criteria: the sperm must be ejaculated in the vagina, and fertilization must take place in the body of the woman. Clarification will be needed on whether the Instruction permits ova to be medically removed, on whether the sperm can be drawn from the vagina *post coitum*, and on whether the sperm and ovum can then be inserted in the womb or in a fallopian tube.[190] To many these questions seem to be a matter of technicalities, and they lead to what has been called "moral nit-picking." The impression is given of trying to find loopholes in the rules rather than facing the need to rethink the principles.

Still everyone agrees on the goals, and it is the role of moral theologians to debate the "how's." At this point, the Instruction sees distinctions that constitute the difference between wrongness and rightness, while its critics see difficulties that call for prudence. To one group, these distinctions point to the will of God inscribed into human nature; to the other, they seem like the fixations of a mistaken methodology and a misunderstanding of integral human life. There is no question of the moral earnestness of either group. There is question of moral wisdom.

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THE CHRISTIAN DIFFERENCE IN ETHICS

In their recent pastoral letters *The Challenge of Peace* and *Economic Justice for All*, the U.S. Catholic bishops set out to instruct the community of American Catholics and to contribute to the general public debate about morally significant policies. Thus, in *Economic Justice for All* the bishops speak of their desire "to provide guidance for members of our own church as they seek to form their consciences about economic matters" and of "the common bond of humanity that links all persons" and that is "the source of our belief that the country can attain a renewed

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[190] It has been suggested that the document was written in such a way as to permit Gamete Intra-Fallopian Transfer (GIFT) and Low Tubal Ovum Transfer (LTOT). GIFT involves extracting an ovum by surgery, placing it in a catheter along with sperm which may be obtained by use of a perforated condom. These are kept separated by a bubble lest the sin of IVF be incurred. Then both sperm and ovum are injected into a fallopian tube in such a way that they meet one another only in the body. LTOT takes a surgically obtained ovum and places it beyond any obstruction in the fallopian tubes, where it may then be fertilized in normal intercourse. Both are said to be free of sin since sexual intercourse takes place in the normal fashion and actual conception takes place in the woman's body. The fact that doctors and nurses have to be involved is taken to be assistance, not replacement. Still, since there is considerable technical intervention between the sexual act and fecundation, it has been suggested that these methods really should be proscribed. The Instruction holds that no one "may subject the coming of a child into the world to conditions of technical efficiency" (Nientiedt, "Natur nachhelfen" 218).

public moral vision."[191] These letters and the diverse reactions to them have been assessed at length in previous editions of these "Notes."[192] They continue to provoke debate on contemporary concerns, but they also bring before us a new variation on one of the oldest themes in the history of Western thought: the relationship between religious belief and morality. From Plato's *Euthyphro* through Paul's Epistle to the Romans to the writings of Alan Donagan and Stanley Hauerwas, it continues to provoke controversy and new proposals. The treatment of the theme varies depending on whether the basic standpoint is philosophical or theological, on how much weight one accords to theoretical demands or to social perceptions, on the current state of the ever-varying relationship between the Christian community and the larger society with its key cultural institutions, and on the particular theological or philosophical tradition within which the theme is examined.

The question about the distinctiveness of Christian ethics, about the difference that Christian faith makes or should make in our understanding and living of the moral life, is, to borrow an image from the British philosopher J. L. Austin, a "trouser" question.[193] A great deal depends on what the other trouser, the contrasting term in the comparison, is. Thus, Christian ethics can be contrasted with the preferences of rational economic agents or with the ethical teaching of classical antiquity or with contemporary American civil religion or with contemporary moral philosophy or with the belief systems of non-Christian and non-Western parts of the world. This simply expands the truism that if one asks what is different in Christian ethics, one needs to know different from what. The interest in answers to this question is bound to rise as Christian groups and particularly the Roman Catholic Church continue to make efforts to affect public-policy debates. But it also remains a subject of perennial importance for both metaethics and theological ethics. It is most often presented as an introductory or foundational issue that is then either set aside or built upon in the rest of the treatise. But the difference of Christian ethics keeps recurring in assessments that philosophers and theologians offer about types of actions and about specific virtues, about the general shape and context of the moral life, and about the connections between human nature and the various forms of society. Instead of being like a foundation level that is put in place at an early

[191] National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*, no. 27, in *Origins* 16, no. 24 (Nov. 27, 1986) 415.

[192] See, e.g., David Hollenbach, S.J., "Whither Nuclear Deterrence? The Moral Debate Continues," *TS* 47 (1986) 117–33; John Langan, S.J., "The Pastoral on the Economy: From Drafts to Policy," *TS* 48 (1987) 135–56.

[193] J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964) 15.

stage and disappears from view, it is more like an ingredient in a recipe that may affect the flavor of many other ingredients in different ways. But the metaphor would be misleading if it were taken to imply that the special ingredient is not itself altered by the presence of other ingredients. For instance, the way in which the difference of Christian ethics is understood in contemporary Catholicism is affected by views about the proper relationship of the Church to the world, to the state, and to contemporary society.

Contemporary Catholic moral theology has been marked by a profound desire to exhibit the dependence of moral theology on biblical sources, its integration within fundamental and systematic theology, and its links with ecclesiology, pastoral theology, liturgy, and spirituality. It has seen that canon law is not the only ecclesiastical discipline with which it must engage in serious conversation. At the same time, it has wanted to speak on a range of issues from abortion and treatment of the terminally ill to nuclear warfare and Third World debt in ways that would be intelligible and persuasive to people who do not proceed from a Catholic or Christian starting point. It has also wanted to convey a sense that it understands in a sympathetic way the problematic within which the questions of contemporary people are posed about matters of faith and morals. These desires are not necessarily incompatible; in fact, at certain times the teaching Church and individual theologians have been able to satisfy them in a very successful way, most notably in *Gaudium et spes*, Vatican II's pastoral constitution on the Church and the modern world. But they do point to different concerns and different audiences, to different ways of resolving potential conflicts, and to different conceptions of ethical method.

