

## Editorial preface

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Theism and morality are almost always conceptual neighbors. In this issue, this close relationship is explored from a number of different perspectives including discussions of Levinas, William James, William Lang Craig, Aquinas and Plato.

The first article by Marc A. Cohen considers the claim of Levinas that human beings as such have an infinite and absolute moral obligation to others, to what the biblical tradition calls our neighbors. Since this obligation is infinite, it cannot be fully met by finite human beings. Because of this, human beings must settle for what is practically attainable. Social relationships negotiate this practical settlement with social contracts and customs that limit our infinite obligations. Religious laws, customs and contracts (or covenants) do the same. The danger of settling for the limits of decency as this is defined by religious law and practice is that it may blind us to our infinite moral obligation to the other; indeed, it may seduce us into thinking that we have met all that is morally required of us regarding our obligations to others by simply obeying the dictates of religious law and custom. This leads to the possibility that one can follow the letter of religious requirements for decency and yet be a scoundrel. Faithfully remembering the call of the infinite obligation to others can avoid this seduction by continually striving to go beyond the limits of decency.

According to Toby Betenson, William Lang Craig is wrong to think that if God does not exist then our lives are futile. Indeed, Betenson holds that on Craig's own premises, the opposite is true: our lives would be futile if God does exist. For Craig, without God there is no fairness, no ultimate justice, and hence what we do would not be causally efficacious in bringing about justice and fairness. But on Craig's

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own terms, if there is a God, then what we do, our moral actions, would also be causally inefficacious in bringing about Justice and fairness. That is, if God exists then what we do would not matter: justice and fairness will prevail no matter what we do. Hence life would be futile if God did exist. After considering several objections to this position, Betenson makes it clear that he thinks that it is possible for a life to matter even if there were no God.

In the spirit of Livinas in our first article, Xianofei Liu assumes that our moral tasks are extremely demanding. And if we are to meet these demands, we need a strong motivation for doing so. Even if theism lacks epistemic justification, it may be practically justifiable because theistic beliefs offer strong motivating reasons for carrying out our daunting moral obligations. But Xianofei finds that the traditional practical arguments for theism (classically formulated by James and Kant) are inadequate because they are ultimately self-defeating. She proposes a new version of the practical argument for theism that avoids this pitfall. This argument begins with the assumption that the challenge of morality is exacerbated by the fact that we live in a morally corrupt society. If God exists, then this challenge is less daunting.

According to orthodox biblical faith, we are required not only to love our neighbor, but to love God as well. Roberto Di Ceglie reads Aquinas as proposing that the moral duty to love God is the bridge between faith and reason. Aquinas approvingly quotes St. Hilary who says: “I am aware that I owe this to God as the chief duty of my life, that my every word and sense may speak of him.” In obeying this duty to love God (charity) the believer is enabled to assent to the revealed truths of faith; but it is also this love of God that causes us to desire knowledge and heed reason. As St. Paul says, charity is greater than faith; and as Aquinas tells us, faith is greater than reason; but for Aquinas, it is charity (the love of God) that is greater than both, or if you will, the ground of both.

Divine command theories of moral obligation face the dilemma that Plato raised in the *Euthyphro*. On the divine command theory, an act becomes morally good because God makes it so. If God commands this act because he is morally obliged to do so, then his command cannot make it morally good. If the divine command theory is to succeed, it must be possible for God to make acts morally good even if he is not morally obliged to do so. So the question is this: can a being with no moral obligations make actions morally good by his command? Alfred Archer discusses Alston’s proposed solution to this dilemma. The concept of supererogation is the basis of Alston’s proposal. On this view, God is not morally obligated to make some act morally good, because his command goes beyond moral obligation. After discussing objections to Alston’s proposal by Young, Stump, and Lombardi, Archer offers his own defense of Alston’s proposal.