

## RELIGION AND MORALITY\*

In the great traditions of Hinduism on the one hand and Christianity and Judaism on the other, it has generally been difficult to distinguish between religion and morality. It is also the case that in the popular religious consciousnesses of Hindus, Christians, and Jews there seems to be, if not an identity, a very intimate relation between religion and morality. Infractions of rules of moral conduct, such as committing adultery, are perceived to be religious offenses; in the Ten Commandments, for example, such behaviour is against the law of God, and not against some moral law which has purely a secular rational justification. Also duties that modern secular persons would define as purely religious, such as duties of ritual cleanliness, for persons in the classic religious traditions have a kind of moral force. They are obligations; one is required to conform to these requirements and one is under punitive sanctions if one does not. Institutional sanctions such as rites of purification and various forms of penitential acts are required to become free from defilement or pollution. To modern secular persons such duties are purely religious and have no moral features. Certainly to many western philosophers and theologians the failure to distinguish between religious and moral duties is a confusion of categories.

The relations between religion and morality are of several sorts. There are historical relations; the culture of India and the morality of India's people cannot be explained without taking into account the great religions in India's history. An identifiable Islamic "ethos" is present in nations from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific and its islands as a result of the expansion of a creative religious movement. There are social and cultural relations between religion and morality not only across a chronological frame of reference, but in present history as well. The presence and practice of Roman Catholic Christianity, for one example, in many portions of the world even in secularized cultures is felt on matters of personal

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morality, the development of law, and the formation of social policies that address matters of birth control. The presence of Islamic scholars of law and morality and their impact on large numbers of persons deeply affects legal developments and social customs in nations that have Muslim majorities. Religious institutions interact with governmental and secular ones; religious beliefs and practices have effects on the cultures of which they are a part.

There are what might be called "psychological" relations between religion and morality. Religious beliefs and practices are significant in giving particular characteristics to the attitudes and outlooks toward life that are expressed in what persons value, and in how they conduct their relations with one another. While gross oversimplification would be involved in stating what is *the* Hindu, or *the* Christian attitude is toward distribution of property, or toward sexual relations, it still remains plausible, and indeed necessary, to account for the relations of religious beliefs and practices to the moral beliefs and practices of the adherents of these religions. The relation is "psychological" in a broad sense; the self-understanding and the practices of individuals is informed by their religious commitments and activities.

There are practical relations between religion and morality that must be attended in the legal relationships between institutions, such as churches and the state. How a secular state preserves and protects its religious minorities, not only in social practices but also in law is a matter of persistent concern in religiously pluralistic nations. In the United States there are special privileges of tax-exemptions for religious (and other) institutions, and special privileges for members of the profession of the clergy such as exemption from military service. While this example pertains more directly to the relation of religious institutions and their professional workers to the law it points to a larger issue of conflicts of loyalties between those justified on religious grounds and those justified on political and constitutional grounds. A religiously based claim for special status issues is a claim for exemption from obligations which themselves are based on justice... all persons of a given age and all institutions with property are equally subject to the same obligations to the state.

There are social and cultural relations between more speci-

fically religious orientations toward life and those that are more distinctively moral. This is not only the case over long periods of history, as I noted above, but also in any given time in history. Religious symbols are frequently used to interpret not only the religious, but also the moral significance of social and cultural life. In the recent history of the United States we have seen an example of this. For many persons, black and white, the religious theme of liberation from bondage portrayed in the exodus of the enslaved Hebrew people in ancient Egypt from their captors had a special pertinence to the circumstances of black people in American society. The old spiritual, "God down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land. Tell Old Pharaoh, let my people go," both expressed the circumstances of black people, and gave direction to the activities of the civil rights movement. It was meaningful, even in the secularized culture of the United States, to take recourse to a biblical event and its symbols to describe and to direct a course of social moral action.

On the level of ideas, both philosophers and theologians have been concerned with the relations of religion and morality. The discussion has taken several forms. One matter of attention has been on the logical relations of moral concepts to religious concepts. As a commonplace it was generally assumed by many persons that religious concepts, because they deal with God, or ultimate reality, were logically prior to moral concepts, and that the ultimate vindication of moral concepts was a theological or religious one. Many critical thinkers now recognize that this commonplace was itself historically and culturally bound, and that there is no logically necessary relation between religious and moral concepts. Morality does not logically require religious supports. That relations can be established which are reasonable between certain religious beliefs and certain moral beliefs is not doubted; but these are not necessary for morality. Morality can be established as independent from religion. This line of thinking has not gone unchallenged; there are those who would argue that even if one did not use religious language, such as the name God, morality must be ontologically grounded and that the ontology is logically prior to ethics. I only wish to indicate that the discussion occurs now, as it has for many generations, about the relations of religion and morality at a philosophical level.