An interesting current example of the effort to situate moral theology within the framework of systematic theology, specifically Christology, is an article by Angelo Scola, "Christologie et morale." Scola urges that moral theology be based on Christology, in contrast to the development of liberal and idealist Protestant theology after Lessing and Kant. In this Protestant approach, Scola says, "the event of the historic Jesus is ineluctably relegated to a particular instant of time, structurally incapable of becoming a universal salvific foundation of man and his moral activity."[194] In the face of the difficulties presented by critical biblical scholarship about the relationship between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith and about the self-understanding of Jesus in regard to eschatology, Scola opts for Balthasar's resolution of the problem, which takes as central the *pro nobis* aspect of Christ's death and resurrection,

[194] Angelo Scola, "Christologie et morale," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 109 (1987) 382–409, at 387.

in which the world is taken into the "hour" of Christ. Christ is both singular and effectively present in all times, so that "Jesus is the universal normative element of Christianity."[195] His redeeming work is absolute and definitive; Christian existence is to be understood as existence *en Christō*. There is a unique supernatural end for human persons, and all merit derives uniquely from Christ. The two poles of Christian existence are both centered in Christ: "the initiative of God in Christ and liberty as the following of Christ."[196] Scola then concludes that one cannot deny the specific character of a Christian ethics, in which he sees four key factors: (1) the justifying initiative of Christ; (2) the gift of the Spirit; (3) our response in liberty, which includes within itself our orientation to transcendental good; and (4) the offering of self in Christ for others. In Scola's view, the teaching of the Old Testament, the judgments of conscience, and natural law are all recapitulated in Christ. The Christ event becomes "the regulative structure of ethics," since it is the full development in relation to which other, incomplete or anticipatory moral teachings are to be judged.

Scola offers two lines of interpretation for nonbiblical ethical systems. On the one hand, he observes that our inability to meet the demands of biblical ethics is a wound which impels us to make a morality in our own image.[197] On the other, he sees extrabiblical ethics taking its origin in the free appeal of love from another and involving an opening to transcendence and a precomprehension of revelation.[198] It is not easy to determine whether he thinks it is either possible or desirable to integrate these two interpretations, which have very different evaluative implications.

Scola does go on to make it clear that he is interested in Christian ethics mainly as a virtue ethic. The inclinations are important to our practical life and are to be transformed by the good so that we can act according to our virtues. A denial of the specificity of Christian ethics goes with a concentration on norms and acts rather than on a morality of attitudes, though he concedes that some of the opponents of the specificity thesis, such as Josef Fuchs, have been willing to grant the existence of some specifically Christian attitudes or virtues. The path of Christian ethics proceeds from the singularity of Christ to "the general formulation of the normative content of morality and of the new human person: to give one's life for others."[199] Scola, in a remarkable footnote,

[195] Ibid. 394.
[196] Ibid. 398.
[197] Ibid. 399.
[198] Ibid. 401.
[199] Ibid. 405.

maintains that in the case of the Christ event it is indeed possible to deduce norms from an event.[200] It is not clear whether this is a metaphorical use of logical language or what are the warrants for thinking that such a remarkable move could be carried out. It may well be that enough normative content has been packed into the event-stating major premise so that some normative conclusions follow. But it should be clear that general predications about Christ of the type that we find in 1 Cor 1:30, where Christ is called "our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption," will not yield specific normative conclusions by any logical process known to either Aristotle or Willard Quine. As Scola himself admits, particular norms cannot be deduced from the Christ norm without historical or hermeneutical mediation.[201] He looks to the apostolic parenesis, to the tradition of the Church, and to the magisterium as three factors which guarantee the legitimacy of our efforts to connect the teachings of Jesus with our own days. Along with his emphasis on this ecclesial approach to moral norms, Scola also affirms that it is possible to deduce from human nature a series of specific norms which will be "universally and necessarily valid"[202] and which express universally valid constitutive structures of human life.

What are we to make of this conception of Christian ethics? Unlike some Protestant theological approaches, it does not make much of differences in method and theological standing between Christian ethics and natural law. What it offers is a dogmatic shelter against the relativizing winds of historical change, particularly since Christ is the eschatologically unsurpassable norm.[203] Christian ethics is situated within a systematic context which ensures its identity and continuing relevance. It offers a framework for living the moral life in a Christocentric way. What it leaves unclear is the real connection and status of the various moral norms, which are apparently assumed to be in a state of perpetual harmony with each other, and what the real social and ecclesial affinities of the position are. It seems possible to interpret Scola's Christological morality so as to lead to an ethic of heroic self-donation, or to passive obedience, or to a quasi-Lutheran sense of the tension between personal sinfulness and the full normative demands of the Christ-event, or to sectarian withdrawal from the world, or to the establishment of a new Christendom. Readers may applaud the effort to integrate morality with a high Christology but should be uneasy with a position which relies on

[200] Ibid. 407, n. 51, where the author expresses amazement at Klaus Demmer's rejection of the idea.
[201] Ibid. 407.
[202] Ibid. 408.
[203] Ibid. 406.

a very high proportion of assertion to argument and leaves many important matters unclear.

