day who also claimed to be moral realists. To Nietzsche, moral facts like obligations and guilt only make sense in a theistic world.

guilt exists. While it is not hard to envision Mackie conceding that universal guilt feelings exist, those feelings would not be interpreted by him to mean that universal objective guilt also exists. Mackie saw within the cultural landscape a clash of values that made it hard for him to think of morality as anything close to objective. As he undoubtedly would have seen it, people in one culture may feel guilty about action *x* while those in another culture may not.

At first glance, it looks like my argument is in real trouble, as well as any claim to moral objectivity. First, I would concede that evidence exists that reveals that cultures are morally nuanced. However, I would quickly add that existing evidence for *some* moral relativity does not mean no moral objectivity exists. Humans disagree about a lot things and morality just so happens to be one of them. But disagreeing about *x* does not mean that *x* does not exist. And while one may find evidence for a clash of values amongst cultures, one is not hard-pressed to find moral consensus either, especially as it relates to values such as truth telling, friendship, and things of like manner. My argument is not that every one of our moral rules align, but that of our moral rules, some align universally.

It is no surprise that Mackie had a hard time making sense of morality in a naturalistic world. He writes about this tension in his argument from queerness, expressing of the argument, "This has two parts, one metaphysical, the other epistemological. If there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe. Correspondingly, if we were aware of them, it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else" (Mackie, 1977, p. 38).

While I think naturalists can make a stronger case for realism than we see here, I also think theism, as will be argued below, can offer an even stronger case to ground our moral experience. Moreover, on the basis of theism, the instrument of conscience, though not infallible, offers us both a metaphysical explanation and an epistemological one by means of assessing our guilt feelings. As will be explained below, assuming our guilt feelings are objective, it seems plausible that our guilt feelings are one of the natural signs by which God metaphysically gets our attention. By acting as our informer, perhaps guilt epistemically attunes us to the nature of God, as I will argue, as one who is a personal, all-knowing, moral lawgiver who is good and fit to judge. Furthermore, unlike Mackie's naturalism, which makes it hard for

him to account for morality, the theist circumvents the queerness he refers to. For in a world fashioned by God, morality would not be strange as fiction. Morality is at home within a theistic universe. It makes sense that a good God who desires us to live moral lives would tailor make us with a keen sense of conscience that informs us when we are living out of alignment with his moral will.

In a real way, the queerness Mackie is concerned about becomes the naturalist's problem, not the theist's. Evans (2013, p. 121) writes, "The argument from queerness that Mackie mounts is only effective against naturalistic metaethical views. Both normative properties and human cognitive capacities to grasp such properties are to be expected if God created and sustains the world." Interestingly enough, while rejecting moral realism in favor of moral skepticism, Mackie did recognize the criteria could be met for moral values to obtain in a theistic world (Evans, 2013, p. 231). Nevertheless, he rejects theism and objective morality, believing that naturalism fails to give us resources to account for objective morality.

But our guilt feelings are often perceived as objective, which may indicate that they are. In other words, when we perceive that our feelings of guilt correspond to some moral failure, a causal link for our feelings is provided, which helps to establish the objective reality of our guilt feelings. Swinburne's principle of credulity is helpful here. Concerning this principle, Swinburne (2004, p. 303) writes, "It is a principle of rationality that (in the absence of special considerations) if it seems (epistemically) to a subject that *x* is present (and has some characteristic), then probably *x* is present (and has that characteristic); what one perceives is probably so." While Swinburne situates his principle in the context of a different argument, it seems that it can apply as it relates to the person who feels guilt. That is not to say that someone may not be suffering from a false sense of guilt, but it is to say if he feels guilty for stealing from his friend because he really did steal from his friend, then it seems the link between his guilt feelings and moral trespass is an objective case of guilt. This same principle can help us avoid a lot of the other trappings that moral skepticism brings along with it, such as the existence of a real external world.

The theist is not alone in countering Mackie's error theory. There are naturalists who are moral realists who would object to his theory. Fortunately, the theist is not left alone to defend himself against Mackie's claims. Rather, he can tether himself to other meta-ethical theories, including those of atheist moral realists, to counter his objections.

3.2. Moral Non-Cognitivism

Not surprisingly, as a view, moral non-cognitivism is championed in different ways by its proponents, in which some of the discussion includes highly technical language that is beyond the scope of this thesis to tackle.[120] To simplify, advocates are generally unified in that *x* does not exist mind-independently, but their viewpoints differ regarding how to understand the nature of *x*. As a whole, non-cognitivists do not believe moral propositions express objective truth. Instead, they believe our moral judgments express our emotions, plans, desires, attitudes, etc. This view improves upon error theory in that it does not deny the existence of *x* and provides moral motivation for behaving wisely. If murdering for fun expresses a distaste to me, then I am morally motivated to not murder for fun and this expression of distaste informs my behavior. In this case, moral non-cognitivism offers an explanation for why morality matters.

But like other non-realist theories, this theory runs into a grounding issue for morality. For example, it is difficult to provide an explanation that offers an objective account of morality. This problem for the non-cognitivist emerges when reflecting upon personal expressions that are morally relative to the particular individual at hand. For some individuals, their distaste for murder provides the reason not to murder, but what about the person who has a taste for murder? Given this account of morality, there is no contradictory claim to those individuals who disagree on the issue of murder. While this theory offers explanatory motivation for some not to murder, we are still left with the authority question. If all we are doing is expressing attitudes about murder, then in the absence of some external authority the person's

[120] For works on various forms of non-cognitivism, including emotivism, see A. J. Ayer's ([1936] 1971) *Language, Truth and Logic*; see also the following works by Charles Leslie Stevenson: "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms" (1937), *Ethics and Language* (1944), and *Facts and Values* (1963). Concerning quasi-realism, see the following works by Simon Blackburn: "How to Be an Ethical Anti-Realist," in *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (1993, pp. 166–81) and *Ruling Passions: A Theory of Practical Reason* (1998). Concerning prescriptivism, see the following works by R. M. Hare: *The Language of Morals* (1952) and *Freedom and Reason* (1963); see also Alan Gibbard's (2002) article "The Reason of a Living Being." Finally, for a helpful discussion of distinctions between various theories of cognitivism and non-cognitivism within moral discourse, see Mark van Roojen's (2018) entry "Moral Cognitivism vs. Non-Cognitivism" in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

expressions lack morally objective force. In this event, it is hard to see how morality is binding, since our moral language fails to correspond to objective reality. We may project our distaste onto the external world, which gives us an understanding of our moral sentiments, but our moral language fails to correspond to anything like, "murder is objectively wrong."

The problem can be illustrated as follows: The emotivist may express attitudes or emotions about murder, but in the absence of some mind-independent authority it is hard to see why a particular action is morally binding. If Tim says, "I feel that it would be wrong to murder Doug," we have Tim's feelings about the matter; but if Sean says, "I feel that it would be good to murder Doug," we have his feelings too. But that is all we have—Tim and Sean's emotions on the matter.[121] The question still remains, is murder wrong?

Now consider guilt feelings. If murder is objectively wrong, then for Sean to feel guilty for murdering Doug would be more than a mere expression of his disapproval before the act, but rather murdering Doug would be the cause for which Sean is objectively guilty, while also providing a connective link to explain his feelings of guilt.[122] Even if Tim felt it is wrong to murder Doug, it is hard given his opinion, or even society at large given the non-cognitivist viewpoint, to explain away the dissenters' feelings in the lack of a moral authority to ground our moral decisions. Sure, some of these dissenters may take the collective expressions of their community about matters such as murder to heart, but if they want to commit an action that goes against the grain of their culture by acting out their fantasies in a stealthy manner, who is to say that they are *really* wrong for doing so? They may even realize there will be consequences if they are caught for disturbing the social contract, but they

[121] It could be expressing their beliefs, attitudes, thoughts, plans, or a combination of sentiments.

[122] We can even think of examples in literature where someone felt it was right to murder, as in the case of the man (the narrator) who took the life of the elderly man in Edgar Allan Poe's (1843) short story "Tell-Tale Heart," or Lady Macbeth trying while walking and talking in her sleep to wash the blood off her hands after the regicide of Duncan in Shakespeare's ([1623] 1974) *Macbeth*. Before the murders, both the man in Poe's story and Lady Macbeth thought it was the right thing to do. But after the murders took place, neither could escape their guilt feelings. The point is this: Feeling a certain way about an action before committing it no way guarantees that one will not feel guilt.

may not feel simultaneously obliged to comply, for they are dissenters. All that to say, the theist is not alone in his pursuit to ground his moral behavior in objective reality. The theist is not a lone ranger against the non-cognitivist in his defense of moral realism, as there are also non-theists ready to defend moral realism. All that to say, theism, as we will soon see, does not struggle from the moral relativity that non-cognitivism does, nor does it struggle to supply a way to ground our moral decisions.

Taken together, Mackie's skepticism as discussed with error theory is transparent, perhaps even brutally honest about the lack of moral objectivity, whereas the non-cognitivist comes off a bit more civilized and less transparent about morality as it attempts to make sense of *x* by acting as if one's moral sentiments are objectively wrong. In the end, both the error-theorist and the non-cognitivist end up with the same problem: a grounding issue.

3.3. Constructivism

Constructivism is another metaethical theory like that of the cognitivists, who attempt to make sense of morality by claiming that our moral judgments can be judged as objectively true or false. But like the non-cognitivists, the constructivist maintains that our morality is the construct of human practical reason. Morality is created, not discovered. Like all views, there are various ways in which adherents construct their account of morality. In the section that follows, I will consider one such account, as presented by Gilbert Harman (1996).[123]

Harman obviously rejects absolute truth claims as an ethical relativist, but he avoids slipping into moral nihilism by contending that one can make claims about the truth or falsity of such claims. Such a contention allows Harman to feel that objectivity in morality can be salvaged, in part, if morality is agreed upon as binding by the individual to accept a particular social contract. He recognizes that contracts are relative, but he helps his readers find some grounding satisfaction by comparing

[123] Consider also Ronald Milo's ideal social agreement in his (Milo, 1995) article "Contractarian Constructivism," reprinted (Milo, 2007) in *Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology*. Also see David Gauthier's (1986) book *Morals by Agreement* and Christine Korsgaard's (Korsgaard *et al.*, 1996) collaborative work *The Sources of Normativity*.

Einstein's theory of relativity to show how space and time are relative. Using Einstein's theory as an example, Harman shares how it would be nonsensical to make claims about motion being absolute (since there are various spatio-temporal frameworks for objects in motion and yet the object is always made relative to a particular framework), but it does make sense to make claims that are true and false. In the same way, he argues that morality is not absolute, but we can know what is right and wrong. Harman (1996) writes, "Moral right and wrong (good and bad, justice and injustice, virtue and vice, etc.) are always relative to a choice of moral framework. What is morally right in relation to one moral framework can be morally wrong in relation to a different moral framework. And no moral framework is objectively privileged as the one true morality." What are the problems at stake with Harman's assessment?

I will address three here. The first problem with Harman's account is the morally motivated society is not motivated for morality's sake, but for its own sake. It is hard to feel good about the moral deeds performed by my fellow citizens if their actions are motivated out of a desire to self-protect. And while feeling good may not be the goal of morality, moral actions motivated out of self-interest are hard to take seriously. For one could always reason, "Had it been in Thomas's greater interest to do otherwise, he would have done otherwise." But this is what ensues from social agreements that are built on the motto, "I won't do *x* to you if you don't do *x* to me."

A second problem with Harman's account is that it undermines moral authority. If there are no universal obligations and morality is, after all, glued to a particular moral framework, it lacks a compelling authority to motivate participants to uphold it. If morality is to be objective and authoritative, it must hold despite people's beliefs about it. But on Harman's account, the person must have personal buy-in. If that is the case, he may take it or leave it if his personal interests are in conflict with his culture. For we all know people who break their agreements, especially self-interested ones. And why not, if there is no ultimate foundation upon which to construct morality; why bother with things like agreements *if* the system can be tweaked? Agreements are only authoritative for those participants who are willing to comply. The authority is self-selected. Even if some may start off strong in holding to the agreement, who is to say the same batch of citizens will not have a change of heart down the road?

A third problem is related to the world at large. While it is easy to understand how each culture can shape their own moral agreements, what happens when these agreements clash with other cultures? Is there not still a responsibility for the well-being of the world at large? How then do we handle international moral affairs? This is the problem with applying Einstein's equation to the realm of morals. If there are no universals, then there are no universal obligations to help our sister continents in need. Furthermore, in the absence of universal objective morals, there is always the risk of cultural elitism, which has not been a good friend of history. The inability on Harman's account to provide a transcultural ethic that transcends culture helps us see one way in which people can work together out of self-interest, but it fails to show how we can help the world at large. Morals clash. Wars happen. Disagreements ensue. Is there anything more ultimate than a social agreement that is subject to change? I think there is, as I will soon share.

In the meantime, it is not difficult to see where Harman would part ways with my first premise. Harman would not have a hard time recognizing universal guilt feelings. However, as I would argue, the cause of guilt feelings would be culturally dependent. The part where Harman would disagree is regarding the argument that moral guilt is universally objective. And it is easy to see why. If morals are culturally relative, then there is no room for universal objective guilt. The problem is that if there is no such thing as universal obligations, then it also means there is no such thing as universal guilt when the obligation is compromised. This may come as a relief to some, but is it true? Below I will argue that universal objective moral guilt exists.

3.4. The Delusional Explanation

A fourth objection to the claim that universal objective moral guilt feelings exist is to argue that those who feel guilty are simply delusional at worst and illusory at best because there is no such thing as objective moral guilt. All moral anti-realists fit this claim, though they may prefer a friendlier term than "delusional." Nietzsche, whom we discussed in chapter 3, is not so gracious, and he fits this category because he believed that the masses were prone to such delusion and that guilt was far from objective. This is because he believed moral norms were fixed by cultures and put in place to tame society, not that there are real objective moral truths to render people

objectively guilty in the event that they failed to comply. Rather, for Nietzsche there is no *real* morality, and therefore the person experiencing guilt feelings is living under the delusion of guilt rooted in the false premise that there is such a thing as objective morality. In fact, for Nietzsche, true freedom will not be realized until humanity is at last released from this delusion. However, is it not more obviously true that some things are obviously wrong? For example, consider a student who dissects his science teacher just for the fun of it because the teacher gave him a failing grade. Is the student's behavior just an experiment for fun or murder? Am I really deluded to believe that this really is wrong? Or would I not be more deluded to deny that this is wrong? Of course the anti-realist might argue just because we are emotionally averse to such things does not make something objectively wrong. I am sure that is the case regarding some of our emotional postures, but on examples like the one above it seems to me that it is worth paying attention to our systemic response.

Moral philosopher Michael Ruse and biologist Edward O. Wilson (1985, pp. 51–52) deny an objective moral realm in favor of their view that morality is simply an illusion that has been "fobbed off" on humanity through the process of natural selection.[124] This is not to say that Ruse and Wilson suppose morality does not play a role, as the illusion is helpful for achieving social harmony and for aiding humanity toward survival, but beyond that, the illusion is simply a useful fiction. However, one might reasonably ask, why pick on morality and relegate it to an illusion? Is it not true that dissecting the science teacher for fun is as seemingly wrong as 2 + 2 = 4 is right? The wife agonizing over the loss of her husband, whom the student dissected simply for giving the grade the student deserved, would not find much comfort in Ruse and Wilson's reply that she is under an illusion or even is delusional to believe that the student was *really* wrong and thus *objectively* guilty for murdering her husband. What comfort would the wife find in knowing that the perpetrator simply disregarded the usefulness of the fiction that dissecting teachers for fun is wrong? Not that the desire for comfort can turn illusions into reality, but Ruse and Wilson appear to subjectivize

[124] However, Ruse and Wilson (1985, pp. 51–52) use the term "illusion" for those who blindly fall under the illusion of morality and consider them delusional. The so-called enlightened ones (apparently like Ruse) are spared from the spell of the delusion by recognizing that morality is *just* an illusion. Therefore, in his view, to believe that the illusion of morality is objectively real is to be in a delusional state.

what is objectively obvious. Moreover, the entire justice system operates from the stance that those justly deemed guilty are *really* guilty, namely that they are not deluded.[125] Obviously, Ruse and Wilson would think that dissecting teachers is wrong and that the justice system is necessary. But then why does it apparently not sound odd to Ruse and Wilson (1985, pp. 51–52) to suggest that the history of morals can be summed up as an illusion that has been "fobbed off" on us?

Contra Ruse and Wilson, philosopher and moral realist Richard Swinburne (2009, p. 152) offers a different angle: "If some philosopher's theory of meaning or knowledge has the consequences that there cannot be moral truths or that we cannot know what they are, then we must reject that theory since it will be more obvious that genocide is wrong than that his or her theory is true." Using the spatio-temporal universe to argue analogously, it is more reasonable to think that we actually do live in a spatio-temporal universe than to accept the skeptical hypothesis that we are brains in a vat or that our perceptions of reality are an illusion. Conversely, it is far less costly to accept an obvious, straightforward hypothesis than it is to embrace a skeptical hypothesis based on an extraordinary claim (e.g., almost everyone in the world is deluded about moral guilt).[126] Expressed similarly to Swinburne's statement, yet from an opposing viewpoint, in a debate with William Lane Craig hosted by the Veritas Forum, atheist and moral realist Louise Antony (Craig and Antony, 2008) went on record as saying, "Any argument for moral skepticism is going to be based on premises which are less obvious than the existence of objective moral values themselves." Both Swinburne, a theist, and Antony, an atheist, while diametrically opposed in worldview, nevertheless recognize the epistemological obviousness of moral objectivity. While others would demur, both Swinburne and Antony agree on one thing: that moral realism is more obvious or intuitive than the premises used to establish moral skepticism.