This article does not address all of these forms of relationship; they have been indicated to set a wider context within which the more special attention of this article can be set. My effort here is to reflect philosophically on certain historical actualities and historical claims about the relations of religion and morality.

### **Preview of the argument :**

With the secularization of modern cultures and societies, and with the development of purely rational (and non-religious) justifications for morality, religious thinkers must sort out more carefully the distinctions between religion and morality, and the relations between them when they are distinguished. This task is necessary because of our historical time. With secularization, not only among the intellectuals, but in Western culture among the masses, the traditional religious supports for morality are eroding, indeed in many places have rapidly disintegrating. Indian culture, generally construed, is not nearly as secularized as western culture, but the reality of secularization is strongly present in India as well. Political leaders such as Nehru, and many intellectuals, Marxist and otherwise, are clearly unimpressed by appeals to religious traditions for justifications of morality. Secularization presses upon the religious thinker the task of clarifying and restating the relations of religion and morality in view of many forceful and legitimate criticisms by secular persons.

It is not only secularization, but religious and moral pluralism that requires the religious thinker to face the issues of religion and morality more directly. India's experience with religious pluralism is long, and it is a very profound and deep experience. Indeed, I venture to say that it has been more dramatic and critical in India than in Western societies, for in India there has for centuries been a large community, the muslim community, whose religion and morality are grounded in the "Semitic" tradition. Islam in its roots and much of its history shares more in common with Judaism and Christianity than it does with Hinduism and Buddhism. The history of North America has had nothing comparable in strength to make people quite as conscious of religious pluralism.

The practical issue that forces questions in ethics and religious thought is this. In so far as particular religious communities (Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, etc.) find the sole, or even primary justification for morality in the particularities of their

religious traditions, it is difficult to establish a common *moral* community within a given nation, or within the family of humans. Radical religious particularism militates against the development of a needed moral universalism. One possible intellectual response to this is to say that morality must be established on principles which overcome the particularism, and clearly scores of efforts of moral philosophers in the West have been directed toward this end. From a purely practical perspective, however, several rejoinders to such proposals are worthy of serious consideration. Religions themselves do not die easily, and even where their traditional forms lose adherents, functional surrogates to traditional religions come into being. Also, there is no community of purely rational moral agents who transcend historical particularities completely, and it is not likely that one will emerge in history. Also, morality is a matter of human affectivity as well as human rationality, and a purely rational morality seems to be barren; it lacks those myths, symbols, communal rites and practices, that attract affective moral as well as religious loyalties.

The resulting question that this article addresses is this. Can one develop a view of religion and morality which on the one hand moves toward that moral universalism that is practically necessary in an age of secularization and religious and moral pluralism on the one hand, and on the other makes a case for the continuation of historically identifiable religious traditions and religious life?

In pursuit of an answer I shall develop a typology which is at once abstract and also pertinent to some historical answers to the question. Three types will be developed: (a) religion and morality are identical, or in a slightly weaker form, they are so intimately related that religion is conceived to be a necessary condition for morality; (b) religion and morality are essentially distinguishable and therefore are autonomous realms; and (c) religion and morality can be roughly but carefully distinguished from each other, but in the great religious traditions there are areas of significant overlapping and congruity between them.

It is the third type that I shall defend not only on the basis of historical and textual evidence, but also I shall make an affirmative case for the limited but significant importance of religion for morality. While my own scholarly competence is in historic

Christianity and to a lesser extent in Judaism, I believe the argument can be sustained from studies of Hinduism as well, both in its analytical aspects and in its constructive position. The article generally follows this outline.

### **The identity, or unity, of religion and morality in historic religions**

One cannot read the classical religious texts of the Hindu or of the Jewish and Christian religious traditions without being deeply impressed with the ways in which religion and morality are, if not identical, unified in an intimate relationship. This relationship is assumed; it is more assumed than argued for; it is more assumed than justified by rational argument. Nor can one participate in or read about the actual and popular religious life of people in the Hindu and the western religious traditions without being deeply impressed that in their consciousness religious and moral duties and loyalties are, if not identical, unified in an intimate relationship. Offenses against moral rules, for example, are judged to be offenses against God or against deities, and penitential action is required. Certain religious beliefs, developed ideationally by intellectuals in the traditions, are the basis for certain rules of moral conduct. Certain religious myths and symbols that are part of religious life and piety ground certain moral attitudes and outlooks that are at least in part moral in character.