A valuable counterpoise to Scola's work is found in a recent article by Josef Fuchs, S.J., who is now retired after a distinguished career at the Gregorian University. In a short but comprehensive piece, "Christian Morality: Biblical Orientation and Human Evaluation,"[204] Fuchs gives a masterly overview of recent disputes on how the two items in his subtitle are to be differentiated and integrated in Christian ethics. Fuchs wisely reminds us that the demand for a more biblical approach to moral theology was already voiced in the first half of the 19th century and that older proponents of a natural-law approach failed to show the specifically Christian character of their position. But he finds that the appeal to Scripture for moral norms not only comes close to fundamentalism, but that it also goes against the general tendency of the New Testament, which "presents itself not primarily as service to the right ordering of the human world but to salvation and therefore to conversion and the personal goodness of the human being in the dawning kingdom of God."[205] In contrast to the biblical or *Glaubensethik* approach is the position which Fuchs labels "ethical autonomy in Christian context"[206] and which holds that "an ethical demand which is *fundamentally* unintelligible to human beings cannot be an element of the mandatory ethical self-realization—whether it be as general norm or as concrete demand."

Fuchs notes that the debate between these positions has been of interest not merely to moral theologians but also to dogmatic theologians and exegetes, and he offers a critical assessment of the positions taken by Hans Urs von Balthasar and Cardinal Josef Ratzinger, pointing particularly to the lack of close and definite connection between the biblical morality presented in Christological terms and a concrete "human" morality. Fuchs's own approach avoids both the skepticism about reason and the adversary stance to contemporary society found in some proponents of the *Glaubensethik* and the ahistorical abstract universality which dominated the treatment of moral norms in Neo-Scholasticism. He stresses the place of contingent realities and experiences in our moral knowledge, and he employs a conception of reason which is responsive to historical change and allows for the joining of faith and reason in the making of moral judgments. He observed that Vatican II in *Gaudium et spes* acknowledges a certain ethical pluralism,[207] and he endorses Schül-

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[204] Josef Fuchs, S.J., "Christliche Moral: Biblische Orientierung und menschliche Wertung," *Stimmen der Zeit* 205 (1987) 671–83.

[205] Ibid. 673.

[206] Ibid. 672.

[207] Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes* 43.

ler's point that the faith-understanding that supports moral knowledge is itself a human understanding bound by the limits of the human condition.[208] These points taken together produce a softening of the faith-reason distinction, a distinction which had been sharpened over the years by both Neo-Scholasticism and secular moral philosophy and had been largely taken for granted by the proponents of the *Glaubensethik.*

It is indeed a key part of Fuchs's response to their views that they cannot escape reliance on human reason in working out their own ethical position. Reliance on Scripture does not eliminate a recognition of the historically conditioned elements in the teaching of the Bible or the necessity for a hermeneutic to shape our reading of the text. What Scripture provides is not a set of timeless norms but an orientation which is to be concretized in human persons. This new orientation requires and does not replace the human effort to understand and to evaluate. For Fuchs, the biblical orientation and moral goodness are closely linked, whereas norms about the moral rightness of action are the product of the work of human reason in understanding and evaluating, a work which is not abstracted from history or from the diversity of experiences and world views. In the final paragraphs Fuchs also responds to the deductivist and antiproportionalist or anticonsequentialist positions taken by Germain Grisez and John Finnis (though he does not mention them by name). He observes: "The judgment of reason about historical concrete action is thus not a pure application of an abstract norm but rather its extensive interpretation."[209] He maintains that the weighing of values which they denounce as impossible and incoherent is found both in ethical theory (e.g., in the principle of double effect and in the ordering of love for the neighbor) and in practical life. In addition to providing a clear and insightful statement of the issues in this debate as seen by a moderate proponent of the autonomist position, Fuchs also gives a sensitive and enlightening sketch of the integration of historical and biblical factors in the making of concrete moral judgments.

The distinction between moral goodness and moral rightness also plays a prominent part in another recent article by Fuchs, "Salvation, Morality, and Right Action: The Christian Ethical Teaching of the Second Vatican Council."[210] Fuchs acknowledges that Vatican II was not much taken up with issues of fundamental moral theology. The decree on the lay apos-

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[208] Fuchs, "Christliche Moral" 678.

[209] Ibid. 682.

[210] Josef Fuchs, S.J., "Heil, Sittlichkeit, richtiges Handeln: Die christliche Morallehre des zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils," *Stimmen der Zeit* 205 (1987). This article also appears in Italian under the title "Vaticano II: Salvezza, moralità, corretto agire," *Rassegna di teologia* 28 (1987) 1–12.

tolate (*Apostolicam actuositatem*) does affirm that the work of salvation includes the right ordering of the world.[211] In Fuchs's view, both personal moral goodness (*personale Sittlichkeit*) and salvation (*Heil*) are incarnated in right action in the world. The attention of Vatican II was given primarily to presenting the mystery of salvation in terms the modern world could grasp. Personal goodness is not a form of egoistic self-enclosure but an openness, a readiness to act in the world. The virtues, especially love, are elements of personal goodness. But the great questions of contemporary society are questions about right action, which are not solved by reliance on personal goodness, although personal goodness does require us to be responsible for the world. Rather, they have to be answered in terms of a new humanism. Fuchs says: "In brief, according to the humanism championed by the Council, the human person (*der Mensch*) is the criterion for right action in the world of the human person."[212] There is no great distance between this formulation and the personalistic teaching of John Paul II with his emphasis on the primacy of the subject in work.[213] As Fuchs himself would admit, however, proclamation of the human person as criterion is an incomplete and inconclusive contribution to ethical reflection. Thus Vatican II had to acknowledge the possibility that there can be different cultures and different moralities.[214] It is of particular importance for Fuchs that what he calls the questions of humanity do not belong to the class of things revealed for our salvation, and so there cannot in principle be unique or universally-binding Christian response to them. Fuchs does acknowledge that the Council also speaks of bringing natural values within the perspective of Christ[215] and of seeking higher principles in the light of faith[216]—expressions which point more in the direction of a Christocentric approach. His essay combines a scholarly sensitivity to the diverse ways in which the Council handled an important set of theological issues and a firm advocacy of his own systematic position. It also manifests the complexity and ambiguity of the Council's accomplishments.