[125] I concede that the court of law is dealing with legal guilt. However, much of the guilt that is dealt with legally entails moral guilt. For example, as in the case of murder, while the murderer is tried in the court of law and convicted legally, his legal conviction is the result of his moral guilt.

[126] Most philosophers agree that while skeptical hypotheses are coherent and *possibly* true (and possibly even irrefutable), they are almost certainly false.

Occam's razor, the principle that the simplest explanation is usually the right one (all other things being equal), is another response one could offer concerning Ruse and Wilson's theory. On naturalism, moral realism is less likely to be true than it would be on supernaturalism. While, simplicity is not always the solution for deciphering challenging problems, in the realm of moral theory it unnecessarily complicates the problem of moral discourse to contend that humanity is under the spell of a cosmic delusion. Though some might argue just the opposite, arguing that it is simpler to acknowledge guilt feelings without having to defend the idea of objective moral guilt. It seems to me that it is hard to pick and choose in the emotional realm. Take other emotions, for example, anger. If people feel angry, though they may have unjustifiable reasons to be angry, there are times when their anger can find an external correlate that makes their anger justifiable. The same type of internal emotions can find other external correlates. Jealousy, shame, laughter, etc. are sparked by something external to us as each of the various human emotions have a role to play in how life works. In the case of guilt, the role of guilt feelings (i.e. authentic guilt feelings) alerts us to a moral violation. Such connections make better sense of our guilt feelings and are thus a simpler explanation of our guilt feelings than to deny the relationship between guilt feelings and the fact of one's guilt.

3.5. The Global Hallucination Explanation

Another objection to the claim that universal objective moral guilt feelings exist, is to declare that the universal experience of the external world is in principle a global hallucination.[127] This claim comes undone under the same replies that Swinburne, Antony, and their use of Occam's razor supplied above. That is, any argument that attempts to establish this claim will be built on premises that are harder to maintain than the very claim it opposes. Put another way, it is more reasonable to believe that the one who truly believes that guilty feelings are pure fiction or the result of mass hallucination is the one who is hallucinating or delusional. It is more apparent prima facie that there is such a thing as an external world or a corresponding thing

[127] A view hardly recognized anymore, but at the obvious risk of not including it, I offer this summary.

such as objective moral guilt to explain one's guilty feelings than it is to construct an argument from supposed global hallucination.

Similarly, there is a parallel structure between this argument and the argument that derives the existence of an external object by appealing to perceptual experience. If *x* perceives an apple on the table, then the best explanation is that there is an apple on the table. As Swinburne (2004, p. 303) states in regard to his principle of credulity, "If it seems (epistemically) to a subject that *x* is present (and has some characteristic), then probably *x* is present (and has that characteristic); what one seems to perceive is probably so." Unless one has good reason to doubt what he perceives, he is within his epistemic rights to believe what he perceives to be true. If someone believes that he dissected his teacher and feels guilty about it, he is right to believe that he is indeed objectively guilty, and his experience of feeling guilty serves to confirm his belief that he should have done otherwise. On the contrary, if someone wakes up from a dream in which he was an anteater, he would not be within his epistemic rights to believe that he lost his human nature. Rather, he is more apt to be hallucinating, or simply dreaming. There are no cases, let alone universal experiences, to confirm the dreamer's belief.

In addition, a person's suspicion that his guilt feelings are non-hallucinatory can be strengthened by casting a universal net over the cosmic landscape in an attempt to catch humanity in the same dilemma of experiencing guilty feelings. The catch will prove fruitful in this test, providing universal warrant to justify his claim that he is not alone in experiencing feelings of guilt. Such feelings are not easily dismissed, and the universality of the experience of moral guilt offer good reasons (epistemically) for also believing in objective moral guilt.

Such a test can even aid those bereft of guilt feelings (e.g. psychopaths) by taming their choices as they are still supplied with good reasons for believing in objective moral guilt, based on the systemic evidence of those who have the emotional capacity to recognize guilt feelings. While feelings may help reinforce the reality of objective moral guilt, the lack of *feeling* guilty does not suddenly erase the reality of *being* guilty. In the subsections above I have argued that despite these five possible objections, universal objective moral guilt feelings do exist, which is stated below in premise 2 of the syllogism for my chain argument *from* moral guilt.

2. Universal objective moral guilt feelings exist.

While it is clear why the atheistic non-moral realist will reject premise 1, it is less clear, given atheistic moral realism, why proponents of this theory will also reject premise 2. What objection might adherents of atheistic moral realism make? They may claim that the presence of psychopaths serves as a direct refutation of premise 2.[128] The validity of this objection will now be addressed.

3.6. Objection to Premise 2: The Psychopath Objection

The contention of the psychopath objection is that since psychopaths fail to feel guilt, there is no such thing as universal guilt. Thus, the first objection to the claim that universal objective moral guilt feelings exist is simply to point to the case of psychopaths.[129] Psychopaths are those who are incapable of feeling guilty. For example, the objector would argue that the psychopath who steals a purse from an elderly lady and fails to feel guilty invalidates the claim that universal guilt feelings exist. This is an understandable objection, but does the existence of psychopaths, who fail to experience feelings of guilt, thwart premise 2 of my syllogism? I do not believe so. First, even if universal guilt feelings did not exist, that would not imply that universal guilt does not exist. As mentioned above, one can be guilty without feeling guilty. For example, if a psychopath standing before the judge who just rightly sentenced him to life in prison for murdering his wife were to exclaim, "But Your Honor, I do not feel guilty," this would not change the fact that this person *is* guilty, nor would such a reply likely engender a sympathetic response from the judge. Rather, such a reply is likely to cause the judge to have greater concern.

Or consider another illustration. I was born color blind; more technically, I am severely color differentiated in that I see color but struggle to differentiate certain colors from one another. Now I do not doubt for a moment that universal objective

[128] Obviously, atheistic non-moral realists could argue similarly.

[129] Mistakenly, psychopaths and sociopaths are often lumped together. While both share clinical similarities, psychopaths lack empathy and the ability to feel guilt, whereas sociopaths can experience empathy and guilt but often fail to do so. Both disorders can exhibit themselves in varying degrees.

colors exist, but I do doubt my ability to discern greens from browns and purples from blues. However, my colorblindness, or anyone else's for that matter, does not dismantle the truth that objective colors exist.[130] Nor is the police officer likely to let me off the hook for running a red light on hearing that it looked brown to me. With this visual handicap, I have a responsibility to learn how to live in a world where many of the rules are set by color and act accordingly. Similarly, the psychopath may lack the ability to feel guilt, but this does not excuse him from learning society's moral code and following suit.

Some atheists claim that psychopaths pose a serious problem to theistic ethics. Baggett (2014) dismisses this claim and directs his attention to a challenge issued by atheist Erik Wielenberg (2008) in his book *God and the Reach of Reason*. In the context of discussing C. S. Lewis's moral argument, Wielenberg (2008, p. 80) states, "Perhaps more problematic for Lewis's argument than variation in the deliverances of conscience is the fact that some people apparently lack a conscience altogether. Psychopathy (sometimes called 'sociopathy') is a personality disorder characterized by, among other things, the absence of the capacity to experience various emotions, including empathy, love, and guilt." Wielenberg (2008, pp. 80–81) quotes leading psychopathologist Robert D. Hare's (1999) description of psychopaths, "They *know* the rules but follow only those they choose to follow, no matter what the repercussions are for others. They have little resistance to temptation, and their transgressions elicit no guilt. Without the shackles of a nagging conscience, they feel free to satisfy their needs and wants and do whatever they think they can get away with." Baggett addresses Wielenberg's challenge by acknowledging that a psychopath's lack of feelings is a concern, but not an irredeemable one. While the psychopath may have little to no emotional capacity, he or she still has reasoning capacity. Baggett (2014) writes, "A psychopath is a person who doesn't feel appropriately about his actions, but reason still leads to moral law. So psychopaths are not incapable of recognizing the moral law, they just lack the right emotional

[130] It is far more likely that some people, like myself, simply fail to recognize the various nuances of color than it is to conclude that given some people's color blindness, there is no such thing as objective colors.

responses to it. Thus they are disadvantaged, but not in a way that precludes knowledge of the moral law."[131]

Prima facie, in spite of the psychopath objection, premise 2 of my syllogism seems obviously true, at least more so than the denial of guilty feelings. Our moral experience coheres to this sentiment because guilt feelings do not disrupt just theists. No, every stream of thought regardless of one's cosmic stance has found its members disturbed by guilt. Neither the theist nor the atheist has managed to fully eclipse their guilt feelings. This, then, leads to premise 3 of the syllogism.

3. Therefore, (the best explanation is that) universal objective moral guilt exists.

Given the conditional validity of premise 1, and the affirmation of premise 2 of the antecedent of the conditional statement in premise 1, the middle conclusion in line 3 follows as the best explanation. And if universal objective moral guilt exists, the inevitable question remains: What is the ultimate explanation of this moral phenomenon? I will argue that by implication a certain *type* of God does exist, as stated next in premise 4 of the syllogism.

4. If universal objective moral guilt exists, then there is a (a) personal, (b) all-knowing, (c) moral lawgiver who is (d) good and (e) and fit to hold us accountable.[132]

[131] In the same post, Baggett (2014) discusses David Wood, who despite his lack of guilt feelings as a psychopath and atheist learned to function virtuously in a moral world through use of his reason. Though technically diagnosed as a sociopath, given Hare's definition of a psychopath, Wood seems to fit this description better than a sociopath because of his inability to experience proper emotional responses from as far back as he can remember. For Wood's story, see "David Wood: Why I Am a Christian," Acts 17 Apologetics (2014), http://www.acts17.net/2014/12/david-wood-why-i-am-christian.html. As it pertains to accountability, Robert D. Hare (1999, p. 143) in *Without Conscience* concludes a chapter with this statement: "In my opinion, psychopaths certainly know enough about what they are doing to be held accountable for their actions."

[132] These five characteristics of God are not meant to be exhaustive. The list could be shortened to argue for a personal, all-knowing, moral lawgiver, or perhaps even lengthened upon

The first half of my argument was developed abductively and is less controversial than the second half with its deductive use of argumentation to which I now shift in order to a to complete my chain argument.[133] While atheistic moral realists would concur that universal objective moral guilt exists, they would not concur that this in itself entails God's existence. Conversely, I will now argue given the first half of my argument that if universal objective moral guilt indeed exists, then there exists a personal, all-knowing, moral lawgiver who is good and fit to hold us accountable.[134] As my argument is made, along the way we will encounter two objections to this premise: (1) the atheistic moral Platonist objection, and (2) the anonymous source objection.

3.7. First Objection to Premise 4(a): Atheistic Moral Platonism

Unlike Ruse and Wilson, Wielenberg (2014) in his book *Robust Ethics: The Metaphysics and Epistemology of Godless Normative Realism* subscribes to a form of godless moral realism, holding that some actions are intrinsically good and some are bad. In acknowledging the difficulty of proving such brute moral facts, he contends that persons should still accept these values unless proven otherwise. Morals, for Wielenberg, are objective like math, and such objectivity and moral obligations are self-evident to him. But how does he epistemologically ground morality? These necessary moral features are grounded in the Platonic realm. I find it interesting that

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further philosophical reflection. For the sake of space, however, I limit myself to five noteworthy characteristics.

[133] By beginning my argument abductively in lieu of beginning deductively with an atheological premise, I have sought to avoid putting my interlocutors on the defensive by considering some of the potential arguments they might give to explain our guilt feelings.

[134] While I believe it is possible to construct arguments for guilt feelings on the basis of naturalism alone, I believe the task grows difficult when objective moral guilt is accounted for on the basis of naturalism. On a personal note, my entire argument could be constructed abductively by wording the final premises as follows:

4. If universal objective moral guilt exists, then the best explanation is that a (a) personal, (b) all-knowing, (c) moral lawgiver who is (d) good and (e) fit to hold us accountable exists.
5. Universal objective moral guilt exists.
6. Therefore, the best explanation is that a personal, all-knowing, moral lawgiver (God) who is good and fit to hold us accountable exists.

Wielenberg, who raises the anonymous source objection (see the discussion under 3.8 “Second Objection to Premise 4[a]”) on account of obligations, believes that we should feel obligated to some personal-less abstract value. As Baggett (2015, p. 138) notes in an exchange with Wielenberg (2015) regarding necessary truths in the moral argument of C. S. Lewis, “The idea that free-floating ontological truths, inert abstract objects, are just sort of out there—without explanation, without foundation—seems by my lights considerably more obscure than a theistic understanding of such truths obtaining because of the noetic activity of God.” I agree. Why according to Wielenberg’s theory would anyone feel morally obligated or even guilty for failing to fulfill such an obligation to an abstract personal-*less* moral attribute ethereally existing in some Platonic realm? In regard to behaviors to which guilt properly applies, Baggett and Walls (2016, p. 176) explain that, “guilt, it is thought, properly attaches to morality in a way it doesn’t to breaking the laws of logic. We don’t feel guilty, and shouldn’t, for making a logical mistake. Maybe we feel silly or even embarrassed, but not guilty. The feeling of guilt, though it can be absent on occasions when we’re still actually guilty and present on occasions when we’re not (which is enough to show these things aren’t identical), more typically points to a real state of guilt.”

In consideration of this first objection to premise 1, here are three problems for atheistic moral realism. First, atheistic moral Platonism faces the problem of extracting an *ought* from an *is*. Knowledge tells us what *is*, whereas values tell us what *ought* to be. Atheistic moral Platonism may tell us that moral values exist, but it cannot tell us *why* anyone is morally obliged to comply.

Second, atheistic moral Platonism and all other forms of objectivism about morality remain in conflict with the non-static course of natural selection. Given the ever-changing state of evolutionary theory, how can anyone be secure in their moral certitude? On this view, even if there were a set of mind-independent moral facts existing from eternity, humanity on an evolutionary course is not likely, even if it did recognize these transcendent values, to submit itself to a morally static state. Evolutionary naturalism is concerned with *fitness*, not with conforming to abstract values. This then creates a moral dilemma for atheistic moral Platonism: it conflicts with naturalism. And the priority for naturalism is not right living but survival.

Third, atheistic moral Platonism raises more questions than it answers. For example, why think that abstract Platonic values exist? Or, what evidence is there that

has convinced the masses that they are to get their cues from the realm of abstract values? Are these values all equal? If so, how is their value measured? How can we recognize their value? Why should I be motivated to follow these values? What about these values produces obligation for me? And more relevant to this inquiry, why on this view would a person be *guilty* for failing to live according to such values?

These seemingly intractable problems make it insuperably difficult to believe that atheistic moral Platonism can furnish a compelling explanation for objective moral guilt. If this is indeed the case, what explanation can account for the moral phenomenon of guilt? I will argue that a particular type of God, namely a God who possesses the following five attributes: (a) personal, (b) all-knowing, (c) moral lawgiver who is (d) good and (e) fit to hold us accountable who exists. We begin with the first attribute of the type of God being described.

3.7.1. First Attribute of Premise 4: Personal

In order to be universally offended, the offended must be a personal agent.[135] A person cannot offend a non-person. Philosopher Robert Merrihew Adams (1999, p. 257) correctly describes the connection between guilt and a personal God as follows: "It is obvious that in theistic traditions guilt has been powerfully connected with rupture or straining of our relationship with God. A divine command theory of the nature of obligation facilitates the understanding of moral guilt as involving offense against a person." Moral guilt is the normal consequence of not making good on one's obligations. An obligation is a moral duty that can be fulfilled or failed. If fulfilled, then no offense is taken. If failed, the agent is rendered morally guilty. Also capturing the connection between our guilt and a personal agent is Alfred Edward Taylor ([1930] 1951, p. 207), who writes, "When we feel as we ought to feel about the evil in ourselves, we cannot help recognizing that our position is not so much that of someone who has broken a wise and salutary regulation, as of one who has insulted or proved false to a person of supreme excellence, entitled to wholehearted devotion."

As discussed above, non-persons like abstract objects or natural laws are indifferent to human action and are not offended in a moral absolute sense. And this is

[135] By "universally offended," I am referring to all persons globally whose moral trespasses have offended (in the past) and do (in the present) offend God personally.

why someone like C. Stephen Evans, who endorses a natural law account of the good, still feels himself in need of being a divine command theorist to account for obligations. In asserting that it is difficult to even comprehend the atheistic moral Platonist position, Craig (2008, p. 178) asks, "What does it mean to say, for example, that the moral value *Justice* just exists? It's hard to know what to make of this. It is clear what is meant when it is said that a person is just; but it is bewildering when it is said that in the absence of any people, *Justice* itself exists. Moral values seem to exist as properties of persons, not as mere abstractions." This is also true of moral guilt, as guilt implies an offense, and abstract values and natural laws take no offense. The law of gravity may be contradicted but not offended if a miracle maker levitates in the air. This is because offense requires personhood. And if values just exist necessarily, like gravity, a case can be made that one ought to follow those values, but those values are indifferent to one's chosen course of action, and they certainly are not offended if one opts out of living according to these values.

Since God is personal, objective moral guilt feelings not only tell us that we should have acted otherwise, but that we were obligated to do so. This will become more clear, in particular, when we consider that the personal nature of God is also a moral lawgiver. Nevertheless, upon failing to make good on one's moral obligations, those functioning with a sensitive conscience can sense the personal nature of the violation, and the feelings therefore *fit* in a context where a moral being exists to whom all persons are ultimately accountable. This incorporeal someone whom humanity is to obey has equipped humanity with a metaphysical intuition, or inner conscience, to sense his voice. Describing the inner workings of conscience and its effect on the human heart, Anglican and later Roman Catholic theologian John Henry Newman, known for his moral argument from conscience (see discussion under 2.3), graphically captures the inner sense of a *personal* God who is there both to affirm and disturb those whose actions are respectively in and out of alignment with his moral will. He expresses this in his novel *Callista*, a story of third-century Christians during the great persecution of the Emperor Decius, in a scene in which the title character, a young pagan woman undergoing conversion, eventually declares to her dismayed brother her growing sense of God's personal presence. Newman (1856, p. 244) writes,

> After a time, Callista said, "Polemo, do you believe in one God?"
>
> "Certainly," he answered; "I believe in one eternal, self-existing something."