Evidence for this will be adduced first from some examples in the western religious traditions. The first is from the Torah, the legal texts which are the foundation of Judaism, and which have been accepted as part of the canon of Christianity. The Ten Commandments, in their setting both in book of Exodus (20 : 1-17) and in the book of Deuteronomy (5:6-21) contain the moral commandments to honour parents, not to kill, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness against others, or covet the neighbour's property, but they are set in contexts which are clearly religious. As moral commands, these commands have both a distinctively religious *authorization*, and are preceded in the Decalogue by the "first table of the law", that is by commandments of duties to God.

First the authorization. In the Exodus account upon the return of Moses from Mt. Sinai the commandments follow with a very direct form of speech. "And God spoke all these words, saying..." (Ex. 20:1) The commands are given to the people as the words of Yahweh. Let us embellish this a bit. They are not

given on the basis of a purely rational moral argument that makes appeals to the generalizability or the universalizability of the moral teachings that follow; they are not justified by such a principle as Kant's that a moral maxim be chosen so that it would be applicable if it were a universal law of nature. They are not argued for on any principle that would find in the moral commands a ground in the natural human tendencies toward self-fulfillment as one would find argued in the metaphysical tradition of the moral law of nature. Rather they are given as words of Yahweh; they are authorized by the Deity.

In their setting in the book of Deuteronomy they are preceded by a recollection that Yahweh had made a covenant, a contract, with the people. The moral rules are, in a sense, the requirements of the contract. They are also preceded by a recollection of something that God has done for the people, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." (Dt. 5:6) Not only are the moral commands part of the contract, but also they are grounded in a deed, an action of Yahweh. He had brought them out of slavery; in gratitude to him, and in memory of this event, the people are to adhere to the requirement of the covenant, the contract. Again, there are distinctively religious reasons both for the moral commandments, and for adhering to them.

Second, the so-called "first table of the law" contains commands that are not specifically moral, but rather are specifically religious in character. There are to be no other gods before Yahweh, the Lord. The people are commanded not to make any graven images; they are not to take the Lord's name in vain, and they are to observe the holy day, the Sabbath. It was clearly not a confusion of categories, a confusion of religion and morality, to have these religious obligations bound together in the same code as the distinctively moral obligations of not killing, not stealing, etc. Duties to God and duties to others were all part of the same contract. The penalties forecast for the people if they did not adhere to these commandments covered both infractions of the rules of the first and second tables of the law. Ritual duties, such as keeping the Sabbath, could be blended into the same code as moral duties. Religion and morality were identical, or at least unified in intimate relations to each other.

A similar blending of morality and religion occurs in the Holi-



ness Code found in the book of Leviticus. In chapter 19, for example, we have many verses that appear to be purely moral in character such as commands against stealing, lying, oppressing and robbing the neighbour; we have commands to be impartial to the poor, to be just in our judgements, and not to hate. But also there are "non-moral" commands intertwined in the same code, such as not letting cattle breed with a different kind, not sowing the field with two kinds of seed, and not wearing garments made with two different kinds of cloth. All of these commands are punctuated periodically with a religious or theological authorization: "I am the Lord". No Kantian principles of universalizability and no Aristotelian arguments from natural law are made to support them. Religion and morality are unified, or at least intimately related to each other. Many examples could be drawn from the development of Christianity as well to support this generalization about the unity of religion and morality.

### **The development of a distinction between religion and morality**

The impact of classical Greek philosophy on the religions of the Bible was one factor that led to the development of a sharper distinction between religion and morality than is found in the Torah. Many scholars have shown how the moral teachings and outlook of primitive Christianity very quickly absorbed the pattern and structure of Greek philosophy, and particularly of the natural law theory of the Stoics. This theory, together with developments of Roman legal theory had an increasing impact upon the ethics of Catholic Christianity. Similar developments can be traced in Judaism, crowned by the work of Maimonides, and in Islamic ethics as well, but I confine my example to Christianity. The grand synthesizer of these elements, including also the recovered Aristotelian philosophy, was St. Thomas Aquinas. It is from his work that a distinction in Christian thought developed between ethics as a philosophical discipline on the one hand, and moral theology on the other. Ethics was a philosophical discipline because it was based on the use of "natural" reason, and did not take recourse to any distinctively religious "revelation" for its authority. Moral theology was based on both "revelation" in the Bible and ethics as a product of natural reason. Indeed, except for a few instances, the morality that was based on revelation could also be defended by natural reason. Moral theology



did, however, add to its portfolio specifically religious duties as well, and thus included more human activity than the purely moral.