The controversy over the *Glaubensethik* goes on in a Catholic context in which the importance of community values and needs and the place of reason in ethics have traditionally been strongly affirmed. Much American reflection on the same themes is marked by the fact that our religious and philosophical culture has been considerably more individ-

[211] Vatican II, *Apostolicam actuositatem* 5.
[212] Fuchs, "Heil, Sittlichkeit, richtiges Handeln" 20.
[213] John Paul II, *Laborem exercens.*
[214] Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes* 36.
[215] Vatican II, *Gravissimum educationis* 2.
[216] Vatican II, *Apostolicam actuositatem* 16.

ualistic. American theologians working in this area are also likely to be strongly influenced by the broadening of concerns and methods that has been going on in analytic moral philosophy over the last three decades partly as a development of the later work of Wittgenstein, partly as a consequence of the renewal of political theory in the work of John Rawls and Robert Nozick, and partly as a response to the criticisms of analytic moral philosophy made by Iris Murdoch, Elizabeth Anscombe, Stephen Toulmin, and Alasdair MacIntyre among others. James McClendon, professor at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley and author of *Ethics: Systematic Theology*, a work still in progress, relates the recent discussion within Christian ethics on the indispensability of narrative to a broader philosophical treatment of the expression of convictions in speech acts. He makes his general point thus: "Moral convictions, like doctrinal ones, are narrative linked, not in the first instance by virtue of some unique feature of Christian morality ... but by virtue of being convictions."[217] Christian ethics must attend to the distinctive narrative material to which it is logically related. But this narrative orientation is, if McClendon is right, not something confined to Christian ethics. In his view, there is a dispute between narrativists and decisionists, according to whom ethical decisions are to be guided by general norms which are in principle detachable from their original context, e.g. Jesus' commandment to love the neighbor. McClendon interprets this dispute as being about what aspects of the moral life to focus on.

For narrative ethics (as I have construed it) never wanted to deny that people decide, or that their decisions are sometimes morally significant, or that those significant decisions might be framed by rules and principles of so high a degree of abstraction that they would no longer have the appearance of narrative summaries. It only wanted to insist that the principles, even such principles as the principle of utility or the categorical imperative, have a context, as do the decisions they are meant to guide, only to insist that the context is a narrative one, and that the meaning of both the propositional principles adopted and the decisions these are meant to guide is to be found in terms of their narrative setting.[218]

McClendon acknowledges that this synthesis of divergent emphases will not silence all objections. In particular, it is important for the Christian to understand that since morality ought not to be made dependent on a false story or a noble lie, it does matter a great deal that the narratives

[217] James W. McClendon, Jr., "Narrative Ethics and Christian Ethics." *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986) 383–95, at 387. McClendon offered an enlightening treatment of convictions in a book that he coauthored with James Smith, *Understanding Religious Convictions* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1975).
[218] Ibid. 392.

basic to Christian morality be "in some sense true."[219]

McClendon's position requires us to distinguish between a weak form of narrativism, which should be acknowledged by all moral theories, because it is a contextual requirement for successful performance of the speech acts carried out in moral judgments and evaluations, and a strong form of narrativism, in which our attention is directed to narratives which are to shape our moral consciousness and in which some narratives have a special status within a particular human community. McClendon's treatment of the matter recognizes that the strong narrativist case is not proven, but holds that at the same time Christian ethics and secular moral philosophy in the decisionist mode are not so far apart from each other as many earlier contributors to the discussion had supposed. The narrative element in Christianity involves complex claims which are both vulnerable to historical criticism and rich sources for moral assessment, but it does not make Christian ethics something totally different from secular moral philosophy, which has its own implied or suppressed or underdeveloped narrative elements. He is particularly interested in making the point that relativism is not a problem that affects narrativist approaches alone.[220] McClendon also offers in the course of his argument a particularly telling summary of the abuse of narrative in situationist approaches to ethics:

Situationism did indeed bring narratives into the discussion of moral decisions, but the narratives were usually cut to fit the dilemmas already perceived by the ethicist, biography was reduced to short story, and short story to episode, while character was contracted to the episodic will of moral agents. Situationism was no more engaged by the full Christian narrative than its parent utilitarianism had been.[221]

The dispute between narrativists and decisionists has in a way been engulfed by a much larger argument about the place of historicist approaches in ethics and in philosophy more generally. A particularly provocative reflection on this larger debate is found in a piece by Linnell Cady, "Foundation or Scaffolding: The Possibility of Justification in an Historicist Approach to Ethics." Cady, a Catholic teaching at Arizona State University, wants to keep normative discourse from sliding into formless subjectivism without appealing to either autonomous ethical principles or confessional interpretations.[222] Cady is in substantial agree-

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[219] Ibid. 393.