> "Well," she said, "I feel that God within my heart. I feel myself in His presence. He says to me, "Do this: Don't do that." You may tell me that this dictate is a mere law of my nature, as is to joy or to grieve. I cannot understand this. No, it is the echo of a person speaking to me. Nothing shall persuade me that it does not ultimately proceed from a person external to me. It carries with it its proof of its divine origin. My nature feels towards it as towards a person. When I obey it, I feel a satisfaction; when I disobey, a soreness—just like that which I feel in pleasing or offending some revered friend. So you see, Polemo, I believe in what is more than a mere "something." I believe in what is more real to me than sun, moon, stars, and the fair earth, and the voice of friends. You will say, Who is He? Has He ever told you anything about Himself? Alas! no!—the more's the pity! But I will not give up what I have, because I have not more. An echo implies a voice; a voice a speaker. That speaker I love and I fear.

This "soreness" that washes over the guilty subsequent to committing a moral transgression feels more intimate than some random law of nature; it feels personal. Newman sees conscience like an inner voice. The conscience cuts both ways. One can feel God's approval when doing the right action and his disapproval after committing a wrong action. The disapproval that one experiences after failing to keep a moral obligation is like a soreness to Newman, which I would describe as guilt feelings. When these guilty feelings flare up, they are to be listened to. They are more than random chemicals firing and misfiring; rather, through the feelings someone is saying something. This explains why guilty feelings feel personal, like *someone* has been offended, because someone has. That someone is God.

The sense of moral guilt is intended to alert the guilty person that he has offended the one who prescribed the moral duty. The duty then is relational, thus thickening the obligation. Guilty individuals are guilty not of violating some random law of nature but of violating the laws of God himself. Through conscience, God speaks to the guilty with an authoritative force of his voice. This voice is the one to whom all guilty persons are ultimately accountable. And by recognizing the personal prescriber as God, humans can discover a heightened sense of moral motivation to please him. As Craig (2008, p. 179) asks his readers to consider, "Suppose that values like *Mercy*, *Justice*, *Love*, *Forbearance*, and the like just exist. How does that result in any moral obligations for me?" There is no moral motivation or compelling sense of ought that one has to fulfill their moral obligations on atheistic moral Platonism, whereas the theistic worldview provides the motivational basis for our duties as duties toward a personal God. The personal nature of our moral lapse helps explain why our

feelings of guilt are intensified, as God is the one seeking to capture and draw our attention to our moral failure by means of our feeling guilty.

3.8. Second Objection to Premise 4(a): The Anonymous Source

A second objection to premise 4(a) can be expressed in the following question: Is humanity guilty for failing to make good on obligations before a God who, if he does exist, does so in obscurity, making it impossible for recipients to recognize the source of their obligations? This is called the anonymous source objection. But is God truly an anonymous source? Philosopher Erik Wielenberg (2014) thinks so, even though he resists the fact that moral obligation has a theistic foundation on account of an objection to his idea of an anonymous letter. The claim he seeks to advance with this idea is that if one received a letter imposing an obligation from an anonymous source, then the recipient has no real obligatory accountability to any such unknown authority. Wielenberg contrasts this lack of obligation with a clear authority figure such as a parent or a military commander whose authority is immediately recognized. In such instances, the child or lower-ranking officers are indeed obliged to fulfill such commands.

At first, Wielenberg's observation and dismay might seem understandable. The *precise* source of our moral obligations is not as clear as some may wish.[136] I am sympathetic to Wielenberg's contention, but does it then follow that the source of our moral obligations is guilty of anonymity for failing to disclose himself clearly? I do not believe so. First, unlike us, God is non-corporeal, which does make the search for our moral source more difficult to track but not impossible. Also, Wielenberg's making of a direct correspondence between the military commander and the parent is not directly analogous. The question then becomes, how can one morally track one's obligations to a divine commander? It seems to me that one must follow the trail *all the way up*. To do so requires compelling reasons to believe that the moral facts, in

[136] According to the Christian tradition, God has made himself known through creation (see Ps 19; Rom 1:18–21) and conscience (see Rom 2:14–15). By these two means of self-disclosure, humans can recognize that God exists and cares about their moral life, but this recognition will not necessarily lead to belief in the God of Christianity. That requires further insight. However, moral arguments for God are ideally situated to serve as a prolegomenon to distinctively Christian theology.

this case moral guilt, lead to God as the ultimate explanatory source of our commands.[137]

People can know about morality without understanding the ontological foundation upon which it lays. The order of knowing is not the same as the order of being. People can know that objective moral guilt exists without an understanding of the ontological foundation that supports them. In the same way, people can know what they ought to do and not know how to articulate why they ought to do it. While the moral source and the moral reason behind the obligation may go undetected, one way we as persons can work our way back to the moral source is by recognizing the guilt feelings that follow an instance of failing to make good on one's moral obligation. The feelings point to a *personal* violation that has taken place. Similarly, in regard to Wielenberg's view, one can throw the question back to him and ask just as reasonably, "Is it clear to those who subscribe to your view that the moral source of their obligations can be grounded in the Platonic realm?" While Wielenberg supplies a thoughtful moral case, it seems that his view of an anonymous source leaves him in the same dilemma—perhaps a worse one. Why follow the Platonic values that Wielenberg subscribes to? Are not those values anonymous and in need of an explanation? Why should a person be obligated to some abstract impersonal source of morality? What authority do abstract values have on humanity? What accountability is there for violating the Platonic realm of morals? It seems if there is a game of anonymity happening, it is more likely to be with the free-floating objects of Platonism than the God of theism. This leads to the second attribute of the type of God being described.

3.8.1. Second Attribute of Premise 4: All-knowing

In order to be universally offended, the offended must not only be personal but all-knowing. By "universally offended," I mean that for all guilt to be accounted for, there needs to be an all-knowing aggrieved person, i.e. a knower is required in each

[137] For a refutation of Wielenberg's (2005) anonymous source objection as well as a case for how God might make known his commands to humanity, see Evans's (2013, pp. 110–117) *God and Moral Obligation*. See also Evans's (2010, pp. 37–45) *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God*, where he shows how God's commands are promulgated to humanity.

case of guilt. A person cannot be offended unless he *knows* about the offense. But some might object by saying that there might be a number of all-knowing beings. To counter, I would appeal to a principle similar to Occam's razor: the principle of parsimony. This principle or scientific law, with its focus on entities, states that entities should not be multiplied needlessly, and the simpler of two competing theories is to be preferred if they can explain what needs explaining equally well. Accordingly, my hypothesis that there is a single knower is simpler than the hypothesis that there are many knowers. Furthermore, given the fact that there cannot be a single human knower in every imaginable case of guilt, it is reasonable to conclude that there is a single omniscient knower to account for humanity's universal sense of guilt. The fact that guilt carries with it a sense of personal offense, or an awareness of being watched, coupled with the fact that this sense is universally experienced necessitates an all-knowing someone. While we can be guilty against another someone without that person knowing about it, we cannot slip an offense by an all-knowing being.

Given this divine attribute, God is the only one to whom humanity could be both exhaustively and ultimately accountable. As an all-knowing God, he is capable of holding humanity accountable for the sum total of their moral deeds as a moral lawgiver.

3.8.2. Third Attribute of Premise 4: Moral Lawgiver

In order to be universally offended, the offended must not only be personal and all-knowing, but also a moral lawgiver. On the one hand, this argument contends for the existence of a personal, all-knowing, good God, who is fit to hold us accountable, and whom we offend; and on the other hand, it contends for the existence of an objective moral lawgiver. But there has to be a mechanism to show that these two beings—the all-knowing, personal good God, who is fit to hold us accountable, and the moral lawgiver—are identical. This is tricky. To connect the dots, I would appeal once again to Occam's razor by arguing that only an objective moral lawgiver can be universally offended. Hence, the one who is offended *is* the moral lawgiver.

Far from divine hiddenness, God as a *personal, all-knowing, good God, who is fit to hold us accountable*, steps out of hiding as the *moral lawgiver* to whom we are

ultimately accountable. If we are morally accountable, then God will make our obligations known, which can be accessed by means of our conscience, the instrument by which humans can detect God's moral law. One might wonder why I argue that the personal, concerned agent in question is the source of objective morality. Because the personal, concerned agent is the *object* of universal moral offense; hence, this agent has an intimate link with universal moral laws. For the moral offense to be genuine it requires (a) a transgression of a moral law and (b) a morally concerned agent.

As human agents we are morally obligated to follow God's divine commands, and in the event that we do not, we are rendered guilty, regardless of whether or not the objective moral guilt is accompanied with moral guilt feelings. The much-discussed Euthyphro Dilemma comes to mind as a possible objection. However, one way this dilemma is solved is when God's omnibenevolent nature is depicted as the ultimate source of good. Therefore, the good is not arbitrarily willed, nor does it necessarily exist in the Platonic realm detached from him, but rather God is the good, and goodness flows from him and is directed at humanity through his divine commands.[138] Our conscience provides the moral machinery to discern God's commands, and the duty of moral agents is to comply. This leads us to fourth attribute of premise 4.

3.8.3. Fourth Attribute of Premise 4: Good

Being personal and all-knowing, this offended moral lawgiver gives observers a window into this God's nature, namely that he is good. Guilt feelings, as uncomfortable as they are, serve to instruct us. As a good God, his commands are issued from his good nature, and when we act out of alignment with his commands, our guilt feelings are meant to alert us to the fact not only that our moral action was wrong, but also that our guilt feelings are instructive in telling us that God cares about our moral behavior because he is good.

[138] Here is where Evans's (2013) *God and Moral Obligation* is helpful as his book comes replete with arguments that fill in the gap for questions I do not have the space to address in this thesis. His book also offers a wealth of further resources for exploring this topic further.

3.8.4. Fifth Attribute of Premise 4: Fit to hold us accountable

Taking the foregoing attributes together, this personal, all-knowing, offended moral lawgiver who is good is also a God who is able to hold us accountable for the life we live. How God does this is not clear from this premise or argument alone, but it is fair to say that the kind of God possessing these attributes would be just in holding us accountable for our wrongdoing by his very nature if he so chooses. Such judgment is his prerogative either in this life, the next, or both. Guilt feelings that accompany guilty actions serve as a moral teacher and are there to help us in our goal of moral improvement. The first act of judgment one experiences in relationship to God are guilt feelings in conjunction with his moral trespass. These feelings as the voice of conscience are there as an internal indictment regarding our actions and can help us acknowledge our wrongdoing and avoid such actions down the road.

Having argued by implication that a certain *type* of God does exist, this leads to the conclusion in line 5 of the syllogism.

5. Universal objective moral guilt exists.

And to the final conclusion in line 6.

6. Therefore, there is a personal, all-knowing, moral lawgiver who is good and fit to hold us accountable who exists.

This personal, all-knowing, moral lawgiver who is good and fit to hold us accountable is God.

4. How This Chain Argument *from* Moral Guilt Contributes to the Moral Argument at Large

In the previous section, I have made a case for a chain argument *from* moral guilt. One of the goals of constructing this version of the moral argument is to seek the best explanation to account for our guilt feelings, and to seek the ultimate explanation for universal objective moral guilt. I contend that this chain argument

from moral guilt offers three advantages or improvements that contribute to the moral argument at large.

4.1. This version of the moral argument avoids the atheological premise of the deductive argument discussed above and leaves room for bridge-building between the theist and atheistic moral realists.

By acknowledging that non-theists can produce a moral explanation for guilt feelings absent of God gets the conversation off to a non-defensive start. Furthermore, the nice thing about the way the chain argument is formulated is that it circumvents the five core concerns that Baggett and Walls (2016) raise in using a deductive moral argument. It accomplishes this by not falling prey to their concerns, yet it also allows for a deductive conclusion that given God as the best explanation of objective moral guilt feelings, he then also is seen as the answer to objective moral guilt.[139]

4.2. This version of the moral argument can be useful in countering the claim made by non-theists that God is culpable for evil or that ultimately God himself is evil.

This argument from guilt reveals not only a moral lawgiver, but also a good God who uses our guilty feelings to show us that we have acted contrary to his moral law. Guilt then reminds us that we have acted wrongly in relation to God's moral commands. Like touching a hot stove, guilt carries with it a message, thus burning the conscience by sending a moral cue to avoid such actions in the future. Through reflection upon one's guilt, one can learn that God cares deeply about the good and that he in fact is the good. This argument counters the idea that God is an evil entity. Guilt feelings show us that we acted outside of his moral will, and the displeasure we experience at the sensation of guilt points to the greater disappointment as understood by God. If God were an evil God, it seems that the overriding universal experience for the participants of acting wrongly would be one of indifference, not guilt.

Furthermore, far from being morally blameworthy or responsible for evil or being evil himself, God shows humanity by guilt that they are accountable to him for

[139] For the five problems Baggett and Walls (2016) see with the deductive argument, see their book *God and Cosmos*, pp. 77–78.

their moral failure to comply with his moral obligations.[140] Not only that, but it would be hypocritical on God's part to hold humanity accountable for evil actions that he is in the end responsible for. And finally, God by definition, in the Anselmian sense, is the greatest conceivable being and one who is worthy of worship and moral cooperation. This is far from the notion that God is a being who can be accused of moral wrongdoing, or worse that God is a being considered an evil being.

4.3. This version of the moral argument displays the richness of the moral argument by displaying some of the key divine attributes, which other versions do not necessarily establish.

Embedded in this argument is a *type* of God: one who is personal, all-knowing, and a moral lawgiver who is good and fit to hold us accountable. By "personal," he can be offended. By "all-knowing," he is equipped with a universal awareness of all moral actions. By "a moral lawgiver," as discussed above, he cares deeply about humanity's moral behavior. By "good," he cares about our moral behavior so much so that he gets our attention through guilt feelings to alert us to not only our wrongdoing, but also his good nature. And by one who is "fit to hold us accountable," he is the rightful authority before whom all humanity is culpable and answerable.

5. Practical Implications of the Argument *from* Moral Guilt

The argument *from* moral guilt also involves at least four practical implications.

[140] If God holds persons to a morally perfect standard that flows from his nature, then this itself refutes the idea that God is evil. Regarding the cause of evil, it is the result of living in a world marked by free will. Regarding the nature of evil, it is best understood as a privation of good, rather than a pure substance of sorts. For an accessible yet scholarly treatment of evil and God's responsibility, see analytic philosopher Alvin Plantinga's *God, Freedom and Evil* (1977). See also philosopher Stephen Law's article "The Evil-God Challenge" (2010). For a response to Law's argument, see William Lane Craig's answer to Question of the Week "#238 The 'Evil god' Objection" (2011) at https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/question-answer/the-evil-god-objection. For an argument that an evil God is far less likely than a good one, see Peter Forrest's article "Replying to the Anti-God Challenge: A God without Moral Character Acts Well" (2012).

5.1. This version of the moral argument can aid those with guilty feelings to learn from their guilt by viewing moral guilt as a teacher of right moral actions through antithesis.

Let me explain. By reflecting upon one's moral action, which created the occasion for guilty feelings, a person can reflect upon the antithetical action that should have been acted on in order to spot the non–guilt-producing action or morally superior route to take. For example, the person who feels guilty for lying can learn by reflecting on his moral guilt the importance of telling the truth. This instruction helps the person realize how telling the truth would have spared him this lively sense of guilt feelings, which could have been avoided by doing the morally right action. Or the person racked with guilty feelings for stealing can learn that working for one's possessions could have prevented her from her current state of angst. Or the person overwhelmed by guilt feelings for committing adultery can learn that faithfulness would have spared him from his present emotional inflictions. Granted, this line of thinking will not equate to an exact moral formula, but it is one way to explore moral alternatives that will not result in feeling guilty.[141] Through such reflection and a focused commitment to new moral pathways, one is guaranteed a more formidable pathway that results in less guilt and a morally robust way of life.

5.2. This version of the moral argument can function as a sign or pointer in revealing yet another way in which God has disclosed himself to humanity.

Contra ultra-skeptical arguments for the divine hiddenness of God, theists have long held that God has made himself known to curious onlookers, even showcasing the numerous ways that God has disclosed himself through nature. In his book *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God*, C. Stephen Evans (2010) features a plethora of examples from the natural order of things to depict how God has

[141] Morality is not always discovered through considering the antithetical action to whatever behavior produced a person's guilty feelings. In fact, sometimes a preferable moral action is discovered through the middle alternative. For example, the person who feels guilt for getting inebriated may not have to antithetically conclude that he can never drink again to elude feeling guilty. While it is true that the person would not feel guilty for being drunk if he never drank, it is also possible that he could embrace the middle alternative and choose moderation over total abstinence and still dodge guilt.

manifested himself by providing various "signs" to detect him. Evans (2010, p. 2) writes:

> The nature of a sign, as I shall develop the notion, is to be a "pointer," something that directs our attention to some reality or fact and makes knowledge of that reality or fact possible, and this feature is what explains the continuing appeal of the arguments.
>
> However, these signs, like signs in general, do not point in a conclusive or compelling fashion. Signs have to be perceived, and once perceived must be "read."… The natural signs that point to God's reality are signs that can be interpreted in more than one way and thus sometimes misread and sometimes not even perceived as signs. They point to God but do not do so in a coercive manner.[142]

The theistic arguments, such as the teleological, cosmological, and moral arguments that philosophers have developed, are meant to take their aspect of moral interest and show how that particular chosen aspect serves as a sign or pointer in drawing our attention to God's existence. In taking the aspect of moral guilt: it too serves as a type of sign or pointer that, although once considered beyond itself, can track the one to whom the offender offended. Like a check engine light that serves as a sign to alert the driver that the engine needs the attention of a mechanic, so too moral guilt operates similarly with humanity by revealing that something has gone awry in the chosen action and the person is now in need of a moral remedy to bridge the moral gap. Guilt then provides an emotional punch that can convince the heart to avoid such actions down the road when given the opportunity to act out.

