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## Introduction to *MUST MORALITY BE GROUNDED IN GOD?*

In my first semester as a graduate student at Boston College, I attended a lecture on God and morality. This was the first time I had given much reflection to the topic, and I recall having a very strong reaction against the speaker's thesis that, without God, ethics would be impossible. My first thought was of Aristotle, who in my mind had a successfully objective moral theory rooted in an account of human nature that did not depend on God. Yet, as I considered the claim more deeply (and calmed down!), I began to think about Aristotle's repeated references to God, or at least to "the divine," in *Nicomachean Ethics* and saw that the speaker may have been onto something after all. It is one thing to say that one cannot do ethics without the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but quite another to make such a claim in regard to the God of the philosophers. While one need not be a Jew or Christian in order to have an objective ethics, it may be that some conception of God as the root of the moral life is necessary. This is still a live question in my mind, and so I am thankful to Paul Symington for asking me to serve as special guest editor of this issue of *Quaestiones Disputatae* as it has afforded me a chance to revisit in a calmer and (hopefully) more mature way this topic with which I began my graduate school education. The essays collected here all had their inception in a conference entitled "Must Morality Be Grounded in God?" that was hosted by the Franciscan University of Steubenville in the spring of 2013.

The first set of papers contains the three plenary addresses and responses delivered at the conference. John Rist's "Must Morality be Grounded in God?" argues that not only is God the necessary ground of morality, but that the Christian God is the best candidate for the kind of God that can provide such a foundation. Offering us an impressive foray into the history of ethics regarding this topic, Rist defends the claim that only a personal God will do for ethics and concludes with a warning to Christians who cede too much to secularists on just this point. In Paul Symington's response to Rist, despite his sympathy with Rist's position, he cautions against a "Christian triumphalism" that both fails to start with the natural goods that can be pursued in a sense "prior" to explicit belief in God and also misses that aspect of morality that is not about obligations.

In "Suarez's 'Best Argument' and the Dependence of Morality on God," Mark Murphy argues against Rist's approach to the relationship between morality and God; an approach which starts with morality and pro-

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ceeds to argue that it cannot be explained without reference to God. In contrast, Murphy offers a Suarezian account that works in the opposite direction: *assuming* that God exists, one then goes on to determine what the dependence of morality on God would be. In response, John Crosby challenges Murphy's position on the grounds that it does not seem to offer the atheist who undergoes a conversion a transformative way of experiencing morality and thus fails to recognize the phenomenological radicality of religious life.

In the final plenary paper, "Morality and God," Christopher Tollefsen focuses on God's personhood and agency as the central attributes for thinking about morality. After arguing against Murphy's focus on God's goodness as the grounding of morality, Tollefsen discusses how God affects morality from our perspective as agents and concludes by shifting the emphasis from God as one who commands to one who offers His love *via* "authoritative invitations." In response, Jonathan Sanford attempts to clarify the disagreement between Murphy and Tollefsen by focusing on the nature of explanation: as he has it, whereas Tollefsen focuses on motivation, Murphy goes deeper into a metaphysical analysis.

After the plenary papers and responses, the submitted papers can be divided into two groups: whereas the first group approaches the relationship between God and morality by focusing on some figure in the history of philosophy, the second group is oriented toward issues in contemporary ethics.

The first group, organized by historical order, begins with Brian Donohue's "God and Aristotelian Ethics." He argues that Aristotle's ethical framework is dependent upon God, and that this tends to be missed to the extent that commentators overlook the centrality of the intellectual virtues to Aristotle's account of the good life. Gregory Sadler ("Anselmian Moral Theory and The Question of Grounding Morality in God") frames the issue by distinguishing between four different way of asking about the relationship between God and morality. While Sadler focuses his attention on St. Anselm of Canterbury, he does so in order to show how Anselm can help us think more clearly about this issue in the contemporary dialogue. Next, in "The Moral Disadvantage of Unbelief: Natural Religion and Natural Sanctity in Aquinas," Francisco Romero Carrasquillo directs our attention to St. Thomas Aquinas and the question of the relationship between natural law and God. Carrasquillo argues that, even from the perspective of natural reason, for Aquinas God is central to the moral life in light of the fact that religion is a central moral virtue around which the good life must be organized. Finally, Andrew Pfeuffer's "Correcting the Caricature: God and Kant" discusses the role of God as a necessary postulate for the enterprise of ethics. For Kant, as Pfeuffer argues, practical reason demands that we assert a goal to the moral life or else the whole system of morality collapses.

The second group of papers turns our attention to contemporary concerns. In “God and Moral Scepticism,” Joe Milburn approaches the relationship between God and morality by asking whether or not we can make sense of moral discourse without reference to God. More specifically, Milburn argues that theism provides us with the best (even if he is hesitant to say *only*) response to Kieran Setiya’s skeptical argument concerning epistemic luck. Nicholas Rescher (“God and the Grounding of Morality”) asks why we should be moral, and shows the problems that the leading schools of thought take that do not root morality in God. Arguing as well against Divine Command Theory, Rescher claims that gratitude lies at the foundation of the moral life, specifically gratitude to God as the source of our being. Next, Sr. Elinor Gardner, O.P. (“Faith is the Light of the Soul”), speaks from within Christian philosophy and its claim that God’s grace is necessary for moral perfection. Offering a meditation on the life of St. Antony, Sr. Gardner shows how Antony’s reliance on grace afforded him a rich and beautiful life that would otherwise have been denied to him. Finally, in “Who Needs God, IVF and the Gift of Life” Barbara Freres takes up Peter Singer’s “simple case” regarding artificial reproduction and argues that, while reason can argue against this practice, without faith it is nearly impossible to guide our actions rightly. Thus, while Freres (like Milburn) does not intend to rule out the possibility of a proper moral life without faith, she shows us how important faith is to illuminating and guiding our way.

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