[220] Ibid. 394–395.

[221] Ibid. 384.

[222] Linnell Cady, "Foundation or Scaffolding: The Possibility of Justification in an Historicist Approach to Ethics," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 41, no. 2 (1987) 45–62, at 46.

ment with Iris Murdoch's criticisms of a morality of rules and principles on the ground that it denies moral progress in the life of the individual and is unduly influenced by positivist conceptions of knowledge and the person. For Murdoch, the moral life is an endless process of purifying one's vision, a kind of "unselfing."[223] But looking toward the good is not enough, and Murdoch's position overlooks the "critical role" of conceptual frameworks.

In Cady's view, Alasdair MacIntyre does take seriously the conceptual incommensurability that disrupts our moral discourse and the moral fragmentation that marks our culture. According to MacIntyre, both teleological and deontological conceptions of morality have been uprooted from their original social context. For MacIntyre, "principles and virtues of the moral life are rooted in specific practices which are integral to particular historical communities."[224] But this clearly leaves us trapped in a form of historicist relativism. Stanley Hauerwas moves beyond this by offering moral reflection in the context of the Christian narrative; in Hauerwas' approach, principles have a secondary role as abstractions, while religious visions both describe the world and prescribe appropriate behavior. But in Cady's view the conflict, both in ourselves and in the modern world, cannot be overcome by the choice of one particular moral tradition. Hauerwas' position is "a fideistic retreat from the onslaught of the historicist attack on the post-Enlightenment ethical paradigm."[225] Cady sees the current situation as offering several unacceptable alternatives: appeal to theological authority, reliance on ahistorical reason with a correspondence theory of truth, and radical relativism. Rather, the way forward involves three major elements.

First, in place of the uniform and static conception of nature, which has collapsed in the face of so much evidence showing the diversity and malleability of human nature, there has to be a recognition of commonalities which are relational in character; there is need for an "ontology of human-being-in-the-world."[226] Second, there has to be a recognition that moral discourse depends on a context and a community. This is, of course, a key point in the narrativist approach and in the post-Wittgenstein proposals for thinking about morality as a form of life. Cady is particularly concerned to show that context and community have to be universal and appeals to our common concern for survival, the character of our search for knowledge, and the scope of our most fundamental

[223] See Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970).
[224] Cady, "Foundations" 50.
[225] Ibid. 53
[226] Ibid. 55.

desires. Cady concludes: "We are therefore morally obligated to create such a universal communal context wherein these ends can be secured."[227] These arguments are less than apodictic, but they offer an interesting reminiscence of the natural inclinations that Aquinas considered to be a basis for precepts of natural law. Third, the goal of creating a universal community does not yield a set of rules which resolve ethical dilemmas, but it does enable us to specify virtues and principles which are appropriate and helpful in realizing the universal goods of truth and survival. Such a position strikes this observer as not very far from the position taken by Fuchs. There is the same desire to recognize the historical character of ethical reasoning and the same distrust of both radical relativism and the confrontationalist approach to secular reason exemplified by Hauerwas and some proponents of the *Glaubensethik*. Cady expresses suspicion of the "confessional defense"[228] in which theology is invoked to resolve the uncertainties of ethics. There is in this position a reliance on a chastened and historically sophisticated form of reason, which is one way of developing the natural-law tradition, even where there is a considerable reluctance to speak of nature.

Something of this same expectation about the capabilities and limits of reason is found in a judicious popular presentation by Gerard Hughes, S.J., on "Natural Law Ethics and Modern Theology." For Hughes, the central feature of natural law is our coming to understand our nature in its environment. So it is not surprising that "our view of what is ethical will change as our knowledge of human nature develops."[229] Hughes, who teaches moral philosophy at Heythrop College in the University of London, also cautions against exaggerating the extent of change and disagreement: "We have not lost our bearings, but we do have to learn to live with complexity and a fair degree of uncertainty."[230] It is his belief that Catholics have tended to value certainty in morals over truth. Vincent MacNamara, in a companion piece on "The Use of the Bible in Moral Theology," reminds us of the difficulties involved in the alternative approach of searching the Scriptures for unalterable or self-interpreting rules. In MacNamara's view, the links between faith considerations and ethical justifications are inherent in the indicative-imperative structure of biblical ethics; but they are less rigid than the search for rules would lead us to expect. The Bible should be seen as a source of revealed reality,

[227] Ibid. 58.
[228] Ibid. 59.
[229] Gerard J. Hughes, S.J., "Natural Law Ethics and Modern Theology," *Month* 20, no. 3 (March 1987) 100–103, at 101.
[230] Ibid. 102.

not revealed morality. Its "great formative stories tell us who we are,"[231] and we allow ourselves to be influenced by the full range of ethical diversity in the Bible. Christians need the Bible for a full appreciation of Christian moral life, which is not reducible to commands or rules.[232]

Reliance on reason is brought under sharp questioning in a recent essay by Gilbert Meilaender. "Eritis sicut Deus: Moral Theory and the Sin of Pride," which appeared in the same special issue of *Faith and Philosophy* as the McClendon piece. Meilaender is a Lutheran theologian who now teaches at Oberlin College. His primary target is consequentialism, of which utilitarianism is the first great exemplar and which, in his view, derives much of its power from "the fact that it sounds like a secularized version of the Christian love command."[233] In a consequentialist ethics the moral agent "is essentially a public functionary whose responsibility it is to evaluate from an impersonal standpoint the worth of possible states of affairs and, then, to seek the best overall outcome available."[234] But it is not consequentialism alone which excites Meilaender's disapproval. He cites with approval Iris Murdoch's verdict on the moral psychology of Kant as incarnated in Milton's Lucifer, and he claims that Kant offers "a moral theory for beings who are all freedom and no finitude."[235] The crucial issue for Meilaender, as the title of his piece makes plain, is whether a moral theory takes us out of the position which is appropriate to us as finite and free creatures. He fastens particularly on R. M. Hare's effort to synthesize Kantianism and utilitarianism in his universal prescriptivism and to make judgments from the "archangel" level of moral thinking. He insists that it is not our responsibility as moral agents to bring about the best overall outcome. The commandment of universal love is to be interpreted not so that all particular relationships are dissolved, but so that the prohibitions of the Decalogue are kept intact.