5.3. This version of the moral argument improves the moral argument by including how guilt feelings relate to one's moral standing before God versus relegating the guilty feelings to the purely subjective category.

Guilty feelings according to this argument can be objective insofar as they correspond to violating a moral obligation. In this case, persons are right to feel guilt

[142] In his preface to *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God*, Evans (2010, p. viii) notes that the discernable knowledge as revealed in nature that serves as a sign or points to God's existence is accompanied by two characteristics, saying, "It will be both widely available to humans and yet easy to resist." These two thoughts are turned into two principles that Evans calls the "Wide Accessibility Principle" and the "Easy Resistibility Principle." For Evans then, these two principles help explain why the debate continues about whether or not God exists after all.

when they have indeed done wrong. In the event that a victim is guilty of committing some wrong action *x*, he has created a rift between himself and his good Creator. This argument invites transgressing parties to move past their feelings to their guilt, and then to make the connection that guilt points to a personal, all-knowing, moral lawgiver who is good and fit to hold us accountable.

5.4. This version of the moral argument acknowledges that humanity is universally guilty before God, but it leaves the guilty in need of moral resolve.

In a sense, this argument leaves people hanging in the despair of their guilt, in that no remedy is offered. However, a possible solution to moral guilt will be discussed in the next chapter where I will there argue that the solution to moral guilt looks Christian-shaped. But before people will see their need to be absolved of their guilt, they must first recognize that they are indeed guilty. Not until they acknowledge their guilty status will they be ready to explore options to eradicate their guilt. Through this argument, guilty individuals can learn not only that they are guilty toward a good God, but that what they still need is reconciliation and forgiveness. Admittedly, this argument stops short of resolving people's guilt, but it does pave the way for the journey toward resolving our guilt feelings.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, moral guilt is easier to make sense of in a theistic world. The illusionary moral world of Ruse and Wilson reduces guilt to a bad case of paranoia and goes against our common-sense experience; the anti-realism of the likes of Nietzsche or Freud provides no grounding for guilt, as their approach lacks a foundation to support it. Furthermore, in their blindness they envisioned guilt as a thief of happiness, and consequently they failed to recognize any value in preserving the role of guilt. Instead, they sought to deny what guilt may be objectively communicating. Yet, to get rid of guilt you must part with the moral laws that instigate feeling guilt upon breaking such laws in the first place. This recipe inevitably eradicates the foundation upon which morality is built. And Darwin, though he offers little to ground morality, at least recognized the instrumental role of guilt in helping the fit to survive. But he too, like Nietzsche and Freud, rejected a mind-independent moral law that humans are universally bound to. Rather, for Darwin, morals were

culturally relative, and guilt, though it can aid humanity toward being better people, has no universal hold. Then there are the atheistic moral realists, like Wielenberg, who hold to a Platonism that may offer an explanatory foundation, but it is a weak foundation, subject to collapse, as there is no real moral authority, accountability, or motivation for people to make good on their obligations. While much could still be said regarding the wide array of naturalistic options, one can at least grasp the ease by which theism can ground its moral claims.

Taken at large, when recognizing a personal, all-knowing, moral lawgiver who is good as the source of our moral obligations and who also is our accuser when we behave in ways that produce moral guilt, we are given not only a better explanation of our guilt feelings via theism, but a universal explanation for objective moral guilt itself.

In the next chapter we will not only see how the God of Christianity fits the description of God as discussed in this chapter, but also consider the remedy to our guilt that this God provides.

Chapter 7

A Christian-Shaped Response to Moral Guilt

1. Introduction

How might a Christian respond to the problem of guilt? While there are various traditions of Christian theism, I want to consider at least one response—an evangelical Christian response to guilt.[143] While many non-evangelical Christians would subscribe to much of what is written in this chapter as a valid explanation and resolution of the problem of guilt, at the risk of including others unwillingly I will limit myself to that branch of Christianity I am most familiar with—evangelical Christianity—in order to show how this version of Christian theism might offer someone a remedy for their guilt.[144]

With that confession in mind, the aim of this chapter is fourfold. First, I will show how the attributes of God based on Christian theism correspond to the theistic version of God argued for in the previous chapter. Second, I will describe the status of humanity's guilty condition as described by Christian theism. Third, I will consider Christian theism and its response to resolve human guilt by means of Christ's atonement. And finally, I will share five reasons why Christian theism's response to guilt is appealing before tying up the chapter with a quick wrap-up.

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[143] Unless otherwise stated, all uses of the term "Christian theism" in this chapter are meant to convey a particular type of Christian theism, namely evangelical Christian theism. That is not to say that other traditions of Christianity would disagree with this chapter; far from it, because there would be great concord on many points of this discussion. But to avoid being overly cumbersome and having to point out each of those distinctions, and for the sake of the delimitations already in place, I will resist. Obviously, there is no end to definitions. Even within evangelical Christian theism there are points to contend. It is not as if this type of theism, i.e. evangelical Christian theism, is perfectly hammered out into a tidy little doctrinal corpus. Nevertheless, the content shared in *this* chapter would capture the ethos of evangelical Christian theism.

[144] The verses used throughout this chapter to support the various points are typically used by evangelical Christians to validate their view. While many other non-evangelical Christians would also concur, some may take issue with certain texts, hence my concession.

2. Theism and the Attributes of God

In the previous chapter, I argued that universal objective guilt points us to a God who is personal, all-knowing, and a moral lawgiver who is good and fit to hold us accountable. In this chapter, I show how the God of Christian theism not only fits the theistic description of God as discussed in chapter 6, but also how Christian theism offers an account of how moral guilt emerged and yet moves beyond the problem by offering a robust solution to guilt through Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross.[145]

Before limiting our discussion of God to the five attributes discussed in chapter 6 (section 3.4), it is right to acknowledge that Christian theism subscribes to a God who far exceeds these attributes being described as one who is infinite, eternal, unconditionally loving, holy, gracious, merciful, forgiving, self-existent, and worthy of worship.[146] So then, not only does the God of Christian theism accord with the theistic vision of him depicted in the previous chapter, but also he fits Anselm's vision of God as the greatest of all conceivable beings. In fact, to contrast Anselm's vision over and against the Christian concept of God is to promote a false dichotomy because Anselm himself was devoutly Christian. But in keeping with the purpose of this section, I will now narrow my focus to show that the God subscribed to by Christian theism possesses within himself the five attributes we have discussed, which also will prepare us to consider Christian theism's response to resolve moral guilt.

2.1. God is personal.

Christian casemakers have long argued that the God of Christianity, by his very essence, is personal and relational, eternally existing in non-corporeal, triune community. According to them, there is one God (Deut 6:4; 1 Cor 8:4; Gal 3:20) revealed in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14)—

[145] Here again is another concession.

[146] As one worthy of worship, this is the type of God that philosopher Paul Moser (2009) argues for in particular in his book *The Elusive God*. A God worthy of worship is one without moral defect, who desires goodness toward humanity, even offering them redemption. For an insightful discussion where he delves into this topic more fully, see Moser's (2020) interview entitled "Dr. Paul Moser, Is there reason to believe in God?"

and each person is fully God (1 Cor 8:6; John 1:1–4; Acts 5:3–4). In addition, they would be quick to point out how the Scriptures consistently use personal pronouns such as *he*, *him*, and *his* in reference to God's personal nature. Furthermore, components such as mind, will, and emotions, which when taken together are often assumed to entail personhood, are each ascribed to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For instance, God the Father is a person described as having a mind (Isa 55:8–9), will (1 Pet 2:15), and emotions (Ps 78:40). God the Son is also a person characterized by having a mind (Luke 2:52), will (Luke 22:15), and emotions (John 11:35). And so also the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, is said to have a mind (Rom 8:27), will (Gal 5:17), and emotions (Eph 4:20). Moreover, each of the three persons of the Godhead are seen to possess all the attributes of God.

While God's attributes transcend humanity, Christian theists contend that the personal God of Christianity is also immanently involved with humans, whom he created in his image (Gen 1:26). There has been no shortage of discussion concerning what it means to be created in God's image,[147] but perhaps a component of it they would argue is that we humans are created to reflect God's personal moral character (Lev 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:7; 1 Pet 1:16).[148] Christians recognize after the fall that humanity's reflective capacity was certainly tarnished, but also would argue that God's moral demand was not lowered to accommodate transgressors. Instead, his

[147] When Christian theists say that we are created in God's image, that is not to equate humans with God. To them, God is a necessary, non-contingent being who transcends us. Regarding this topic, speculations are plentiful. While acknowledging this, here is how some might understand what it means to be created in God's image. In *part*, there are those who can see how being created in the image of God can refer to our ability to share in *some* of God's attributes such as personhood, volition, intellect, emotions, and things of that sort. And as a holy God, who desires us to be holy, others can also see how part of the image of God in us is to reflect his moral virtues. For more on this subject, see Kenneth Boa's (2001) *Conformed to His Image*, and J. P. Moreland's (2009) *The Recalcitrant* Imago Dei.

[148] This is not to say that persons with mental disabilities like retardation are not created in God's image, nor is it to say that people who develop mental illnesses like Alzheimer's are no longer able to reflect God's image, as both retardation and Alzheimer's affect the brain and would limit one's ability to discern God's moral commands. As a loving and gracious God, Christians contend that he knows everyone's limitations, and as a just judge, he takes all of this into account as it relates to our moral standing with him.

moral expectations remained firmly intact as his character serves as the final standard by which all moral actions are judged.

This is a significant point. Christians claim that since persons are created by God, this allows us to intuit things about his personal nature. In particular, in keeping with the theme of this thesis, this is especially true as it relates to the realm of morality, whereby humans can detect the personal nature of God through (1) our guilt feelings and (2) our moral obligations.

First, God's personal nature can be detected through our guilt feelings. Perhaps this can help explain why guilt feelings accompanied by our moral failure feels personal. Far from offending some free-floating abstract object, the morally guilty person offends a personal God. While simply failing to conform to a Platonic virtue might show how one is objectively guilty in complying with virtue *x*, it certainly cannot explain *why* one ought to feel guilty. Virtue *x* is person*less* and therefore indifferent to whether we conform to its value. As Taylor ([1930] 1951, p. 207) writes, "When we feel as we ought to feel about the evil in ourselves, we cannot help recognizing that our position is not so much that of someone who has broken a wise and salutary regulation, as of one who has insulted or proved false to a person of supreme excellence, entitled to wholehearted devotion." Here, then, moral guilt is personal in nature, and by it we can see that we have morally fractured our relationship with God. Adams (1999, p. 257) remarks, "It is obvious that in theistic traditions guilt has been powerfully connected with rupture or straining of our relationship with God." Since God is personal, he can be offended, and our guilt is his way of signaling to us that a relational breach has transpired. The Christian would argue that guilt then is meant to provide us with an epistemic sense that something has gone awry in our relationship to a personal God, and we are in need of repair.[149]

[149] The fact of guilt should be accompanied by feelings of guilt. John Hare (1996, p. 223) remarks, "It is a mistake, however, to conclude that the feeling of guilt is not usually part of a mature human response to moral failure. Not to feel guilty at all after a moral failure requires either not perceiving it as a moral failure (moral blindness) or acknowledging it as such but not caring about it (amoralism)." He also concedes, "There is also, separately, the *judgment* that something was a moral failure." I would add, as discussed in the previous chapter, the psychopath might recognize the fact of guilt but remain bereft of felt guilt (p. 223).

Second, God's personal nature can be detected through our moral obligations. As Adams (1999, p. 257) further adds, "A divine command theory of the nature of obligation facilitates the understanding of moral guilt as involving offense against a person." Similarly, Evans (2013, p. 28) writes, "If God exists and is a genuine person, then the relation between creature and creator is a genuine social relation, and like other relations, carries with it distinctive obligations." If I were to reflect on the cause of my guilt feelings, it would not take long to discover some moral obligation that I violated that in turn led to my feelings of guilt. But then the question remains: To whom was I obligated? On the basis of Christian theism, we are obligated to God. Therefore, when I lapse morally and feel guilty for failing to keep my moral obligations, the offense seems personal because it *is* personal. If God created us, we are not our own. Our moral obligations, when rightly discerned as coming from God, are then aimed to help us better live in accordance with God's moral law.

Christian theists stress that since humans are created by God, we are therefore obligated to make good on God's moral commands, and as will be seen, in the end we are also accountable to him as our final authority. As a personal God, we are told that he is armed with both the moral standing and the authority to apportion both praise and blame to us depending on how well we fulfill our moral obligations.[150] Our guilt then is telling us someone is offended as we have transgressed against a person, and even more so, a divine person. As a result, the relationship is fractured and in need of repair. Writing about guilt and its relationship to Divine Command Theory (DCT), Baggett and Walls (2011, p. 119) state, "DCT provides distinctively rich resources for

[150] See Patrick Todd's (2018, pp. 33–55) article "Does God Have the Moral Standing to Blame?" In this article, Todd attempts to address whether God has the moral standing to blame humans for moral wrongdoings given his providential involvement in creation. After discussing both the open-theists' response and the determinists' response, he concludes that both views leave room for God to morally hold wrongdoers accountable. Insofar as creatures are free to act, God is free to blame and thus bring us to account for our actions. Obviously, there is lots of room between open theism and determinism, and understandably there are critics who would be quick to contest the idea that accountability is consistent with determinism. For further inquiry into this topic, see also John Ross Churchill's (2017, pp. 425–448) article "Determinism and Divine Blame" and G. A. Cohen's (2006, pp. 113–136) article "Casting the First Stone: Who Can, and Who Can't, Condemn the Terrorists?" For additional helpful resources to investigate this topic in more detail, see the reference list at the end of Todd's (2018) article.

making sense not only of how guilt involves an offense against a person, but also how forgiveness is possible. For the God of Christian theism, for example, is the supreme person who is offended by our moral failure, as well as the one who has provided a way to take our guilt away and restore our broken relationships." Thus, it is easy to see on the basis of Christian theism how every guilty person is in need of forgiveness and reconciliation, which Christ's atonement makes possible.

On the basis of Christian theism, the more one is motivated to please God and live morally in sync with him, the closer one will be in his or her personal relationship with him, while the opposite is also true. The more people reject God's commands in order to chart their own moral course, the more alienated they will be from God. People can get quite isolated from God, but they can never hide from him in such a way as to circumvent the knowledge of God. For not only is the God of Christian theism personal, which means he can be offended, but he is also all-knowing, which means our guilt is ever before him.

2.2. God is all-knowing.

Just as a non-personal entity takes no offense at wrongdoing, for it requires personhood to be offended, so too for an offense to take place the offended must have *knowledge* of being offended. And according to Christian theism, since he is omniscient, he is able to provide an exact account of *everyone's* guilt. On the basis of this view of God, it is not as if he is limited in knowledge and therefore only cares about some people's moral actions, while other persons he created get a moral pass because of God's ignorance. God is described as "perfect in knowledge" (Job 37:16) and "his understanding is beyond measure" (Ps 147:5).[151] Because he is all-knowing, God knows the whole of our moral life, both good and bad. Nothing is hidden from his sight (Job 34:22; Jer 23:24). He knows our thoughts (Ps 94:11;139:4), motives (Prov 16:2; Jas 4:3), actions (Job 34:21), and even our secrets (Ps 44:21). All of this taken together assists God in producing an accurate account of humanity's moral status before him that makes him fit to judge accurately.

[151] Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations hereafter are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (2016).

2.3. God is a moral lawgiver.

As well as being personal and all-knowing, the God of Christian theism is also described as a moral lawgiver. Regarding God's moral laws, they are not arbitrarily dispersed, nor does he consult an independent moral rulebook to marshal his commands. Rather his commands are derived from his good nature.[152]

Before proceeding further, a possible objection must be addressed. Some might argue that God's moral law is undetectable. And obviously, if we are to fulfill our obligations, there must be a way for us to detect God's moral prerogatives. As Evans (2013, p. 39), a divine command theorist, rightly acknowledges, "It is hard to see how an unknowable moral obligation could be an obligation at all. Unknowable moral obligations would, from an existential point of view, not be much different from non-existent moral obligations; neither would provide me with moral guidance. Certainly, those who have no way of knowing about their moral obligations should not be blamed or held responsible for failing to live up to those obligations." Considering this sentiment, how might one track their moral obligations to a moral source? Or more precisely stated, how has God disclosed his moral commands? Here I limit my consideration to two of the numerous sources the Christian theist claims to access in tracking God's moral laws. These two sources are (1) Scripture and (2) conscience. The former relates to special revelation and the latter refers to general revelation.

2.3.1. God's moral law has been revealed through Scripture.

From Genesis to Revelation, Christian theists are struck by God's commands. This is especially evident after God's people entered the wilderness of Sinai, when God revealed a new pattern of life for them through his commandments. The Torah records 613 of God's commandments, perhaps the most notable of which are the Ten

[152] I briefly mention this as space does not permit me to digress into the much-discussed Euthyphro Dilemma. My stance is this: Something is good not because God arbitrarily wills it (i.e. radical volunteerism), nor is something good because the good exists independent of him (i.e. moral Platonism), but rather, the horns of the dilemma are split by recognizing that God commands us to do things because *he* is good. As the locus of moral goodness, his commandments spring forth from his good and loving nature.