The basic foundation for the argument that morality could be more clearly distinguished from religion, and that ethics (a philosophical discipline) could be distinguished from moral theology (a religious discipline with philosophical aspects) was that morality is grounded in the moral order of nature. Morality is grounded in the *nature* of human life, and particularly from the observation that persons have natural inclinations toward their "good", toward their self-fulfillment. This good is both natural and "supernatural"; it is a natural and temporal end of human well-being or flourishing, and a supernatural or eternal and of friendship with and enjoyment of God. The inclination toward both, however, is natural. The argument that morality can be rather clearly distinguished from religion is based on the conviction that human minds can infer by natural reason from the natural inclination toward the temporal good those principles and rules of conduct that must be adhered to in order for the temporal, natural good to be fulfilled. Reasoning from the moral order of nature leads to the formation of moral principles and rules that are applicable to all persons, since all persons share a common human nature. One does not need to take recourse to the Bible, to a historically particular religious tradition, to establish the principles of morality.

How this works can be illustrated from Thomas's arguments to show that suicide is a moral wrong, as well as a sin against God. This argument can be found in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Question 64, article 5. The first argument is that individual humans naturally seek the fulfillment of their good, the flourishing of their lives. To commit suicide clearly goes against this natural inclination; it is contrary to the moral law of nature, and therefore is morally wrong. The second argument is that all persons by nature participate in societies, and that the common good of human societies requires that all their members participate in them so that they may properly function. To commit suicide deprives human society of a person who contributes to its common good; it is contrary to the social character of the moral order of nature, and therefore is morally wrong. Both of these arguments are philosophical; neither makes a primary appeal to "revelation". Only the third argument is distinctively religious or theological. Because life

"is God's gift to man and is subject to his power" whoever commits suicide sins against God. To take one's own life is not only an act of ingratitude for a gift, but it is the usurpation of the authority of the Deity, "for it belongs to God alone to pronounce sentence of death and life." Not only is this a religious argument because of its appeal to a theological principle; also the specific authorization for it is a biblical text, Deuteronomy 32:39, "I will kill and I will make to live."

In the first two arguments, as in many other moral arguments in Thomas's work and the tradition of Catholic Christianity, the reasons why an act is morally wrong requires no invocation of a Deity, no specifically religious language. One does not need the third argument to prove that suicide is unethical. We can have morality without religion; we can have ethics without theology. The religious argument is different in character; it is added, but is not necessary to the moral conclusion.

It is clear, however, that for Thomas Aquinas morality is finally grounded religiously and theologically in spite of the distinction that his thought both expresses, and warrants for others to make. There are religious concepts that are related to those natural moral concepts. What are distinguished are ultimately related. I shall indicate two ways in which the relationship is established.

First, in his discussion of the moral law of nature, Thomas argues that the moral order of nature is not finally autonomous; it is not grounded in itself, or only in the nature of human life. Rather, this natural moral law participates in the Eternal Law, which is in the mind of God. (*Summa Theologica*, II-I, question 91, article 3.) Josef Fuchs, S. J., argues that this makes the natural law *theonomous*, rather than autonomous. (J. Fuchs, *Natural Law: A Theological Investigation*, New York (Sheed and Ward, 1965), pp. 67-73.) God's law participates in nature; it is the mind of God that is discerned through the moral order of nature. Thus morality, which can be clearly distinguished from religion, has a religious or theological foundation and ground. Ethics, which is a purely rational philosophical discipline can be developed without revelation, without the historically particular Christian tradition; nonetheless ethics is ultimately theologically grounded; that is, it participates in the mind of the Deity. A full authorization of what has a relative autonomy includes articulation of its theological basis.

A second way in which the relationship is established is in the overarching framework of Thomas's theology and ethics, a framework that Christian theology incorporated from neo Platonism. All things, including human nature from which the natural moral law is derived, come from God and return to God. The nature from which moral principles and rules are inferred is itself a gift of the goodness of the Creator. It is not only, as in the third argument about suicide, that we have our particular lives as gifts which can be taken only by the will of the giver. It is also that the natural grounds for the other two arguments are themselves possible because nature comes from God and is returning to God. Both the origin and the end (*telos*) of the natural law are in God. Thus when one violates a moral law one is acting so that the order of life created by God ultimately for his purposes is violated. When a person commits an infraction of a moral principle he or she is missing the way toward the return to God and is jeopardizing the eternal enjoyment of God, or salvation.