Meilander follows a line of reflection developed by Samuel Scheffler and Thomas Nagel.[236] Scheffler moves us away from the effort to answer the question of what is to be done from the standpoint of an impersonal observer and points to two considerations which limit our freedom to

[231] Vincent MacNamara, "The Use of the Bible in Moral Theology," *Month* 20, no. 3 (March 1987) 104–7, at 105.

[232] Ibid. 106.

[233] Gilbert Meilaender, "*Eritis sicut Deus*: Moral Theory and the Sin of Pride," *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986) 397–413, at 400.

[234] Ibid. 398.

[235] Ibid. 399.

[236] See Samuel Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), and Thomas Nagel, "The Limits of Objectivity," in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* 1, ed. Sterling M. McMurrin (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1980) 119–39.

pursue the general good. The first is an agent-centered prerogative which leaves us free to pursue our own projects or, in Meilaender's language, "free to take up our calling with glad and trusting hearts" and to love by serving "the neighbors whom our vocation places before us."[237] This agent-centered prerogative rescues us from the burden of consequentialist legalism and from the divisions between theory and decisions, between motives and reasons, between elite archangels and passive proles which will develop if we structure society along consequentialist lines. The second is an agent-centered prohibition which rules out the pursuit of the good when this involves us in doing evil or "in ways which manifest our failure to trust God to care for us and the world, by seeking to take upon ourselves the burden of a divine providential governance."[238] Meilaender does believe that moral rules allow for exceptions in hard cases. He goes to some length to show that Michael Walzer's notion of supreme emergency, which he uses to justify a policy of nuclear deterrence, does not involve consequentialist overriding of moral principle but expresses a requirement of moral and strategic necessity. Meilaender offers a resolution of the problem of supreme emergency that is quintessentially Lutheran in its denial of ultimate justification.

And if a moment of supreme emergency should arise, the Christian can and will offer no justification for overriding the moral rules which bind us to our neighbors and thereby limit us. The Christian must seek no impersonal standpoint from which to be justified in such a decision. If we are truly caught up in the web of necessity, we must act.[239]

Meilaender's position presents an interesting Lutheran parallel to some of the moves made by Germain Grisez, Joseph Boyle, and John Finnis in the theoretical portions of their recent treatise on nuclear deterrence, even though they reach very different practical conclusions.[240] What are we to make of it, and in particular of the moral and religious test that he proposes for moral theories? What is the proper place of trust in God in our moral theorizing and moral decisions? All Christians will presumably agree that Christians ought not to usurp the position of God and ought to entrust the direction of their lives to God. But the question is whether such points do any real work in making the moral argument about what is or is not the right course of action. A possibility that may occur to some but that is not Meilaender's own view is that

[237] Meilaender 407.
[238] Ibid. 410.
[239] Ibid.
[240] John Finnis, Joseph Boyle, Germain Grisez, *Nuclear Deterrence, Morality and Realism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987) esp. chap. 14, "Concluding Christian Thoughts."

any departure from the universal norm is a manifestation of lack of trust in God. The point of the question can be seen more clearly when we reflect on the ethical problems presented by new technologies. Often enough, whether in health care or communications or defense, they present us with opportunities to do things that we had previously thought only possible to divine power. Would someone taking trust in God as a notion to be used in determining rightness or wrongness rather than as an attitude to be adopted in the carrying out of what one has judged on other grounds to be morally right be able to accept and use such a technological advance?

It seems to this observer that a Christian consequentialist still has need of trust in God because honesty requires him or her to admit the insufficiency of knowledge, the presence of bias and selfishness in motivation, and the structural gaps between intended consequences and actual consequences. Both the consequentialist and the Thomist exercising prudence have the opportunity and the responsibility to exercise a providence in some measure over themselves and their actions.[241] A particularly unfortunate aspect of Meilaender's valuable and challenging paper is that it may encourage nonconsequentialist moralists to ascribe the sin of pride to the various proponents of consequentialism, who are, for the most part, moralists who wish to be compassionate and reasonable and who are particularly concerned to maintain a humble attitude before the facts of complex and perplexing situations. The inference from attitudes allegedly implied by a theoretical position as interpreted by a critic to the actual attitudes of those theorists and others who hold the position is precarious at best and is frequently fallacious. At the same time, it offers a tempting opportunity to engage in high-minded but uncharitable abuse.

The issue of prudence and the extent and the way in which we are called to exercise providence over ourselves also figures in a recent study of Karl Rahner's existential ethics by Daniel Nelson, who subtitles his article "A Critique Based on St. Thomas's Understanding of Prudence." Nelson does not take issue with Rahner's view that human nature is more fluid and open than the Neo-Scholastics had believed, and that it is both subject to historical change and penetrated by grace. In addition to the realm of essential ethics in which syllogistic reasoning applies universal norms of natural law to particular circumstances, there is also need for an existential ethics which discovers "individual moral obligations not expressed by general rules"[242] and which relies on the discern-

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[241] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1, 22, 2, ad 3; 1-2, 93, 5c.