Commandments (Exod 20).[153] God's commands were there to serve his people, protect them, and allow them to experience a life marked by blessing. God issued commands that in turn became moral obligations that required obedience. Obeying these moral obligations resulted in a fruitful life, and not doing so resulted in moral guilt, accompanied by a whole host of consequences, among them being shame, remorse, relational fractures, and alienation from God.[154] The Ten Commandments were intended to guide people in their relationship with God and others. The first half of these commandments concern peoples' relationship with God, whereas the second half are moral laws given to govern interpersonal relationship with one another. The order is important. The best way to care for others, it is thought, is to first and foremost care about the God who created them.

The hinge law under the old covenant was the *Shema* ("hear"). This commandment, also used as a prayer, states, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut 6:4–5).[155] While keeping God's moral law had various particularities and no doubt could be quite vexatious, Jesus sought to simplify the law by leveraging the *Shema*. After being asked by a religious expert what the greatest commandment is, he replied, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Adding, "On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt

[153] There is a wide range of laws in the Torah concerning sex, marriage, divorce, family, slaves, treatment of the poor, gentiles, diet, proper worship of God, and festivals as well as many other laws given by God to help people faithfully follow him.

[154] Jewish biblical scholar Nahum M. Sarna (1991, p. xiii) writes, "The Decalogue and the legislative sections of Exodus thereby constitute divine law. They are not, as is the case with the Near Eastern law collections, the fruit of human wisdom or royal sagacity. From this flows another credo, first explicated in Exodus, which thereafter animates all of biblical literature: that the welfare of society is conditional upon obedience to God's law. God is deemed to be absolutely moral, and He correspondingly demands moral standards of behavior from human beings. He delivers the faithful from injustice and oppression and ensures the ultimate and inevitable downfall of the wicked."

[155] See also Deuteronomy 6:7–9 for the remainder of the *Shema*.

22:37–40).[156] Many of the religious leaders of his day, in particular the Pharisees, were overly pedantic in their application of God's moral laws, even unnecessarily burdening others by their punctilious approach to Scripture. While they complicated the law, Jesus offered his listeners a way to simplify God's moral program by focusing on loving God and others—something the Pharisees failed to do, and as a result they missed the heart of the law altogether. Although they looked good on the outside, their hearts remained far from God (Matt 23:25–26).

According to Christian theism, Jesus did not treat the law and love as enemies; rather he made an important observation regarding these two features when he said to his disciples, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). He taught an important lesson here. If the disciples intended to follow the law, they needed to focus on loving him. Jesus knew that the more his disciples grew in their love toward him, the less difficult it would be for them to follow his commands. Similarly, according to Jesus then, the reason we fail to keep God's commands is because we have failed in the deeper law of loving him.[157] Jesus thus revealed the tight connection between moral laws and relationship to God.

2.3.2. God's moral laws have been revealed through conscience.

Another source Christian theists leverage to track God's moral laws is their conscience. For them, both believers and non-believers alike can get a better handle

[156] Jesus raised the bar for neighborly love. Whereas under the old covenant believers were expected to love their neighbors as themselves, as the initiator of the new covenant he now ups the ante saying, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: *just as I have loved you*, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34–35, emphasis added). Further reflection on these words after Christ's death would have added gravitas, knowing this was a call to love in such a way as to lay their life down for each other if necessary—a command to complete, selfless love. It would not be in keeping every detail of God's law that the world would be drawn to Christianity but rather through observing sacrificial love on display.

[157] Obviously, one's motives play a role in his or her relationship to God's commandments. The Pharisees looked as if they had kept his commandments, but their hearts were corrupt. They used the law for their own moral status, showing outwardly their pious acts, while their hearts were left in need of significant transformation.

on the instrument of their conscience by learning from others and maturing this internal instrument over time through further reflection. The conscience informs the will through one's intellect and emotions, and as one matures both intellectually and emotionally, he can heighten in his ability to make better sense of his conscience and therefore better channel his will.

The underdeveloped use of one's conscience means that such a person can be wrong about his conscience, which means he is susceptible to violating it in one degree or another. The underdeveloped conscience is not altogether ignorant of right and wrong. While partial ignorance may limit one's discernment to capture God's moral will, it in no way erases his entire sense of it.

Paul worded it like this in his letter to the Romans, "For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus" (Rom 2:14–16). Interestingly enough, here Paul presents a God whom he believes to be good, who is personal, all-knowing, a moral lawgiver, and fit to hold us accountable by reserving a day to bring humanity's secrets to light. By means of these two sources, namely Scripture and conscience, and with the additional revelation that God's existence is clearly made known through creation, Paul could render the verdict that everyone is ultimately "without excuse" (Rom 1:20) when it comes to knowing something of God's moral will.[158]

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[158] While God has provided various sources, such as the two discussed above, Christian theists also recognize that there is a hiddenness to God that makes it difficult at times for his will to be properly discerned. However, they would maintain that such hiddenness is not without satisfactory explanation. For more on this topic, see Paul Moser's (2009) *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology*. Though I touched on just two of the ways God's moral will can be discerned, there is much more to be said. For instance, Baggett and Walls (2011, p. 165), in a chapter entitled "Knowing God's Will," write,

> The point to grasp is that theistic ethicists have a broad array of resources at their disposal to construct a workable moral epistemology: natural law, conscience, moral intuitions, general revelation. In fact, we are also able to tap into the sorts of resources that naturalists and Platonic realists appeal to, ranging from the ways in which minds are structured, distinctive features of consciousness, how we use and acquire language, our natural tendencies toward socialization, and the constitutive rules of institutions. Ours is a more expansive way of construing epistemology,

Christian theists concede that such an indictment is not to say that the moral lines of right and wrong are never blurred, but rather that God has provided *enough* revelation to convince all of humanity of our guilt. They recognize as it relates to moral requisites, with many people come various moral interpretations. By removing oneself from the various particularities, one can still arrive at least at *some* idea of right and wrong, leaving such a person without excuse. Clarifying the weight of this crucial point, Evans (2013, p. 177) writes,

> Within the Christian tradition, there is something else of great value that even scanty moral knowledge might make possible, and this is awareness of our own moral shortcomings. Christianity teaches that humans all fall short of God's requirements and are in need of God's grace and forgiveness. Presumably, if a person had a proper understanding of just *one* moral requirement that the person has failed to live up to, this would be sufficient to make possible a recognition of moral guilt and the need for grace and forgiveness. Even a moral outlook that is riddled with errors and uncertainty could be adequate to give a person an understanding that they are morally responsible and accountable. Even if I only have accurate knowledge of a few moral obligations, that might be sufficient for me to realize I have not lived my life as I should have.

This means an exhaustive understanding of God's moral requirements is not necessary to arrive at the conclusion of one's guilt. While some have been privy to more moral knowledge than others, it is also true according to Christian theists that with more knowledge comes more responsibility and accountability.

One might ask, "What is it about God that gives him the authority to hold us accountable for our moral failures?" To answer this question, I quote at length Baggett and Walls's (2011, pp. 122–123) helpful insights:

> Let us consider the reasons we normally ascribe authority to someone. Sometimes it is a simple matter of power. A person who has the legal power to enforce his will, for instance, has a certain kind of authority. Another source of authority is knowledge and information. We recognize as authorities those persons who have sufficient mastery of a field or discipline that they can command respect for what they know and understand. A third source of authority is moral integrity and character, the sort of authority that appeals to our conscience and demands respect in a deeper sense than the authority that comes from

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encompassing the whole plethora of possibilities for how we might come to know the contents of morality, including resources that are not so readily at the disposal of naturalists, such as special revelation.

> mere power, or even knowledge. Indeed, a person who has mere power or legal authority but who lacks moral integrity lacks the authority to command our respect, even if he has the power to enforce his will on us. Now then, God has supreme power, knowledge, and goodness, and all of these underwrite his moral authority. He created us and this world and stamped us with his image and has the power to hold us fully accountable for our actions. Since he has perfect knowledge of us, he understands perfectly what is good for us and our flourishing. Moreover, since he is perfectly good he desires our well-being and does everything short of overriding our freedom to promote it. In view of his nature as a perfect being, there are no good grounds for doubting his authority. There can be no blindsidedness, no bias, no imperfect understanding, no possibility of misuse of power, or having obtained it wrongly. If all rational withholdings are blocked, we ought to accept God as an authority. And part of what is involved in that is accepting his commands, unless we have good reason to do otherwise; but again, with a perfect being, there can't possibly be good reasons to do otherwise. In short, we think the issue of authority is a matter of power, knowledge, and character, all of which add up to moral authority.

Given who God is and the authority that he wields, Christian theists maintain that it will not require a long moral inventory to conclude that everyone is guilty of failing at least in *some* of our moral obligations before the God whom we are accountable to.[159]

2.4. God is good.

Obviously, entire books have been written on goodness itself. And this, of course, is not the place to delve into the Socratic search of the good, as my intent at this point is merely to show that what Christian theism teaches about God corresponds to the type of God I argued for in the previous chapter. As it pertains to God's goodness, here is a sampling of some of the biblical data that Christian theists access to depict how God's goodness is displayed through his various other attributes. God is described as loving (John 3:16), merciful (Luke 6:36), forgiving (Eph 4:32), righteous (Ps 145:17), kind (Rom 2:4), holy (Lev 19:2), just (Heb 6:10), patient (2 Pet 3:9), and

[159] Evans (2013, p. 15) identifies some of the features of moral obligations: "They involve a kind of verdict on an action, they make it possible to bring reflection on action to closure and make a decision about the action by providing a decisive reason for action, they are the kinds of things people are rightly held responsible for doing or omitting, and they hold for human persons just as human persons."

gracious (Ps 145:8). Speaking directly of his goodness, David writes, "I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living" (Ps 27:13). Another psalmist records, "You are good and do good" (Ps 119:68). Nahum declares, "The LORD is good" (Nah 1:7), and Jeremiah utters, "Give thanks to the LORD of hosts, for the LORD is good" (Jer 33:11). From beginning to end, Christian theists are ready to show how the Scriptures reveal a God who not only is good, but also desires our good. It is this delta, between God's goodness, or even more precisely, his holiness, that has created a relational barrier in need of reconciliation. Fortunately, as will soon be discussed, the Christian theist claims that our lack of goodness does not prevent God from exercising his goodness in acting to deal with our guilt and relationally reuniting us to him.

2.5. God is fit to hold us accountable.

Christian theists argue that given God's omniscience, as an all-knowing God, he knows where every one of his creatures have morally failed to adhere to his moral law. And since he is good, they contend he is fit to hold us accountable for our transgressions. While the Scripture details a God committed to dealing with our guilt through reconciliation, Christian theists claim that it also describes a God before whom we are accountable, stating, "And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Heb 4:13; see also Matt 12:36 and Rom 14:12). From our vantage point as humans, it may seem incredible for a being to be omniscient. But for the greatest conceivable being, in the Anselmian sense, the Christian theist sees that it is within God's epistemic grasp to comprehend our every moral lapse as it pertains to our universal problem of guilt. Perhaps if one considers the progress humanity has made in recording a history replete with a myriad of events by their ability to store vast amounts of information on the minutest bits of hardware, one might be helped to envision how Christian theists attempt to grasp how an omniscient God could produce his own recorded report of our moral lives in bringing us to account for our transgressions.

Having shown that the character of the God of Christian theism corresponds to the God as argued for in the previous chapter, it is now time to consider humanity's plight before the God of Christian theism. This will reveal a moral gap that the atonement of Christ is designed to bridge.

3. Christian Theism and the Human Condition

Within the tradition of evangelical Christianity, the explanation for human guilt is as follows: God originally created humans in a paradise-like state where they exercised their human freedom and thereby freely lapsed into a state of guilt after failing to comply with God's moral command. Consequently, from that moment forward humans have been relationally alienated from God.

Given God's perfection, evangelical Christianity depicts an imperfect humanity where everyone is declared guilty of sin before God. Paul is often cited, declaring, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). Such Christians maintain that "the glory of God" refers to God's perfect righteousness as the standard by which all humans come up short. Regarding human righteousness, they point to Paul's declaration, "None is righteous, no, not one" (Rom 3:10). For them, the personal God of Christian theism serves as the moral standard bearer. They contend that Scripture goes so far as to say that even if one kept all of God's laws and broke just one, that person would still be guilty of imperfection. For evidence, they cite James, who wrote, "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it" (Jas 2:10).[160]

Consequentially, this poses a problem for humanity in need of resolve. On the one hand, there is God's moral perfection and on the other hand humanity's blatant imperfection. According to Christian theism, this chasm between God's moral perfection and our imperfection is widened each time we fail to meet his moral demand. Due to this failure, each of us is guilty in one degree or another before God. John Hare (1996), as we saw in chapter 5, refers to this demand and our inability to meet it as the "moral gap." The structure of the moral gap is described as follows: There exists (1) the moral demand, (2) our natural capacities, and (3) God's assistance. As moral agents, for us the moral gap is created when we fail to meet the demand. This serves as the cause for our guilt. In order to close this gap, humans apart from God's assistance have employed particular strategies. Hare lists three. Left to our own devices (1) we can naively pretend the demand can be met by having a

[160] This is not to say that such a person would have *committed every* sin, but rather one sin is just as consequential as breaking all of the laws in that it only takes one sin to be shown to be imperfect and therefore rendered guilty.

puffed-up view of our natural capacities; (2) we might opt to diminish the demand; or finally, (3) we might search for naturalistic substitutes to help us meet the demand. For Hare, each of the three strategies are found wanting.

The gap remains.

In the first strategy, the person is left to a quiet life of frustration since no one can know if the demand has really been met. To even think one has met the demand leaves that person in the difficult predicament of not being able to truly weigh the nobility of his or her motives that led to that moral performance. Following the second strategy by diminishing the moral demand or even denying it does nothing to reduce the *real* demand given God's existence. And finally, to choose the third strategy leads to the same critique just mentioned, while also setting one up to manufacture his or her own individuated account of morality.

Our failure in attempting any one of those strategies leads Hare to show how Christian theism can help bridge the moral gap by accessing God's rich assistance by means of the atonement, justification, and sanctification through Christ. While Hare's work aims to show how God's assistance provides a way to live a moral life, I concern myself more with considering how Christian theism resolves the guilt problem produced by the moral gap and limit my interest to show how accessing God's assistance by means of Christ's atonement can resolve the guilt caused by our inability to close the moral gap that exists when we are left to our own resources. While I agree with Hare's strategy in employing God's assistance for living the moral life, for the remainder of this discussion I primarily consider how Christian theism holds that the atonement solves our guilt problem (in justification).

Hare (2010, p. 31) in *Why Bother Being Good?* presents us with a problem that needs to be addressed: "The structure of the moral gap has an internal problem. It seems unreasonable, indeed incoherent, to hold people accountable to standards that they are unable to reach." It is not a far stretch to imagine how one could ask, "Why walk through life feeling guilty all the time for failing to meet an impossible standard?" It certainly does seem problematic for God to hold us to a standard that is impossible to meet and then judge us for not doing so. At first glance, this does not seem much different from the head coach of a basketball team setting up a basketball hoop on top of the Empire State Building and then commanding his players on ground level who are trying out for the team to slam dunk the ball if they want to make the cut. What six- to seven-foot-tall person could possibly slam dunk a basketball into a

rim that is mounted on the 102nd floor? Try as they may, while some may jump higher than others, everyone will come up desperately short. Similarly, when we consider what Christian theism has to say about God's perfection in light of our imperfection, the command to keep the moral law seems just as absurd.

Another way to question this difficulty is like as follows: If *a* implies I ought to keep the standard but *b* implies I cannot, then is it not unjust for God to hold me responsible for *a* given *b*? How, then, do we solve this internal problem? Hare does so by understanding that God assists us and has not left us to our own resources. Rather, *c* = God has met the standard for us through Christ's atonement. Therefore, *d* = God remains just in his judgment of us because we are not held accountable for failing to meet a perfect standard, but rather, we are accountable for failing to trust in the one who did so on our behalf. Let us now turn to explore in more detail how God's assistance through Christ's atonement helps close the moral gap.

4. The Atonement: God's Response to the Problem of Guilt

Before we dig too deep into Christian theism's antidote to our guilt, an important distinction must be made at the outset between *sin* and *guilt*, as the terms will often be used. There are those whose psychoanalysis leads them to blur the distinction between these terms. For instance, Speziale-Bagliacca (2004, p. 9) says, "Various attempts have been made to clarify the distinction between guilt and sin, but from the psychoanalytical point of view, the core of the two phenomena seems to be the same." Unlike the psychoanalytic reductionism that relegates sins to various mental disorders, the Christian theist is hard-pressed to forego the distinction. In part, one can see where the confusion lies. Being that sin entails guilt and vice versa, or since everyone who sins is guilty and everyone who is guilty has sinned,[161] it is not surprising to hear complaints of circularity. Perhaps a helpful way to clarify this distinction in regard to Christian theism is to understand the difference as follows: Where there is no sin there is no guilt, but where there is sin there is guilt, for sin *generates* guilt, at least according to Christian theism, where both sin and guilt result in violation of a divine command. *Sin*, then, refers to the act (sins of commission) or

[161] For discussion of guilt *before* and *after* wrongdoing, see chapter 5, section 2, "The Development of Humanity's Sense of Guilt."

the inaction (sins of omission), and *guilt* refers to one's status before God as a result of the act. Sin is the cause of the effect guilt. People become guilty when they break a moral law. And the guilt is objective, as we have already discussed, whether the person *feels* it or not, since the moral law was breeched. In order for the guilty person to be declared innocent of the act, the sin must be dealt with first. This is what the atonement attempts to solve. Having made this distinction between *sin* and *guilt*, I now will consider God's solution to our guilt according to Christian theism by means of Christ's atonement.[162]

To resolve our guilt, this chapter and its argumentation style is distinct from that of the previous chapter. In the previous chapter, I argued from the bottom up (i.e. from our guilt to God). In this chapter, I am arguing from the top down, beginning with God and his attributes and arguing toward his solution for human guilt as depicted through Christ's atonement.