This theology is clearly more speculative and philosophical than are the texts from the Torah. The relation between morality and religion is elaborated in a way it is not there. The elaboration makes possible a distinction between morality and religion because of the mediation of nature; the relation between the Deity and humanity is not one of the immediate speech and hearing. In the Torah God is the commander; he speaks his commands or moral and religious rules; humans are obedient or disobedient to God's commands. In Thomas, God is the creator of a natural moral order that comes from him and is directed towards him; his Eternal law participates in that order. Because humans can infer the moral principles and rules from the mediation of the natural moral order, morality can be more clearly distinguished from religion. But, as I have indicated, the autonomy of ethics from theology is only "relative" in character; the autonomy of morality from a "religious relationship" to God is only relative. Thus, while the distinction is clearer and sharper, both in the intellectual formulations and in the religious consciousnesses of Catholic Christians there continues to be a relationship that is judged to be necessary, since it is grounded in reality or in being.

### **Some similarities with this in Hinduisim**

Before turning to proposals for a sharper distinction that

occurs in the Catholic tradition a few suggestions of some similarities of the Hindu to the western traditions are in order. Since my study of Hinduism is superficial in comparison with my study of the western traditions, these proposals are made as suggestions only; I desire not to make superficial comparisons. I believe, however, that there is sufficient evidence from some of the classic texts of Hinduism to warrant the suggestions.

In Hinduism, as in the western religious traditions, there is evidence that religion and morality have been unified in an intimate relationship, if not identified. As I interpret the texts, the precise pattern of this relationship is quite different from the references I have used from the western tradition. The Torah texts I have cited, and the natural law argument from Thomas Aquinas both pertain to the religious *authorization of morality by a Deity*: in the first by a commander (a very human image), and in the second by the Eternal Law in the mind of God. The conceptions of a Deity who is a power with a moral will that these references imply is quite foreign to the Hindu tradition. From those portions of Thomas's works that I have used which indicated that proper morality is a necessary condition for the state of the enjoyment of God, or of friendship with God, one can find a bit more common ground with what I find in some classic Hindu texts. Stated most generally, the *telos*, the end of life is some kind of "salvation", and certain moral conditions are either necessary to the realization of salvation, or at least contributions to it. A form of this theme is present in the Old Testament as well, though I have not used it in this article; if the people obey the commands they will flourish with health and prosperity but if they disobey they will suffer.

The proposal of this section is that religion and morality are intimately related in classic Hindu texts, as they are in certain central strands of Christianity (and to a lesser extent in Judaism) in that the end, the *telos* of life is *moksha*, liberation, or salvation in some sense, and moral disciplines are a means to achieve that end. Clearly it is an error to exaggerate the similarities between *moksha* and various western conceptions of salvation, for example the notion of friendship with God. It is also an error to hint that in all of Christianity moral discipline is a necessary condition for salvation; there are important historical movements in which salvation is a free gift of a gracious God rather than a status earned by moral achievement. Yet even in these move-

ments it is clear that the "unearned" salvation has an effect on moral activity; morality becomes a proper expression of salvation. For purposes of this article I shall prescind from developing this strand of Christian thought and life any further.

I shall illustrate the thesis with reference to Hinduism by attending to two features of what, in western distinctions at least, are central to moral life. These are certain attitudes or dispositions matters frequently discussed in the language of dispositions and virtues in western religious moral thought. There are certain duties or obligations as well.

Although I have not cited evidence for it, there are many aspects of western religious thought in which certain attitudes, dispositions, and firmly rooted tendencies of persons are either necessary to, or significantly contribute to salvation. Persons, for example, are to be loving, to be faithful to one another, to be humble, and the like. In the Bhagavad Gita, for example in 16 : 1-4, there are lists of the characteristics of persons who are on their way to liberation. Important to note for my thesis is that the list, extending through the whole chapter, includes and mixes together "virtues" that modern secular persons would distinguish as "religious" virtues and as "moral" virtues. Among the characteristics of the "divine lot" (Ederton's translation) are religious worship, study of the holy books, and austerities, all of which many would see as "religious" virtues. Also included are generosity, freedom from anger, compassion toward creatures, modesty, patience, fortitude, absence of greed and pride, and other features that might be characterized more as "moral" virtues. It did not occur to the writer that one could distinguish between the moral end of life (those things which lead to proper relations with fellow humans) from a "religious" end of life (those things which lead to liberation); they are unified in an intimate relationship, perhaps even identified with each other.

Of particular interest for my thesis is the commendation of a feature that many secular moralists in the West would also honor, as well as many religious thinkers, namely detachment, or disinterestedness as one of the disciplines of human action. This is stated most clearly in 4:19; "Therefore unattached ever perform action that must be done; for performing action without attachment man attains the highest." (Edgerton translation) Arjuna is told

in this famous chapter that the way to *moksha* does not deny the significance of action; but the action must be done in this attitude of detachment or disinterestedness. From the standpoint of much western moral thought the purpose of detachment or disinterestedness is to be able to make moral judgments as a rational autonomous person; a good moral judgment is made without regard to one's self-concern for its consequences, and without regard to one's motives or pre-dispositions to make a certain choice. If I am not utterly incorrect, the significance of detachment in the Gita is not for the sake of morality, but for the sake of "the highest" for the sake of *moksha*. One is to act without regard for immediate self-interest not for the sake of a proper moral judgment or moral action, but for the sake of a higher fulfillment or attainment. To act out of a sense of duty and not out of a desire for immediate reward is to be liberated from certain attachments and thus to be closer to the realization of the ultimate goal or end of life. A "moral virtue" contributes directly to a "religious" goal.