[242] Daniel Nelson. "Karl Rahner's Existential Ethics: A Critique Based on St. Thomas's Understanding of Prudence," *Thomist* 51 (1987) 461-79, at 465.

ment of spirits, which Nelson characterizes "a technique for hearing individual imperatives."[243] Nelson recognizes that for Rahner, unlike some situation ethicists, human freedom is not indifferent autonomy but is absolute obligation before God. His criticism of Rahner turns on his dissatisfaction with Rahner's reliance on nondiscursive knowledge in existential ethics, which he regards as likely to lead to an excessive emphasis on individual freedom and subjectivity. He would prefer to interpret ethical decision-making in individual cases along Thomistic lines in terms of the collaboration of prudence and the moral virtues.

This may well strike readers as cautiously, even reassuringly conservative. But three points should be noticed in the way Nelson uses St. Thomas. First, he holds that natural law "plays no significant epistemic function in making moral determinations."[244] He sees Thomas as offering a reconciliation of the Aristotelian ethics of virtue and the Stoic ethic of law, with law as decidedly the junior partner. Second, Nelson, along with a number of recent commentators on Aquinas,[245] is struck by the abstract and incomplete treatment of natural law that Thomas offers. So he turns to an emphasis on the social context of prudence, which he takes to work within a framework of agreement about virtues and ends, and he stresses the importance of education and maturity. This is an approach which will provide a much more definite basis for persons to make judgments about particular actions; it also increases the weight of those factors in the moral life that are communitarian and that are subject to significant variation over time and across cultures. Third, with reference to the main topic of these notes, Nelson takes the view that a "Christian understanding of human ends" changes the working of prudence.[246] This is not a view he develops at length, but it could very well lead to a much more sectarian approach to Christian ethics, particularly if the larger society fails to manifest the agreement about ends and virtues that Nelson believes to be an essential part of the context for the functioning of prudence.

The emphatic denial that contemporary society has a sustainable consensus on ends and virtues is a view particularly identified with Alasdair MacIntyre. But his most recent contribution to the foundations of theological ethics actually returns to what is probably the oldest problem in this field. In an essay called "Which God Ought We to Obey

[243] Ibid. 467.

[244] Ibid. 477.

[245] See, e.g., D. J. O'Connor, *Aquinas and Natural Law* (London: Macmillan, 1968), and John Langan, S.J., "Beatitude and Moral Law in St. Thomas," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 5 (1977) 183–96.

[246] Nelson, "Rahner's Existential Ethics" 4.

and Why?" MacIntyre argues for what this observer takes to be an essentially Thomistic answer to these questions and against the theological voluntarism of William of Ockham. For MacIntyre, justice is an essential characteristic of the God of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, a characteristic which God cannot fail to have and which does not bring with it any internal constraint on God's will. About other claimants to divine status, Jupiter or Zeus or Amon, the question of justice can be appropriately raised. He concludes:

The concept of justice and the standard of justice which are required in order to characterize God so as to distinguish him adequately from the class of divine pretenders whom we have been considering are and have to be a concept and a standard elaborated independently of our knowledge of God.[247]

Divine-command theories of moral rightness or other fundamental moral terms propounded by Ockham and more recently by Robert Merrihew Adams lack an adequate account both of how to distinguish the just God of Israel from pretenders and of why we are under a moral obligation to obey him. Such theories lack an independent conception of just authority and are driven back to a kind of legal positivism. MacIntyre specifically criticizes the Barthian objection that making fundamental moral concepts independent of theological belief involves making these concepts normative for and greater than the Word of God. He points out that this argument rests on the questionable presupposition that "any appeal to a standard of truth or goodness, established independently of our knowledge of God's revealed Word and will, is and must be an appeal to something external to that Word and will."[248] The position that MacIntyre wishes to defend is one that, like Scola's Christological conception of morality and the *Glaubensethik* generally, wishes to affirm the ontological bond between God and the fundamental moral values or attributes, but that at the same time affirms the cognitive independence of these notions and that preserves the centrality of the distinction between faith and reason. God is not judged by something external to Himself and His word, because "natural justice recognized by natural reason is itself divinely uttered and authorized."[249] MacIntyre also moves on to affirm something like a Thomistic doctrine of analogy but with his own characteristic emphasis on the historical development of ideas.

The concept of justice which we use in speaking of God is therefore an analogically and historically ordered concept, which in some of its uses is no different from

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[247] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Which God Ought We to Obey and Why?" *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (October 1986) 359–71, at 361.
[248] Ibid. 366.
[249] Ibid. 370.

those in which it is applied by human beings to each other and in others very different indeed, although not so different as not to preserve the core unity of the concept.[250]

This is a conception which does not require us to remain fixed in one secular formulation of the idea of justice but leaves us open to further development of both moral and religious understanding. How this article fits into the development of MacIntyre's own religious views and how it relates to the conclusions of *After Virtue* are matters on which this observer cannot pronounce. But it is worth juxtaposing the call for the emergence of a new St. Benedict, with which *After Virtue* ends, with MacIntyre's explicit reliance on Aquinas at a number of key places in this article.