Candidly, I concede that a discussion on the atonement may come off a bit strange, or perhaps even be seen as out of place to some in our modernistic age. By the same token, I do not want to be guilty of chronological superiority, in thinking that ours is the only age suitable to speak to the issue of guilt. One way of navigating this unfamiliar terrain is to remember that God is an accommodating God, who condescends himself to meet us in the culture we live in. While things like atonement may sound a bit bizarre to our modern ears, we must also remember such things as the shedding of blood was part and parcel in the ancient world. What seems odd to us today was not so odd in times past. Furthermore, another way to think of it is like this: If God exists, and if he desired to resolve the guilt of those in times past, then it is not unreasonable to think he would have provided a solution to them by meeting them in their context, instead of waiting until his antidote made sense to our modern sensibilities. The purpose of blood sacrifice, though foreign to most of us living in today's world, would have resonated with much of the ancient world by serving as a priceless demonstration of God's unconditional love for humanity, while also painting

[162] If there is any vagueness by using the word "solution," I simply mean to consider whether our guilt can ultimately be resolved, eradicated, remedied, or in fact dealt with. If guilt has caused a relational problem to exist between God and humanity, the question of whether a solution exists seems to be a fitting inquiry.

an unforgettable picture of the cost of human rebellion.[163] To clear up this picture as presented in the atonement, it is helpful to capture what was accomplished through Christ's death.

In consideration of Christ's atonement, let me disclose a few of the theological assumptions within evangelical Christianity. There is the assumption that due to sin, all of humanity is guilty before God and in need of repair. To settle our debt—a debt we could not pay—God, who is eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, holy, free, and the rightful judge of all the earth, has set in motion a plan to eradicate our guilt. To accomplish this plan he sent his Son, the second person of the Godhead, to earth so that through his incarnation and morally perfect life, Christ fulfilled the law everyone broke, was then crucified for our sins in order to remove our guilt, rose physically from the dead on the third day, and is now God's gracious gift on offer for all of humanity as the unique and exclusive way of salvation. Each of the theological positions above have long been debated within the broader domains of Christianity. Though tempting, I will content myself to avoid the myriad of controversies by painting in broad strokes the picture that fits in accordance with the portrait of Christian theism as understood within evangelical Christianity.

With those disclosures behind us, Christian theism contends that by means of Christ's atonement, God has offered us a way to remedy our problem of guilt—one that does not compromise his moral standard, nor does it leave believers oppressed with the constant burden of failing to live up to a standard they can never meet (e.g. Freud's super-ego). These believers hold that during his earthly ministry, Christ was not mistaken regarding the purpose of his life mission in restoring us to God, but rather he understood himself as the unique one sent by God to accomplish our salvation and free us from the bondage of guilt in order to reconcile us to God. They maintain that he saw himself acting as our representative through his morally perfect

[163] Commenting on Newman's thoughts regarding atonement in their book *The Moral Argument*, Baggett and Walls (2019, p. 47) write, "What Newman found remarkable is the ubiquitous evidence of notions of atonement. From Greece to Rome, from India to Britain, from Africa to the islands of the South Seas and the natives of Australia, we find similar ideas and practices of atonement—a substitution of something offered, or some personal suffering, for a penalty that would otherwise be exacted. Why, Newman queried, should men adopt any rites of deprecation or purification at all unless they had some hope of attaining to a better condition?"

life and fulfilling prophecy that foreshadowed his death, and thus meeting the necessary requirements for our reconciliation.[164] By these two features, namely his morally perfect life and his atoning death, Christian theists claim that a solution to our guilt was made possible.

First, according to Christian theism, Christ believed his morally perfect life qualified him to act as our moral substitute in atoning for our guilt. Christians assert that everyone before and after Christ has been guilty of moral imperfection. To those in doubt, John the apostle wrote, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). By remaining sinless, Christ was uniquely fit to resolve our sin and guilt problem. John later added, "You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin" (1 John 3:5). Had he sinned, he would have disqualified himself as humanity's Savior. Through his life of moral perfection, Christ envisioned himself fulfilling the law everyone else was guilty of breaking. During his life he did not intend to overthrow the law but to fulfill it, exclaiming, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt 5:17). Furthermore, Paul added, "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us" (Rom 8:3–4). By meeting God's

[164] Christians believe that Christ's morally perfect life uniquely qualified him to represent humanity as "the last Adam" (1 Cor 15:45). Whereas the first Adam represents sin, guilt, and death, Christ the last Adam represents sinlessness, grace, and life. Paul writes, "For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous" (Rom 5:17–19; see also 6:1–3; 2 Cor 5:14; Heb 2:9). In the opinion of Christian theists, when you take the first and the last Adam together, each Adam represents humanity in the following way: The first Adam represents what we *would* have done. Christ Jesus, the last Adam, represents what we *should* have done.

righteous requirement on our behalf, Christ became the perfect resource to resolve our guilt.[165]

Second, in addition to fulfilling the moral law through his morally perfect life, Christian theism teaches that Christ also saw himself fulfilling biblical prophecy that promised to resolve our guilt. In particular, Christians stress that he envisioned himself as the Passover sacrifice in initiating a new covenant to eradicate guilt. As for Passover (Exod 12:1–28), they believe Christ saw himself as the Passover Lamb, offered up during the Passover feast (Mark 14:12). As the Passover of Exodus freed the slaves from Egyptian bondage, Christ as the Passover Lamb saw himself freeing humanity from the slavery of sin and guilt. Christ was not alone in this recognition. For example, his cousin John the Baptist exclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Paul the apostle also declared, "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor 5:7). Even Peter, as he reminisced on both Christ's morally perfect life and his sacrificial death reminded his readers, "Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Pet 1:18–19).

Christians claim that as the Passover Lamb, Christ saw himself initiating the long-anticipated new covenant. Under the old covenant everyone was guilty, but under the new covenant a final solution to resolve guilt was now available. The prophet Jeremiah penned a coming day when the new covenant would be inaugurated.

> Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their

[165] Christian theists observe that being sinless did not inoculate Christ from temptation, but rather, as the author of Hebrews writes concerning him, he "in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15).

> iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer 31:31–34; cf. Heb 8:8–12).

To this day, Christians celebrate because Christ believed that day had come—a day in which our sins would no longer be remembered. Having now fulfilled the law through his morally perfect life, he offered himself as the spotless Lamb of God on behalf of the guilty and made room for the new covenant to be realized. Reminding his readers of Christ's sacrifice, Luke recorded his monumental words from the upper room: "And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood'" (Luke 22:19–20). At last, Christians believe that the way of forgiveness is not found by keeping all the rules but by entering into a new covenant relationship with God through Christ's atonement. But how exactly did the atonement accomplish this?

4.1. How Christ's Atonement Solves Our Guilt Problem

As for the atonement, one might contest, "If God is all-powerful and good, why did Christ really have to die? Why not just pronounce us forgiven?" Some, like Aquinas, have argued that this was possible but God chose otherwise. But why? A common Christian response would be to say that God felt it necessary to provide a solution that would neither compromise his justice nor minimize his moral standard, but one that would allow for our sin to be paid for and our guilt to be removed while also showing us the truth about how he feels about the trappings of sin. Had God just pronounced us clean, one could argue that (1) justice would not have been served, (2) sin would have been minimized, and (3) humanity would never had known the depth of God's love for us in that God still loved us in spite of our sin and guilt. The atonement settles these issues for God and becomes the way for us to be reconciled to him.

As we consider Christ's atonement, space does not permit me to explore the various atonement theories, but hopefully my understanding of some of its essential

features will emerge through the remainder of this chapter.[166] As in any discussion, it is important to clearly define the terms we use. *Atonement* refers to Christ's substitutionary death on the cross, which cleanses us from our sin and thus removes our guilt, so that we might become reconciled to God.[167] Here then, are four of the diverse ways Christ's atonement does just that according to Christian theism.

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[166] For a review of the various theories, see Craig's (2018, pp. 29–53) *The Atonement*, where he examines in more detail the Christus Victor, Satisfaction, Moral Influence, Penal Substitution, and Governmental theories of the atonement. In the end, while not defending any particular theory of the atonement, Craig (2018, p. 53) contends that a viable defense of the atonement must include what is entailed in the Penal Substitutionary theory. One's tradition of Christianity might influence a person to subscribe to one particular view of the atonement over another. For example, this chapter is presenting a case that is evangelical in nature and thus in agreement with Craig's defense, but many Roman Catholics would favor a Satisfaction theory of the atonement whereby Christ is the means for God and the world to be at one. Through his morally perfect life and death on the cross, Christ satisfies God's justice regarding humanity's iniquity by paving the way for God and humans to be reconciled at last.

[167] Craig (2018, pp. 4–5) helps narrow the focus on how the word *atonement* is best to be understood:

> The word "atonement" is unique among theological terms, being a derivation, not from Greek or Latin, but from Middle English, namely, the phrase "at onement," designating a state of harmony. The closest New Testament (NT) word for atonement in this sense is *katallagē* or reconciliation, specifically reconciliation between God and man. Reconciliation is the overarching theme of the NT, and other important NT motifs such as the Kingdom of God, salvation, justification, and redemption are subservient to it. Atonement in this sense thus lies at the heart of the Christian faith. But there is a narrower sense of "atonement" that is expressed by the biblical words typically translated by this English word. In the Old Testament (OT), "atonement" and its cognates translate words having the Hebrew root "kpr." Best known of these expressions is doubtless Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. To atone in this sense takes as its object sin or impurity and has the sense "to purify, to cleanse." The Greek equivalent in the Septuagint (LXX) and NT is *hilaskesthai*. While the result of atonement in this narrow sense may be said to be atonement in the broad sense, nevertheless the biblical words translated as "atonement" or "to atone" need to be understood in the narrower sense if we are to understand the meaning of the texts. Theologically, the doctrine of the atonement concerns atonement primarily in the narrower, biblical sense of cleansing of sin and has traditionally been treated under the priestly work of Christ.

This narrow use of the word *atonement* stands in contrast to other broader uses of the term such as one finds in Eleanor Stump's *Atonement* (2018). Craig (2018, p. 5) distinguishes his sense of the term from hers as follows: "In contrast, Eleonore Stump (2018) treats atonement in a very broad sense, as signaled by her use of '*at onement*,' designating a state of union with God. Accordingly, her book is not about Christology, but about soteriology and, especially, pneumatology. The Holy Spirit displaces Christ as the central figure in her account of achieving union with God. The death of Christ

4.1.1. Christ's atonement pays our ransom in order to spare us from the consequences of our guilt.

The word *ransom* was as familiar to the people in the ancient Greco-Roman world as it is to us today. To pay a ransom referred to buying people back from slavery, prison, or a death sentence. In prophesying his own death, Christ said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Here, identifying himself with Isaiah's suffering servant, Christ also envisioned his death paying a ransom to God for our sin.[168] In John's Revelation, he recorded a future scene in heaven where worshippers exalt Christ for paying our ransom: "And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation'" (Rev 5:9). Christian theism stresses that Christ paid the ultimate price to ransom humanity from their guilt by laying down his very own life. By his death, he purchased our salvation, freeing us from the consequences of our sin and guilt, which would have otherwise meant our death, for Paul wrote, "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23).

A possible objection one might raise is this: How, if "death" according to Romans 6:23 refers to eternal death, can it be said that Christ paid the full sum of our penalty if his death only resulted in three days whereas our penalty would be eternal separation from God? The critic might argue the ransom on this account seems to only have been paid in part. To rebut, one has a few options to reply to the objector. First, one might contend that unbelievers are not eternally separated from God but are annihilated shortly after death once their penalty has been justly paid postmortem. In this way the responder attempts to circumvent the objection at hand. Another might offer a more satisfactory response to how it is that Christ's death paid our full ransom

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plays a relatively minor role in her theory of *at onement*, and atonement in the narrow sense no role at all."

[168] Christ's death paid our ransom to God, not to Satan as some have mistakenly thought. This erroneous teaching, first espoused by Origen (AD 185–254), taught that Satan held people captive and a ransom was owed him order to release the prisoners.

by reminding the objector of Christ's two natures, consisting of both a divine and human nature. In one sense, as the second person of the Trinity (i.e. as God), Christian theists claim that Christ never died. Rather, it was only his human nature that experienced death for three days. Yet the problem does not seem to have been set aside. At least not yet. One might say that Christ's body remained in the grave and his resurrection was only spiritual in nature. But this argument, the Christian theist contends, fails to do justice to the biblical records that claim Christ's resurrection was physical. So the problem still remains. What might be said at this point? One could argue that while Christ might have left his body to rot in a grave, it was taken back up after three days so as to serve as "the firstfruits" of every believer's promise of future resurrection (see 1 Cor 15:20). Many Christians insist that had his body been left in the grave, the church would have lost its greatest defense of Christian theism—namely the resurrection of Christ. Without his bodily resurrection, the church would have had a hard time getting off the ground. His resurrection served as the exclamation mark that indeed his accomplishment of paying our ransom had truly been met. What was important was not a perfect correlate (i.e. eternal separation from God) but a satisfactory offering to appease God's justice. And for the Christian theist, the atonement did just that.

4.1.2. Christ's atonement satisfied (propitiated) God's just demands, which paved the way for us to be reconciled to God.[169]

Christians believe a payment needed to be paid in order to satisfy God's justice. Through his morally perfect life, Christ was able to offer his life on our behalf as the perfect substitute. Admittedly, the idea of a wrathful God angered by sin does

[169] *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (2005, p. 1346) explains the word *propitiation* as follows: "The general meaning of the word is the appeasing of the wrath of the Deity by prayer or sacrifice when a sin or offence has been committed against Him. The word occurs three times in the AV, in connection with the death of Christ (Rom 3:25, 1 John 2:2, and 4:10; to which RV adds Heb 2:17). Such a translation accurately represents the meaning in classical Greek of the words used (ἱλαστήριον, ἱλασμός). However, the Hebrew equivalent is never used with God as the object; this fact suggests that the primary biblical meaning is to expiate or remove an obstacle on man's part to his relationship with God. To say that the death of Christ is 'propitiatory' is, then, to say that it is effective in restoring the relationship between God and man, damaged by sin."

not sit well with the modern concept of God. Nevertheless, according to Christians, the cross vividly depicts the horror of sin in God's sight and the high cost that must be paid to absolve our guilt. They would argue that the modern-day failure to recognize God's holiness has no doubt contributed to this reductionistic view of minimizing the consequences of one's actions. Instead of lowering the standard of his moral requirements, which would have minimized our sin and guilt, Christians contend that God opted to send his Son to meet the standard, and through his graphic death, Christ was able to propitiate God's justice on our behalf. Declaring that with the ransom now paid and God's justice now satisfied in full, a course for reconciliation was now put in place. As Paul wrote, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins" (Rom 3:23–25). Similarly, John the apostle wrote, "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). Following the atonement, Christians insist that the doors were now open for all to access God by simply placing their faith in Christ.

4.1.3. Christ's atonement cleanses (expiates) us from our sin and guilt.[170]

Having paid the ransom and also satisfying God's justice, the atonement allowed a way for believers' sins to be expiated, covered, or cleansed. This means those who were once considered guilty before God are now declared innocent on account of their trust in Christ. Through belief in Christ's righteous sacrifice on our behalf, Christian theism believes that a person's sins are covered in God's sight. For this to happen, a blood sacrifice was required, not because God has some special fetish for blood, but rather through the shedding of blood the costliness of sin and the gravity of human guilt could be both understood and remedied. By expiating human

[170] According to the *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* (Elwell and Comfort, 2001, p. 461), "All NT references to expiation have to do with the sacrifice of Christ for human sin. In the Bible both expiation and propitiation are part of God's atoning work. Christ's sacrifice both propitiates (turns away) the wrath of God and expiates (covers) human sin. God's redemptive work is both personal, or relational, and objective. When a biblical context concentrates on God's wrath, propitiation is involved; when human sin is the focus, then redemption provides expiation."

sin by his very own blood, Christ's death made forgiveness possible. As the author of Hebrews wrote, "Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb 9:22; see also John 1:29). According to Christian theism, everything about the atonement indicates that God does not take moral wrongs lightly. And knowing we could never pay our own ransom or propitiate God's justice in such a way so as to expiate our own sins, he chose to deal with our guilt himself by sending his Son as our cleansing sacrifice.

4.1.4. Christ's atonement resolves our sin and guilt through imputation.

To impute is to reckon, count, or credit something to someone. What is reckoned, counted, or credited to another can be good or bad. In the case of Christ's atonement, Christians believe that our sin and guilt was imputed to him and as a result he was in turn counted as guilty on our behalf. Similarly, when a person believes in Christ and trusts in his atoning work on their behalf, Christ's righteousness is imputed to that person, and as a result the believer is now counted as righteous. Capturing this exchange, Paul wrote, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21; see also Isa 53:5).