In addition to the commendation of certain attitudes or virtues we have in the Gita the prescription of certain duties and obligations to act in particular ways. These duties, however, are not commended merely because they contribute to the harmonious ordering of society; they also have the larger significance that is "religious". They are, in the eighteenth chapter of the Gita, defined by one's classic caste. We read in 18:41, "Of brahmans, warriors, and artisans, and of serfs, scorcher of the foe, the actions are distinguished according to the strands that spring from their innate nature." (Edgerton trans.) In this text it appears that in the ordering of the classic four castes there is something like a "law of nature", an ordering of life which is part of the given. That order, while it does not have the same theological warrants that the natural law has in the doctrine of creation in Catholic theology, surely has a cosmic, religious significance. One might infer an imperative from the passage quoted, "Act according to your nature." The difference between this and the Catholic view is that here we have natures according to castes, and not a nature which is universal in the human race. I believe this difference is in part to be understood in terms of the singularly monotheistic view of the Deity in the Biblically based religions on the one hand, and the more complex view of the ultimate reality in the Hindu tradition. In both, however, to fulfill one's duties according to one's nature is

not merely a moral requirement; such fulfillment has deep religious significance. It affects the "salvation" of the adherents to each religious tradition. Morality and religion, if not identical, are intimately unified.

Professor S. N. Das Gupta, I believe, summarizes the ethics of the Gita well. He points out that the Gita accepts four types of duties fixed to the four classic castes.

But at the same time it enjoins on all persons that the moral and social duties should be strictly followed. It argues, therefore, that, having attained the highest moral perfection by cleansing himself of all impurities of passion, such as greed, antipathy, self-love, and the like, having filled the mind with a spirit of universal friendship, compassion and charity, and having attained perfect stability of mind, so as to be entirely unaffected by pleasures and afflictions of any kind, and being attached to God through bonds of love which also unite man with his fellow beings, the true seer should continue to perform the normal duties that are allotted to his station in society. (from A. L. Basham, ed., *a cultural history of India*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1975, pp. 121-22).

Put in terms of this article, which hopefully are not excessively distorting, one has certain moral duties, defined by caste; these duties are to be fulfilled in certain attitudes or dispositions, and with certain virtues. When they are properly fulfilled one is on the path to salvation. In turn, one's way on the path to salvation in turn affects how one fulfills moral duties. Religion and morality are inseparable.

I have attempted to adduce sufficient evidence to establish that in both the biblically based religious traditions and in Hinduism we have a very general similarity, namely a unity of religion and morality. Although I have not cited evidence from the Muslim tradition, I believe that the pervasive character of Islamic Shari'a could be adduced to make the same points. I have noted that in Christianity even those points in history when a distinction between the two was established, in the end they are unified.

### **Radical distinctions between morality and religion**

To many secular persons in modern society this unity appears to be primitive. As life in the world is perceived to be one-dimen-



sional, as consciousness either of a universal Absolute, Brahman, or a universal sovereign Deity, God, withers away, it is judged that morality can be fully justified without recourse to religion, and that ethical principles and values can be established without recourse to theological or metaphysical realities. In addition it is frequently observed that persons who are radically secularized live moral lives that are at least as worthy of praise as persons who adhere to traditional religions; thus practically one does not need to participate in the beliefs and activities of traditional religious communities in order to be moral. As I have noted, in religiously pluralistic societies, such as India and the United States, there is a proper concern to find a basis for morality to which adherents of various religions can turn in order to establish a measure of common well-being in a nation and between nations. And further, even those of us who are loyal to a traditional religion are also participants in the thought processes and life of the secularized modern world.

It is in the face of these things that attention has been given to a more radical distinction between religion and morality than the religious traditions have made. Persons who would make the more radical distinction would readily admit that certain relations between the two exist of the sorts I indicated in the introduction to this article. They would admit historical relations between certain religious communities, their beliefs and cultic life, and the morality that has developed in the cultures of which those religious are a part. They would admit a psychological relation between the practice of religious life and the moral behaviour of pious persons. They would admit that there are social and cultural relations between the practice of a religion and the morality of a society at given periods in history, including our own. They would admit that traditionally general religious concepts, such as theology in the West, have provided an authorization for certain moral values and principles. But they would not admit that there are *necessary* connections between the two. Morality is autonomous.