Robert Van Wyck works over the fundamental question of the relationship between our religious beliefs and our fundamental moral norms by focusing on the issue of autonomy. He distinguishes a weak autonomy thesis which "maintains that basic moral convictions are in some sense prior to basic religious convictions," and a strong autonomy thesis according to which "reference to the will or nature of God is totally irrelevant to any set of moral convictions."[251] The strong thesis is unlikely to appeal to theologians or to religious people generally, but it is interesting as the opposite pole to the fideistic affirmation that no coherent and adequate set of moral convictions can be formed without reference to God's revelation. Like MacIntyre, Van Wyck rejects divine-command theory and accepts the weak autonomy thesis. Our obligation to obey God's commands arises cognitively from a combination of "beliefs about God's goodness, God's knowledge, and God's being our Creator."[252] This requires that we have some independent knowledge of good and is a standard view among philosophical theologians and religious philosophers; at the same time, it implies a rejection of the strong autonomy thesis. What makes this article interesting is Van Wyck's use of a way of handling apparent conflicts between morality and religion which is drawn from the revisionist and nonfoundationalist epistemology of Willard Quine, particularly *The Web of Belief*. Van Wyck here, I think, gives the beginning of a logical account of what ordinary people are doing when they revise the connections between their religious and their moral beliefs.[253] This is, after all, something that many ordinary Catholics have done over the last 30 years but often in a way that was muddled and

[250] Ibid. 369.
[251] Robert N. Van Wyck, "Autonomy Theses Revisited," *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986) 372–82, at 372.
[252] Ibid. 376.
[253] Ibid. 378–80.

confused. It has most often been treated in psychological or sociological terms, and alternative logical relationships among beliefs felt to be in conflict were not carefully laid out.

Weak autonomy in Van Wyck's sense is a view that Aquinas and natural-law theorists would have endorsed; but the exercise of autonomy in the sense of free human decision about moral norms has usually been viewed with suspicion and disapproval by the Catholic tradition. John Macken, S.J., contributes to *Milltown Studies* a short but helpful review of the senses of "autonomy" in Catholic theology over the last two centuries.[254] In addition to considering the autonomy of the sciences with regard to faith and the autonomy of the person in the face of the state, he also provides a concise account of the notion of autonomous morality which stresses its links to transcendental Thomism. Macken sees as the central issue in the dispute between the proponents of autonomous morality and its critics the question of the historical conditioning of specific ethical norms.[255]

The suggestion that the distinctiveness in Christian ethics should not be located at a foundational level, but that it should be seen as a flavor and element affecting or shaping the ethical life, is present in several current articles. One of these, "On the Gratitude of the Christian: Toward the Meaning of Christian Morality as Gratitude," is by Werner Wolbert, a student of Bruno Schüller and now a professor in the theological faculty at Paderborn.[256] The theme of gratitude, of living spontaneously in a generous spirit beyond the demands of duty, is one that is congenial to the *Glaubensethik*; and we have already seen Meilaender's desire to protect this kind of response to God from what he would regard as the encroachments of a legalistic consequentialism with its tendency to make the best obligatory. Wolbert's treatment of gratitude focuses on the ways in which it moves us beyond both duty and selfishness, since it is an answer to selfless giving which is not obligatory. He draws an interesting contrast between gratitude as our response to a good deed and punishment as our response to an evil deed, stressing particularly the difference between our view that gratitude should be directed immediately to the benefactor and our view that the infliction of punishment on a malefactor should be handled through third parties. This, I would observe, is true for grave harms and social offenses, but it does not apply to the treatment of children. Wolbert further wants to contrast gratitude as a particular

[254] John Macken, S.J., " 'Autonomy' in Catholic Theology," *Milltown Studies* 18 (Autumn 1986) 31–41.

[255] Ibid. 39–40.

[256] Werner Wolbert, "Von der Dankbarkeit des Christen: Zur Deutung christlicher Moralität als Dankbarkeit." *Theologie und Glaube* 77 (1987) 1–13.

virtue with gratitude as a general virtue influencing our living of the moral life before God. This can be seen as logically parallel to the contrast in Aristotle and Aquinas between justice as a particular virtue and a general virtue. It can also be seen as a good example of one possible way for Christian belief to transform ethics. It would be generally seen as inappropriate or implausible for a nonbeliever to conceive of his or her life as a whole in terms of gratitude, though one can imagine powerful and even decisive sentiments of gratitude to a country or a group or even one's family. The living of one's moral life in a spirit of gratitude is a possibility for the theistic believer. This involves an extension of the ordinary concept of gratitude, most fundamentally because the Creator-creature relationship is unlike ordinary benefactor-beneficiary relationships in its ontological asymmetry and all-inclusive character. But it does not involve an overthrowing of our moral notions or even the introduction of a totally different concept of gratitude. It is relevant that Wolbert's presentation of gratitude to God as a general virtue has a proviso that this is to include an affirmation of God's love for all human beings. This is a move which forestalls a radically privatized and interiorized understanding of gratitude as a personal attitude to God and offers a way of preserving the requirements of universal benevolence and fairness affirmed in secular ethical theories. At the same time, affirming gratitude as a general virtue may influence one's decisions about how to structure ethical theory. For instance, one may be drawn to a theory of the relationship between good and duty which leaves room for works of supererogation. There may thus be ways which affirm the autonomist conception of ethical norms open to all through the exercise of reason but which avoid the suggestion that orientation to God is a comparatively superficial addition to our living of the moral life or an optional adjustment of attitude. These would be ways of showing the influence of Christian values and attitudes in modifying our living of the ethical life at a number of different levels and in making a difference at the margin of practical life and in the core of our hearts.[257]

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[257] Ibid. 10.