But what can be said to the person who objects that it is simply unjust to consider a person guilty or righteous on account of another? Craig (2018, p. 62) draws on legal theory, showing we are not lacking similar examples found in our court systems where imputation takes place through what is known as legal fictions—a concept he describes as follows: "The nearly universal understanding of a legal fiction is that it is something the court consciously knows to be false but treats as if it were true for the sake of a particular action. The use of legal fictions is a long-established, widespread, and indispensable feature of systems of law." Dispelling any concerns that he might be saying Christ's atonement was then a fiction, Craig (2018, pp. 62–64) writes,

> The claim is not that penal substitution is a fiction, for Christ was really and truly punished on such a view.… What is fictitious is that Christ himself did the wrongful acts for which he was punished.… Holding that God, in His role as supreme Judge, adopts for the purposes of our redemption the legal fiction that Christ himself had done the deeds in question in no way implies that our forensic justification before His bar is unreal. Thus, through the device of legal fictions we do, indeed, have some experience of how legal

> responsibility for acts can be imputed to another person who did not really do the actions, thereby producing real differences in the world outside the fiction.

Taken together, Christ pays our ransom to God, which satisfies God's justice, in order to cover our sins by having Christ's righteousness imputed to us, which results in our forgiveness, reconciliation, and redemption. As under the first covenant all are declared guilty, now under the new covenant, Christian theism maintains that the problem of guilt has been resolved through Christ's atonement. As the author of Hebrews wrote of Christ, "Therefore, he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant" (Heb 9:15).

4.2. Why Christian Theism's Solution to Guilt Appeals

Looking at the biblical data, there are numerous reasons why Christian theism's solution of Christ's atonement to guilt appeals. To begin with, (1) God's pardon of human guilt diminishes selfishness by fostering an attitude of sacrificial service to him (Heb 9:14). (2) It also reminds us that Christ's death brought an end to the sacrificial system, relieving humanity's burden to eradicate their own guilt (John 1:29; Rom 6:2–3; Eph 2:8–9; Heb 10:6–8). (3) Furthermore, far from producing an antinomian lifestyle, God's unconditional love and forgiveness as evidenced in the atonement provides ample motivation for repentance and sanctification as "God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance" (Rom 2:4; see also Heb 10:9–10, 14).[171]

[171] Since the first century, there have been those who have thought Christian theism and its solution to guilt is too easy, and in turn their thinking, tends to lead people who claim to have been forgiven to abuse divine grace. Paul the apostle challenged such antinomian thinking, asking, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (Rom 6:1–2). According to Christians, there is a significant difference between believing *in* Christ and believing *that* Christ died on the cross to atone for our sin and eradicate our guilt. They point out that even the demons believe that God exists, but they certainly do not believe in him so as to trust him (Jas 2:19). For the forgiven, the cross fuels their moral motivation and in particular the motivation to love God and others. The atonement provides Christians with the necessary moral motivation to keep God's commands. As Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Here we see the relational connection to keeping God's

(4) In addition, Christian theism justifies believers and spares them from the wrath of God to come, "Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God" (Rom 5:9; see also 8:1). While the list could be lengthened, I will here confine my thoughts by mentioning five additional reasons why Christian theism's solution to guilt appeals.

4.2.1. Christian theism bridges the moral gap for harmonious relationships to exist between God and humanity.

As mentioned above, according to Christian theism, the consequences of sin and guilt have created a relational barrier between God and humanity. The atonement can be seen as God's initiative toward humanity in order to remove this barrier. By Christ's death, both vertical reconciliation with God and horizontal reconciliation to others is possible. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote, "By abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross" (2:15–16). Christians claim that the atonement was God's plan to not only reconcile humanity to humanity, but reconcile humanity to God. Reflecting on the contrast between God's perfection and humanity's imperfection allows one to understand the depths to which God in Christ plunged in order to unite us to himself. God wants human guilt to be removed for a purpose, namely so that people can exist in harmonious relationship with him.

4.2.2. Christian theism tells us that God's omniscience regarding human sinfulness and guilt does not thwart his unconditional love and grace to humanity.

The idea of God's omniscience can be a frightening concept for the guilty person who fails to look beyond this singular attribute of God. Such contemplation can instigate anger, fear, shame, paranoia, and many other defective responses for the person in need of forgiveness. While if the story of Christian theism is true, and it is true that God is omniscient, it is also true that his perfect and complete knowledge of humanity did not cancel out his love for us. A fuller picture of God, and in particular

commandments. When a person loves God, it stirs him or her to want to obey him. On Christian theism, a lack of obedience results from a lack of love.

his attribute of love, is worthy of consideration. Paul wrote, "But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). Here Paul wants his readers to know that God's love is more than words; it is also demonstrated—"God *shows* his love." To specify, Paul qualifies when God's love was demonstrated—"while we were *still* sinners." To uncover the nature of God's love, Paul utilizes the Greek word *agapē*, which refers to a particular type of God's love (i.e. his unconditional love). *Agape* is love without strings attached. If this message is true, then it means that we are loved regardless of our moral performance, sin, and guilt.

Christians claim that God's *agape* love is instrumental in eradicating guilt. They believe his love is what motivated him to send his Son into the world to deal with it (John 3:16). His *agape* love is also the reason insecure humans can find a true sense of security. To be fully known yet fully loved provides security for the insecure and is instrumental in providing a proper motivation for the forgiven to serve God from a place of gratitude rather than serving him out of constant fear of losing his love or trying to morally perform in order to gain his approval.

4.2.3. Christian theism and its picture of Christ's atonement powerfully depicts how human relationships can flourish.

Christians argue that Christ's death serves as a visual reminder for how we are also to treat others who have wronged us. Paul reminds Christians to "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph 4:32; see also Col 3:13). Jesus's willingness to unconditionally forgive those who seek his forgiveness, even at the cost of his own life, serves as the standard by which faithful followers are to extend forgiveness in their relationship with others. By considering God's complete forgiveness of one's own misdeeds through Christ, believers are better able to extend forgiveness to others. Apart from such a generous model of forgiveness, people are apt to formulate their own set of demands on the guilty. Such a model of forgiveness can assist the forgiven in their broken relationships resulting from moral wrongdoing to offer forgiveness in return and more relational harmony

4.2.4. Christian theism explains that Christ's atonement is meant not only to deal with our past guilt, but also to protect us from future guilt by imitating Christ's morally exemplary life.[172]

For Christian theists, God's moral laws are put in place not to stifle us but to direct us to become more like Christ. His atonement on the cross puts the consequences of a life lived apart from him on full display. Nevertheless, as our moral exemplar, these Christians believe that Christ's morally perfect life typifies how we ought to model our own lives. In choosing to walk in sync with God's moral laws, one does not choose a lesser life or forfeit a life of freedom, but rather that person is placed on the pathway toward moral transformation. Such a life lived in concert with God's commands frees one from the many consequences that follow those who live contrary to God's moral will. According to Christian theists, this is because God's pathway steers his followers away from actions that result in guilt, shame, regret, insecurities, and hopelessness. By imitating Christ as their moral exemplar, his followers can participate in the good life they were created for.

4.2.5. As the exclamation mark of the atonement, Christian theism teaches that Christ's resurrection offers believers hope for permanent transformation on the day of glorification.

Evans (2013, p. 87) writes, "Though the moral law aims at our transformation, it begins by helping us see how much we need to be transformed. It points to a problem of moral guilt and a need for atonement that requires more than a philosophical remedy." The resurrection goes one step further, by solidifying this remedy in that Christ's resurrection contains within it a promise to believers that far exceeds this life, one where believers will also share in Christ's resurrected life in glorification (i.e. complete transformation). Paul wrote, "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection

[172] Admittedly, there is no shortage of pastoral leaders who heap unnecessary guilt upon their parishioners in an attempt to overemphasize guilt. Sadly, this often prevents believers from experiencing the joys of forgiveness by trapping them in their past guilt.

like his" (Rom 6:5).[173] Here Paul confidently declared that death is not the end for the believer, but now, free of guilt, believers set their hope in forever sharing in the life of God as morally perfected saints. He added, "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor 15:19–22). For the Christian, this promise brims with hope, assuring believers that life through Christ is more than life on this earth; it is life everlasting.[174] This is a promise so certain to Christ that he believed there was no other way to accomplish this apart from first dealing with our guilt through his death and resurrection. Had he not truly believed he was the final solution to our guilt and ultimate transformation, one might think him a fool to have died on humanity's behalf if it was unnecessary (Luke 22:42).[175]

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[173] For a significant point of contrast within two of the three Abrahamic religions, Christianity, unlike Islam, offers a guarantee that one's forgiveness is secure. Although Islam claims that Allah is merciful and forgiving, there exists an arbitrariness to Allah's will that fails to provide the repentant with a real sense of security that one is forgiven in an absolute sense. For the faithful Muslim, this uncertainty is especially the case as it relates to the final judgment. In the end, Allah has his scales by which he judges. Regarding this future judgment, Muslims can only hope their good deeds outweigh their bad ones. "Then those whose balance (of good deeds) is heavy,—they will attain salvation: But those whose balance is light, will be those who have lost their souls; in Hell will they abide" (Qur'an 23:102–3; see also 21:47). Commenting on these verses, Abdullah Yusuf Ali (2005, p. 892 n. 2942) writes, "Good and evil deeds will be weighed against each other. If the good deeds prevail, the soul will attain *falāḥ*, *i.e*. prosperity, well-being, bliss, or salvation; if the contrary, there will be the misery and anguish of Hell." This makes Islam's solution to guilt tenuous, as final forgiveness is left to fate. In the meantime, the onus is on faithful Muslims to earn Allah's approval in the hope that the scales will be weighed in their favor. In the end, the final answer resides in the arbitrary will of Allah.

[174] According to Christian theism, God's solution to human guilt is freely given, but there is a condition. To share in this life, the guilty person must recognize his or her sin and guilt (Rom 3:10), confess it (1 John 1:9), and receive Christ as his or her own (John 1:12), trusting that through his substitutionary atonement God has made a way for one's guilt to be remedied and to at last be declared righteous (2 Cor 5:21).

[175] If Christ is the only way, one might fairly ask, "But what about those who have never heard?" This question has been answered in various ways, but most Christian scholars are content to

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I showed how the God of Christian theism does more than simply explain our guilt problem; he also seeks to resolve it. I began by showing how the God of Christian theism fits the theistic description of God as discussed in the previous chapter—a God who is personal, all-knowing, and a moral lawgiver who is good and fit to hold us accountable. I then showed the predicament that every human is in as a result of breaking God's moral laws by showing how everyone is guilty before God. I argued that Christian theists maintain that there is a moral gap between God's righteousness and our own unrighteousness that has left us in a state of guilt. To remedy this situation and close the moral gap, I explained how the God of Christian theism sought to deal with our guilt through Christ's atonement, after which I concluded with five reasons why Christian theism appeals and in sum why the solution to our guilt appears to be Christian-shaped.

say that God will judge those based on the knowledge they do possess, and if they believe that God is the Creator as seen in conscience (Rom 1:19–20) and believe in their conscience that they have sinned against him and are therefore guilty (Rom 2:14), they too can be saved apart from the knowledge they never had access to. But they would still be saved on account of Christ's atonement, by having the benefits of his death applied to them when responding with faith to the knowledge they do have. This explanation is not without controversy, but it does seem unjust that God would hold such persons accountable for not believing something about which they had no knowledge. Those rightly concerned with the fate of those who have never heard can hopefully assuage their angst by pondering God's good character, knowing that the judge of all the earth will do what is right (Gen 18:25) and is not willing that any should perish (2 Pet 3:9). For an accessible treatment of this question, see William Lane Craig, "How Can Christ Be the Only Way to God?" (Craig, no date), at https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/christianity-other-faiths/how-can-christ-be-the-only-way-to-god.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I set out to offer a supplemental version of the moral argument by offering an argument from moral guilt before turning to Christian theism as a way to remedy our guilt. To accomplish this goal, I have argued that moral guilt is a universal problem that is best accounted for not by naturalism but by classical theism, and in particular, aspects specific to Christian theism where one finds not only an explanation in order to ontologically ground the universal problem of guilt in theism, but also God's remedy to resolve our guilt as accomplished through Christ's atonement. Because of this, Christian theism is able to offer a more comprehensive account of moral guilt than naturalism. While naturalism offers various explanations (or what I would even call reductions[176]), as depicted by Darwin, Nietzsche, Freud, and others, none escapes the trappings of moral relativism or atheistic moral Platonism. That is not the case with Christian theism.

Concerning morality, relativism fails to offer a sufficient explanation to account for universal objective morality. While we cannot be certain as to how many universally objective moral laws exist, there does seem to be at least *some* that glue cultures together regardless of their morally nuanced code of ethics. For example, torturing a baby for the fun of it, stealing from others, murdering the innocent, raping another person, lying for no good reason, or similar deeds would be the type of actions that would render people guilty, regardless of their personal or cultural ethics. It is as if some of these moral values transcend moral relativism in that they are not dependent upon persons or cultures. This universally shared sense of our moral values and duties connects us as humans to a larger picture of morality, one that is not merely relative to the individual or the culture, but a morality that points beyond these cultures to a mind-independent, universally objective moral law that, when violated, results in a guilty moral status, regardless of whether one feels guilty. As I have

[176] By reductions, I mean to say that the accounts on the basis of naturalism are limited explanations in that they are reduced down to the individual's explanation, or they are even reductive in that the account is reduced to a materialistic explanation.

contended in this thesis, while it is a healthy response for a person to feel guilty in the event of committing some moral trespass, the absence of such feelings does nothing to eliminate the fact that one is still guilty, in particular on the basis of Christian theism, since to break the moral law is to offend the moral lawgiver and hence to be guilty before him. On the basis of naturalism there is no objective moral law, therefore there is no objective moral guilt, and consequently there is no real remedy to assuage one from his or her inner torment of guilt. Nevertheless, when we talk of guilt, universally speaking, the experience of it as it relates to feelings is similar in explanation. Someone does something wrong, and feelings of guilt emerge. While these feelings can be triggered by the variegated moral codes of various cultures, there are some moral standards that when violated, glue us together in an objective sense, causing the theist to inquire more into the nature of *who* we have offended in the instance of a moral trespass. And fortunately, with a particular type of theism, namely Christian theism, the problem of guilt is not left without a solution because Christian theism, over and above naturalism, offers a universal solution to our guilt.

1. Naturalism's Unsatisfactory Solutions to Guilt

To begin, take Darwin, who argued that as rational animals our reflective capacities and our desire to be esteemed by others causes us to experience guilt to varying degrees, depending on the particular culture in which we live. One solution as recognized by Darwin was to reflect upon the cause of guilt and then to avoid repeating the same action down the road. So, to get rid of the guilt, people can feel better about themselves by thinking, "I will do better next time." If they conclude the action was wrong and attempt to avoid it next time, this may guard them from repeated feelings of guilt. The problem is, this solution does nothing to absolve them of the initial action that led to such a person's guilt in the first place. Consider a person who robbed a bank, felt guilty, and determined she will avoid this action in the future. Does that really do anything to solve her guilt in satisfying the need for justice that such guilt requires, or is there work left to be done? One cannot merely sweep one's actions under the rug which led the person to feel guilty to begin with. Guilt requires justice. That said, one wonders in the event where a person "seemingly" gets off the hook for a crime he committed if there's more to the story. On the basis of

Christian theism, there is. That is because there exists an all-knowing God who will bring all to account in due time.

Next, take Darwin's observation that our desire to be esteemed by others causes us to feel guilty. So, a person violates someone else's moral standards and consequently loses esteem. Then as a result, he determines not to commit the same action again in order to save face. But what if now the same person has two people with opposing values and desires to be esteemed by both of them? One can imagine having to make an unfortunate choice regarding which person he wants to be esteemed by more. These are the types of problems the person seeking to resolve his or her guilt will encounter with Darwin's kind of moral relativism. It is not clear what makes one person's values more morally binding compared to another. Similarly, the same types of problems would emerge with cultural relativism. That is to say, it seems right to wonder why one culture's values are morally binding versus another. In both cases, the solutions to guilt are found in conforming to personal or cultural mores. While conforming to cultural norms may grant people cultural esteem from their community, how can they be sure the values of their culture triumph over the values of another culture? The remedies for guilt one can imagine using Darwin's explanation for guilt seem tenuous at best. That is because guilt on the basis of Darwin's view operates more like an emotional response system that is enlightened upon reflection over actions that might otherwise threaten one's survival, or threaten one's moral standing before his or her community, rather than the inner angst or feeling that some universal objective moral law has been violated and consequently renders the trespasser morally culpable before God. Darwin's description of guilt does not adequately address the universality of our guilt as something more than mere relativism in that some actions are guilt producing regardless of one's cultural preferences. Furthermore, Darwin's explanation fails to account for the sense that one has offended a universal watcher. That one cannot hide his or her guilt by simply dismissing the action which led to one's guilt by reasoning, "I'll be more careful next time." Obviously, Darwin does not believe in a universal watcher, but as discussed in chapter 6, a universal watcher makes better sense of our experience of guilt.

Now consider Nietzsche, who believed that guilt was caused through people internalizing their instinctual desires to act out by self-inflicting punishment on themselves in order to tame their instincts, only to find their guilt reaching its moral apex with the rise of Christianity. For him, the solution to absolving one's guilt is to

charge Christianity with the crime of causing so much guilt to begin with and to rebel against one's instincts in pursuit of a self-made life. By denying God, religion, objective morality, and guilt, humans could discover their freedom at last.[177] While one could concede that a lot of false guilt may have captured people's conscience, denying guilt altogether in order to redeem oneself from it is to go to the opposite extreme. One should readily admit that people have certainly been victims of pseudo guilt instigated by religious leaders. Nietzsche is right to assert that some religious fanatics are all too ready to heap guilt on victims who fall short of *their* moral standards. But he was wrong to deny the existence of any moral facts, as it seems more certain than not that some things are just wrong, objectively wrong. For example, it seems truer to argue that raping infants for fun is objectively wrong than trying to argue alternatively or dismissing morals carte blanche.