A particularly interesting argument along this line is made by Professor Alan Donagan in *The Theory of morality* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1977). In this book Donagan argues that the "common morality" of Western culture, historically associated with the Jewish and Christian traditions, is

fully defensible or non-religious, non-theological grounds. His own proposal is based on a theory of human action, and on a theory of the principles to govern human action that is derived from Immanuel Kant's philosophy. The effect of the argument is that one can establish a purely rational defense of the common morality that has been associated with the religious traditions. Put in terms that other Western philosophers use, there is no logically necessary connection between theological and metaphysical beliefs on the one hand and the principles of morality on the other. Nor is any connection necessary behaviorally between practicing a particular religion and praise-worthy moral living.

If applied to traditional Hinduism, I take it that such a position would argue that the moral attitudes and duties prescribed in the texts of the Gita are not in any way logically dependent upon the beliefs about the absolute and the mythic forms this takes that back such attitudes and duties in that text. Nor are they in any way logically dependent upon the ultimate search for salvation that is the purpose of the prescribed discipline. That there are historical relations between the "religion" of the Gita and its ethical, prescriptions would not be denied. That to believe, as devout Hindus have done for centuries, that there is an important relation between the cultivation of these attitudes and the fulfillment of these duties on the one hand, and one's movement toward *moksha* on the other would be judged to be psychologically significant, but not necessary. One can have morality without religion (though it would be more difficult to establish that one has any historic religion without a morality that is in some ways distinctive).

Without assessing this position of radical distinction in any detail, I shall assume that it is worthy of attention by those of us who do wish to make a case on normative grounds for a more significant relation between the two. At least we are moved to clarify our concepts of religion and morality, and to establish a basis for a significant positive relationship which might not in the end be necessary. (We might desire to make a stronger argument, for example, that morality must be grounded in "reality" or in "ultimate reality", but such a vast project cannot be undertaken in this article).

### **Religion and morality : distinguishable but significantly related**

I wish now briefly to indicate how I believe the distinctions

between religion and morality might be taken more seriously than they were in the religious traditions, but also how we can understand a strongly positive relation between the two without arguing that the connection is necessary. That there are over-lapping areas between religious and moral experience I believe has been established.

The adequacy of the position taken in this part of the article depends upon the reader's judgement about the way in which the terms "religion" and "morality" are used. Thus I shall be very explicit about these matters.

Religion, as I use the term, refers to all those human experiences of an ultimate reality that transcends control by our human powers. In the traditional western religions this reality is conceived as a power that stands over human life, limiting it, as well as a power that sustains human life. The relation that evokes the religious dimension of experience is, in much of western religion, one of ultimate dependence; it is one of being subject to powers outside the self in both western religions and some forms of Hinduism; it is a relation to a goal or an end of human life in both western religions and Hinduism. Religion is an aspect of human experience; it is the response of human experience to the ultimate reality. The names given to this ultimate reality, or to the variety of powers that manifest it, are many. Some are abstract such as the Indefinable, the Eternal, the Unknowable, the One Beyond (or Present In) the Many, the Great Soul. Some are quite particular such as Yahweh, Vishnu, Krishna, or Shiva. Clearly it is the case that the ultimate reality is not only named differently, but conceptualized differently even within historically identifiable religious traditions. What distinguishes religion as dimension or aspect of human experience is that the perceived reality has a character of ultimacy to which human and all of life is related.

Many historical and institutional forms of life develop around this experience. Thus religion in a wider sense refers to activities, institutions, and ideas that express this dimension of experience, and that evoke, nurture, renew, and sustain it. I mean to suggest such activities as prayers, cultic sacrifices, ritual disciplines, celebrations of historic or Mythic events and the like. Also included are sacred texts that have captured the stories and ideas that these experiences evoke such as the Bible, the Ramayana, the Upanishads,

and the Bhagavad-Gita. There are also the institutional arrangements by which religious traditions are transmitted from generation to generation : the teaching and worship life of synagogues and churches, the roles and functions of priests and gurus, the festivals of Christmas and Holi. The more speculative reflections of intellectuals which seek to articulate the meaning of the religious aspects of experience and to explain them are included, as in Christian theological writings and in the Upanishads. What marks these activities as religious is their reference to an ultimate reality, to powers or a power with which humans must come to terms, or become properly related to in some way.