And then there is Freud, who believed that people inflict themselves with guilt by reigning in their aggressive instincts for the sake of social harmony and to protect themselves from the fear of two authority figures. The first authority was an external authority, namely the primal father. The solution to absolving one's guilt during this era of human history was much easier. In order to assuage their guilt, the sons simply killed the source of their guilt—their father. However, this solution was short-lived, as guilt out of regret for their action soon emerged in more severe fashion with the arrival of the super-ego. So as not to act out against each other and consequentially destroy one another, a second authority—or an internal authority, namely the super-ego—emerged from the human psyche to tame human behavior by smothering them with guilt. The solution to one's guilt here is realized by opposing the super-ego and lowering its demands or in denying the guilt. And while this may be a good suggestion insofar as it concerns false guilt, can denying guilt altogether really clean up the problem of guilt? Once again, just because a person denies his or her guilt does not guarantee the person is vouchsafed from it.

[177] For an insightful article, see Brian Leiter (2019), "The Innocence of Becoming: Nietzsche against Guilt." Leiter interprets Nietzsche's idea of "the innocence of becoming" in terms of how in Nietzsche's estimation no one is really ever morally guilty for what they do.

2. Christian Theism's Ability to Account for Universal Objective Moral Guilt

Unlike moral relativism, Christian theism can explain morality and the failure to adhere to moral standards in *universal* terms.[178] This is important because Christian theism can offer a universally objective account of morality. One can violate his personal or cultural standards and feel guilty about it, and one's feelings of guilt can even be objective if they correspond to violating one's personal or cultural standards. But the difference is that one's guilt feelings are only objective in a relativistic sense, and just because someone violates some personal or cultural standard, it does not mean that person is guilty before God. One might rebut, "But I do not feel guilty before God, so why does it matter?" As we considered in chapter 5, while our feelings can help us make better sense of our guilt as an offense against a person, they do not tell the entire story. So in the event that a person is not privy to sense a connection between God and his or her guilt, that does not mean the person is off the hook. In the argument I put forward, feelings tell part of the story but not the whole.

That said, you can have a *type* of objective morality on the basis of moral relativism, but it is not universal objective morality that transcends culture, but rather it is objective in *relativistic* terms in that the cause of one's guilt is personally or culturally related, but such a cause is not grounds for universal guilt. For example, if someone feels guilty for committing action *x* because culture *y* prohibits it, then one's feeling of guilt is culturally objective on relativistic terms, but not necessarily universally objective, unless the particular cause for guilt is shared as a universal value.[179] In the case where the moral law of the person and/or culture overlap with God's moral law, then the person would be objectively guilty in both a relativistic and

[178]The case is compelling, as I have argued, that theism alone can service a better account of morality than naturalism. But here in the conclusion, since I have already argued for theism's superior explanation of moral guilt over and against naturalism, theism is simply entailed in my usage of Christian theism for my concluding remarks here.

[179] Such universally recognized moral values are the type of things already mentioned above, such as torturing a baby for the fun of it or raping another person. These moral actions seem to transcend culture, as if there are *some* values that glue us together as cultures. We have a universal sense of shared morality and consequently in the failure to uphold these moral values we also share a sense of universal guilt.

universal sense (i.e. before his culture, and God). While recognizing various ethical systems as depicted by moral relativism, Christian theism transcends these various accounts by offering an explanation of morality that exists independent of personal tastes or cultural preferences. Christian theism can help explain how it is and why it is that some moral values transcend culture and thus glue us together. For the Christian theist, the moral law is universally grounded in God's good nature. This means the moral law does not exist independent of God (in a Platonic sense), but rather it exists because he exists. The two (i.e. the moral law and God) are connected, for the moral law finds its home in God's good nature. It is rooted in him, not apart from him.

3. Christian Theism's Ability to Account for the Dynamics of Accountability

Given God's existence on the basis of Christian theism, one does not lack a universally objective account of accountability, something that naturalism fails to provide. Some, like Nietzsche, are even ready to celebrate this lack. In *Twilight of the Idols,* Nietzsche (1968, p. 54) shockingly admits that the rejection of accountability sits at the heart of atheism, "We deny God. In denying God, we deny accountability: only by doing *that* do we redeem the world." The way to freedom is to reject God, reject morality, reject guilt, and consequently reject accountability. But does this fit our moral experience? This sounds more like a recipe for anarchy. Rather, a guilty person is one who has broken a law and is therefore accountable for his actions. As Evans (2010, p. 139) writes, "Human persons who sense that they are morally obligated to perform or refrain from performing an action commonly see themselves as accountable or responsible in some way, and they frequently interpret this accountability as actual accountability to God," unlike naturalists such as Darwin, Nietzsche, and Freud, who interpret accountability in relativistic terms and see it in some instances as unnecessary, like Nietzsche's. Accountability differs from culture to culture because it is the responsibility of each culture to determine what justice looks like for itself. Consequently, the guilty party is at the mercy of whether or not authority figures act justly, or even comes to know of the crime. One can quickly see how the moral relativism of naturalism results in accountability that is also relative in the way it is dispensed. For example, consider two people, both guilty of the same crime, but from different cultures. It is unlikely that the guilty perpetrators will receive the same punishment. One will more than likely be issued a harsher judgment

than the other because one culture may deem the crime as more severe than the other. And the punishments can vary from one context to another depending on how much one's culture determines the weight of one's crime.

Or consider atheistic moral Platonism. On this account, what would accountability even look like? While one may derive moral standards from abstract values, in the event that one fails to adhere to one of these values, that same person certainly will not be held accountable by the particular value he failed to live out. That is because the abstract value is inept to bring its moral violators to account as a non-personal abstract object. Therefore, accountability is the responsibility of the earthly realm, not the Platonic realm. But this seems incoherent as a comprehensive explanation for guilt. In the case described, you have the values that produce the guilt when violated in one realm (i.e. the Platonic realm), and the issuers of justice in another realm (i.e. the earthly realm). On this account, you have objective moral values but not ultimate objective accountability because cultures vary in the way they dispense justice. Consequently, there is no *ultimate* justice within this framework. Sure, there can and will be justice in this realm, but is it evenhanded? There is an earthly accountability, which has a Platonic reference point to make it coherent. This seems to strengthen my argument that Christian theism is able to offer a fuller picture by personalizing the moral argument over and above the atheistic moral Platonists' view.

To the contrary, Christian theism ensures us that each person will ultimately receive a just account of his or her life before God. That is because on the basis of Christian theism, the moral law does not exist independent of him, but rather morality is grounded in his good nature. And since perpetrators' moral offenses are against God as the moral lawgiver, he has the right to bring them to justice for their actions. Pointing to God's existence, Evans (2010, p. 139), who recognizes accountability as a natural sign, puts it well: "If God is the source of our moral obligations, then God will be among the ones to whom I am accountable; indeed, God will be the primary one to whom I am accountable."[180] As a just God, in the end everyone will give an account to him and he will judge equitably, while avoiding the inconsistencies that come along

[180] Obviously, accountability has social ramifications, and the guilty party may find himself experiencing other forms of accountability be it from law enforcement, government, a spouse, etc.

with moral relativism and atheistic moral Platonism. In the meantime, while justice is often inadequately meted out on earth, Christian theism offers a vision of ultimate unbiased justice before a good God who is fit to hold us accountable.

4. Christian Theism's Ability to Account for the Objectivity of Guilt Feelings

Christian theism makes better sense of our guilt feelings by showing how these feelings can be objective when they correspond to a moral trespass. Contrary to the moral relativism of Darwin, Nietzsche, and Freud, Christian theism's morality is not relative to culture or individuals, but rather universal objective moral guilt corresponds to a universal objective moral law grounded in a God who is a personal, all-knowing moral lawgiver who is good and fit to hold us accountable. Naturalism at large cannot account for the personal aspect of our guilt as pointing to a transcendent someone, nor can it account for a universally omniscient someone who is aware of our guilt, who issues commands to obey, and who is fit to hold us accountable. While atheistic moral Platonism can point to the goodness of abstract objects, these objects as mentioned are not personal, all-knowing, and fit to hold us accountable. Therefore, its account of guilt struggles to account for the full range of moral facts in need of explanation.

For example, it is difficult on the basis of naturalism to grasp how participants become morally enlightened and thus aware of these abstract moral requirements. That is not to say that non-theists are incapable of adjudicating between right and wrong. The theist has no problem conceding this point. For on the basis of theism, *all* people are capable of moral assessment because they are created with a conscience and therefore are equipped with the moral ability to discern between right and wrong. However, it seems more difficult to grasp how on the basis of moral Platonism some non-personal, abstract object can exercise any moral authority to help us discern between right and wrong and then make us feel guilty in the event that we fail to morally conform to the standard. That is also not the commonsense thought of humanity throughout the ages that some abstract realm of values exists to which humans are seeking to conform. For many, this view seems incomprehensible. It fails to illicit a deep sense of obligation, accountability, and clarity. Additionally, values such as goodness, fairness, and love are *personal* values, which the abstract realm lacks. Only a personal nature understands the point of such moral values. Contrary to

this abstract realm of values, Christian theism makes better sense of our moral experience, in particular, our obligations and failure to fulfill our moral duties as an offense against a personal God versus some abstract object. When a person is guilty, and feels guilty for his or her transgression, the guilt feels personal, yet atheistic moral Platonism fails to explain the personal nature of the offense, whereas Christian theism is able to do so with ease. By grounding God's moral law in his good nature, it makes sense then that one's guilt feels as though he or she has offended someone. That is because to trespass a moral law is to trespass against the moral lawgiver. The two (i.e. the moral law and God) do not exist independent of each other, but rather the moral law is grounded in God himself. For when one does transgress the moral law, his or her feelings of guilt are provoked by the moral lawgiver. Whereas atheistic moral Platonism can connect one's guilt feelings to trespassing some abstract virtue, Christian theism not only can do the same but can also make sense of our guilt feelings in connection to a God who is a personal, all-knowing, moral lawgiver who is good and fit to hold us accountable. Thereby, the scope of Christian theism's explanation is more comprehensive in that the shape of the answer that Christianity provides makes it more "probable" as an account of the world.

5. Christian Theism's Ability to Satisfy the Need Guilt Produces in Us

In his book *Existential Reasons for God*, Clifford Williams (2011) addresses some of the need-based grounds we have for believing in God. While recognizing the value of evidential reasons for belief, Williams also acknowledges the important role existential reasons can play in formulating one's belief. This can be seen through the various needs we have and how Christian theism satisfies those needs. Offering his readers a balanced perspective, Williams (2011, p. 13) writes, "If one comes to faith largely via the satisfaction of need, one should supplement that process with reason; if one comes to faith largely through reason, one should supplement that with the satisfaction of need." For Williams and his existential argument, "we are justified in believing in God solely because doing so satisfies certain emotional and spiritual needs" (15). What would this look like in the arena of guilt feelings?

The person ridden with guilt feelings has a need to feel forgiven and reconciled. A remedy is much desired, and according to Christian theism, forgiveness and reconciliation have been known to satisfy those who have trusted in Christ's

atonement. To the contrary, consider the naturalism of Darwin, Nietzsche, and Freud. Their arguments fail to satisfy one's need for forgiveness and reconciliation. While each would envision guilt pointing to a different need than to be forgiven and reconciled, the more common or natural way of understanding feelings of guilt in general is to think the primary need is to be forgiven for one's guilt and reconciled to the offended party, not to simply learn from it, shun it, or reduce the moral standard so as not to feel bothered by it. It is the commonsense reaction for the guilty child or the guilty husband or the guilty friend to know that if he wants to be forgiven and reconciled, then he must acknowledge his wrongdoing and request forgiveness to set things right. Furthermore, our experience with guilt feelings is seemingly more serious than simply seeking to do better next time, or denying our guilt, or perhaps even lowering the moral standard so as not to feel so weighed down by guilt. Our guilt feelings show that we sense a need for forgiveness and reconciliation. That is because guilt is an offense against another being, and Christian theism, unlike naturalism, offers a practical remedy for the person who feels guilty: the atonement. History is replete with examples of people who were once plagued by guilt feelings who then discovered that trusting in Christ's atonement satisfied their need for forgiveness and reconciliation.

Regarding one's need for forgiveness, Williams states, "A sense of having gone astray afflicts us. It may be sharp, in which case we agonize over our wandering heart, or it may be subdued, in which case we are merely uneasy about it. In either case, we need to know that we will not be rejected because of having lost our way. If we think of this need in the context of God, it turns into the need to be forgiven by God" (24).[181] And fortunately, the atonement is God's means to address our need for

[181] To help distinguish between the evidential and existential arguments, Williams (2011, p. 43) writes, "The evidential argument tries to support the existence of God by showing that God's existence is needed to explain how people got those needs, whereas the existential argument tries to show that we can justifiably have faith in God solely because it satisfies the needs." Or to put it another way, "A person who is convinced of an existential argument says, 'I believe because I am satisfied when I do.' A person who is convinced of an evidential argument says, 'I believe because there is a good reason to do so'" (45). Williams can see the value of both existential and evidential arguments, yet he also recognizes that existential arguments have been downplayed. My argument addresses both, while admittedly tackling more of the evidential reasons. I think by grappling with guilt feelings,

forgiveness in a satisfactory way. More than that, while the atonement satisfies our need for forgiveness and reconciliation, it also satisfies God's need for justice. There is no free lunch. Our freedom was purchased. This simple thought experiment with our guilt feelings can help us see how Christian theism better satisfies our need for forgiveness and reconciliation. The message of our guilt feelings is that a relationship has been fractured by our transgression and we are in need of forgiveness and reconciliation. The message following some moral lapse does not tend to be, "Better luck next time. Just forget about it or minimize the consequence of the trespass so you can feel less guilty." Guilt feelings are sharp, and they create a need that Christian theism is equipped to meet via Christ's atonement as discussed in chapter 7 of this thesis.

6. Final Thoughts

Having contended that Christian theism's account of guilt is more comprehensive than naturalism's account of guilt, allow me to recap what I set out to accomplish in this thesis. The journey toward Christian theism and its solution to guilt began in part I with an exploration of various naturalistic explanations that have been given to account for moral guilt. Here in the initial chapters of this thesis I explored and compared the non-theistic explanations of guilt as depicted by Darwin, Nietzsche, and Freud. Following these explanations and comparisons, I sought in part II to show how different moral arguments have been framed throughout history by utilizing various features of morality when arguing for God's existence. This was to provide some helpful background before developing my own moral argument for God's existence from the feature of guilt. In chapter 6, I developed an argument that maintained that the best explanation for universal guilt feelings is the existence of universal objective guilt. I then detailed the type of God who could account for universal objective guilt, namely a God who is a personal, all-knowing, moral lawgiver and who is good and fit to judge humanity on account of their guilt. This led to chapter 7, where I showed how the attributes of the God revealed in Christian theism corresponds to the type of God as argued for in chapter 6. After making this

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forgiveness, and reconciliation, I have entered into existential territory—a territory that is worthy of visitation.

connection, I demonstrated how the God of Christian theism has worked on our behalf to eradicate our guilt through Christ's atonement, before then concluding in that final chapter with several reasons why Christian theism and its solution to guilt is more appealing than naturalism because it offers a more comprehensive account of our moral guilt.

As I wrap up, I hope my thesis contributes to the moral argument at large in the following ways: First, by isolating a moral feature like guilt and showing how it supplements the moral argument, I hope others will reflect on other moral features such as shame, conscience, blame, paranoia, and denial and discover how these various moral features point toward moral realism and theism alike. My project aim was simply to take one piece of the moral puzzle, namely guilt, and demonstrate how it deserves to be part of the moral picture. It is hard to develop a knockdown argument of moral realism from guilt alone, but when joined to other pieces of moral argumentation guilt plays an important role. Second, this thesis sought to advance the moral argument by addressing not only the evidential aspects of guilt but also the emotional aspects of it. I tried to demonstrate how our feelings of guilt can be understood as more than subjective feelings, but they can be objective if they correspond to reality. My argument sought to merge both the evidential and the emotional and show how the two can work together in an objective sense. Third, by constructing my argument as a chain argument, I have offered a unique development of the moral argument that starts with abductive argumentation and ends with a deductive conclusion. This afforded me the opportunity to consider which of the two explanations (i.e. naturalism or theism) offers the best account of guilt while also concluding with a strong deductive claim. By beginning my argument abductively, I readily admitted given the rich resources of our world that naturalism can offer various accounts of moral guilt but then explained why theism is able to offer a more comprehensive account of guilt by adding God into the moral picture. Theism avoids the grounding issue by grounding the moral law in God's good nature. This usurps the naturalist's relativistic explanation by providing a way to understand universal morality; furthermore, it trumps the Platonic explanation in that guilt's personal aspect plugs more naturally into a theistic conception of the world than it does a Platonic one. This moral breach against a theistic God informs the guilty that God is fit to hold us accountable, yet moving to Christian theism, God has acted on behalf of humanity through Christ's atonement to offer us forgiveness and reconciliation

through the death of God's Son on the cross, thus resolving our guilt problem. At last then, I hope by connecting the dots between theism and Christian theism not only to have shown that this is the same God, but also to have shown how the God of Christianity moves beyond explaining our guilt to removing it through the atonement.

In the end, there will be those who will not conclude that belief in theism, much less Christian theism, is capable of providing a better account of moral guilt than naturalism, but hopefully they will not do so at the expense of excluding theistic options before the project begins. May Alfred Edward Taylor's ([1930] 1951, p. 207) words to his generation never be said of ours: "It is just because so many of our modern philosophical moralists are afraid to make the idea of God frankly central in their theories of conduct that their treatment of guilt is inadequate to the actual moral experiences of men with any depth of character."

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