Morality, as I use the term, also refers to human experience: the experiences of goodness and evil or the rightness or wrongness of relations between persons and in the ordering of social life. Just as the most immediate experiences of the religious dimensions of life come often in facing the powers of life and death, so also the most immediate experience of the moral dimensions come in our sense that human life is or is not properly flourishing (the experiences of goodness or evil) and that relations between humans, or between humans and the rest of the natural world, are properly or improperly established (the experiences of rightness or wrongness). An example of the latter is our sense of wrongness in the face of injustices.

Around these basic moral aspects of experience wider aspects of morality develop : rules conduct that have prescriptive force and to which behavior is to comply; social rules and institutions that reward right conduct and punish the wrong; ideals which have attractive force and toward which persons aspire, as for example, non-violence. Also included are human motives : both the reasons given for seeking the good and acting rightly, and the empowering of desire and will to seek the good and do the right.

What distinguishes morality from religion is that morality is primarily directed toward human relations with others, and toward the fulfillment of human capacities or aspirations that are judged to be good.

With this distinction in mind I can now propose a thesis about the relationship. I have referred to both as aspects or dimensions of human experience. Except perhaps for the unique mystical experiences, religious experience is an aspect or dimension of other

experiences. Ultimate reality is confronted in a variety of human experiences. Thus the disciplining of the self, a human experience, can have several meanings; it can be done for several purposes. It has religious significance when its purpose and meaning are to become related in a liberating or saving way in relation, for example, to the Brahman. Or, in western religions, when its purpose and meaning are to be properly related to an ultimate power that governs and sustains and redeems human life.

Moral experience is an aspect or dimension of other sorts of experiences—in family life, in buying and selling, in the ordering of the society, for examples. Action in conformity with Dharma is action according to certain laws, or prescribed patterns of social relationship, and thus in that case the moral is an aspect or dimension of social experience.

For persons of religious consciousness, for persons committed to a religious tradition, *the basic relationship of the religious and moral aspects of experience is grounded in the perception that how persons conduct themselves morally makes a difference to their relationship to the ultimate reality; and how persons relate themselves to the ultimate reality makes a difference to their moral conduct.* In this generalized form, I propose that this is true both of western religions and of Hinduism. The radical separation the modern secularized consciousness makes between religion and morality is possible only on the basis of a conviction that it is meaningless to talk about a relation of humanity to an ultimate reality, or on the basis of a conviction that whatever reality is, it has no moral features or requirements. The possibility of a significant relationship (not merely a hypothetical one but also not a necessary one from the perspective of human experience) between religion and morality depends upon the experience of, and belief in a reality that transcends, or a reality that is present in but not exhausted by, ordinary daily experience.

### **More general significance of this article**

I believe the thesis developed in this article has importance both of scholarship in the area of religion and morality, and for practical religious leadership. Its scholarly importance stems from the challenges of secular philosophers and others to scholars of religion. Frequently in the West, at least, scholars of religion have not been sufficiently careful about their use of terms and

concepts, about distinctions that are meaningful and necessary, and about the limits of their explanatory accounts of religion and morality. As scholars of religion we feel an imperative to be clearer and more precise about these relations.

Its practical importance is that careful reflection on these matters heightens the awareness of the central point at which erosion of religious life occurs in secularized modern societies. The erosion takes place with the diminishing of the meaningfulness of the religious aspects of experience. In the West, at least, religious leaders have often attempted sustain religion for the sake of morality. This makes religion instrumental, and when other instruments sustain morality as well, the significance of religion itself is undercut. The practical religious imperative derived from this article is that the significance and meaning of religious life must be cultivated and defended as an end in its own right, but also as an end that has important relations to moral life.

Its third practical importance is that I believe it establishes the possibility for some development of morality that is acceptable to both secular and religious persons, and to persons of different religious traditions, without eliminating the positive significance of religion for morality. Although the full development of this possibility cannot be undertaken here, a few suggestions are in order. I do not believe that a truly universal morality can be developed that will be acceptable by persons from all religious traditions, or both to all religious and all secular persons. At least in the present development of human cultures this is not a foreseeable possibility, in part because our historical identities with particular religions and the cultures informed by them strongly orient persons in quite different ways toward what is to be valued. I do, however, believe that the position developed in this article makes room for agreement about certain moral values and principles even though they are given more general justifications by different beliefs about ultimate reality, or by beliefs that there is no ultimate reality. The general point is that by recognizing the relative autonomy of morality from religion persons from different religious traditions and/or from none might establish some principles and values that can be supported by different religious beliefs and practices. Yet it would not be necessary to deny the significance of religious beliefs and practices in order to

establish these principles and values. (I have developed this line of argument more thoroughly with reference to Christianity in *Can Ethics Be Christian ?* Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1975).

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