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When Socrates met Euthyphro he wanted to know what holiness is in itself, regardless of what God may say about it. To find what is right and true, the soul must have conversation with itself. By looking within, you will know what is good. Richard Kroner speaks of the ethical principle of Socrates as that of a “new inwardness.”

In modern times Immanuel Kant developed this principle of the inward self-sufficiency of man’s moral consciousness with great ingenuity. Kant, as well as Socrates, is indifferent to what God may say about the nature of the good. But the seeming indifference of both Socrates and Kant to what God may say is, as a matter of fact, hostility to what God says and has said. Kant manifests this hostility in striking fashion when he “demythologizes” the content of the Christian Scriptures and reinterprets them so as to make them mean what the independent moral consciousness has already said.

This syllabus claims with the historic Reformed creeds that the good is good because God in Christ through the Scriptures, says it is good. Without the presupposition of the self-sufficient moral consciousness of the triune God revealed in Scripture, man’s moral consciousness would operate in a vacuum.

To bring out this point Part 1 deals with Christian Ethical Principles. It seeks to show that it is the triune God of Scripture who sets before man his moral goal, who in his revelation gives him his moral standard, and by the gift of faith enables him to work toward his proper goal by way of following the instruction of his revelation.

To bring out this same point by way of contrast, Part 2 traces the development of apostate man’s principle of “inwardness” or moral self-sufficiency in order to show that it has led and cannot but lead to moral chaos. The argument of the two parts constitutes what amounts to a plea to men who, today more obviously than before, spurn the revelation of God in the Christ of Scripture, and trust in the autonomy of the moral consciousness of man to see that in this case as well as in the whole field of knowledge, God has made foolish the wisdom of man, and has been pleased to save them that believe.
Part One: Christian Ethical Principles

Chapter 1: The Material Of Christian Ethics

According to general agreement, ethics deals with that aspect of human personality which we designate as the will. This distinguishes ethics from those sciences whose primary concern it is to deal with knowledge or with appreciation. Those sciences which deal chiefly with knowledge are based upon that aspect of man’s personality which we call the intellect, while those sciences whose chief purpose it is to deal with appreciation are based upon that aspect of man’s personality which we speak of as emotion or feeling.

We do not mean that there is or can be a rigid division between these various kinds of sciences. Ethics cannot be rigidly separated from the other sciences. We should rather say that ethics deals primarily with the will of man, and only secondarily with his intellect and his emotions.

What then are the questions that can and must be asked with respect to the will of man? We answer that they are the same questions that can and must be asked, mutatis mutandis, with respect to the intellect and the emotions of man—in short, they are the essentially human questions with a particular accent or emphasis.

These essentially human questions we may conveniently divide into three. In the first place we inquire into the nature of man. What is man? That is the most basic question we can ask about him. In asking this question we look into the foundation of all that we are going to say further. In asking what man is, we ask what his intellect is, what his will is, and what his emotions are. This question, when applied to the will, has always been taken up in some form or other in all treatises on ethics. It may be that the question, as such, is not even asked. If so, this only indicates that the writer has taken for granted instead of argued some answer to this question. All that anyone can say about the duties or the goal of human endeavor presupposes some theory of the nature of man. It remains, then, a most fundamental question in ethics to ask first of all about the nature of the human will.

In ethical writing this point is usually discussed under the heading of motive. What is the motive that controls the acts of man? What is the most impelling power that makes a man commit this murder? Was this motive by which he was impelled good or bad? Is this man a man of virtue or is he not a man of virtue? Was virtue born into this man or was it acquired by him? Is virtue a habit or an acquisition or perhaps both? If it is inborn, is it then virtuous? If it is exclusively an acquisition how could it get under way? What is this mysterious thing called character? All such questions and many more are taken up in some form under this first main question as to the nature of the human will.

The second question that must be asked with respect to the will of man is that of criterion or standard. The asking of this question is involved in the asking of the first question. Ethics seeks to discover whether the will of man is good or bad. But we cannot answer or even ask this question intelligently unless there is a standard by which a man can be judged and in comparison with which he can be said to be either good or bad.

The question of criterion or standard is usually discussed in ethical writing under the head of law, or duty. What should man do? What is he morally obliged to do? What should he omit doing? Was that deed which I have done wrong, or was it right? Are there
some things that are good, some that are bad, and also some that are indifferent, or are all deeds either good or bad? Such questions as these deal with the quality of one’s deeds. But where will I find the standard that I need for moral judgment? Is it external or is it internal? If external, is it the impersonal law of a universe or the revealed will of a personal God? If internal, is it the voice of my conscience as an individual intuitive principle or is it the vision of a certain end that I have? If an intuitive principle, is such an intuition implanted by God or is it the result of the experience of the race, or perhaps both? Such questions as these are asked under the second division of ethical research.

Finally, the third main question that can and must be asked about the human will is as to the purpose or end of its action. The word purpose, however, is ambiguous. It is sometimes used as identical with motive. Often we say that we have a certain purpose in doing something and mean therewith the same thing as when we say that we had a certain motive in doing something. We say that we excuse a man for some evil done because he had a good purpose in doing it. But in ethical discussion the word purpose is to be considered synonymous with the end toward which or for which something is done, rather than synonymous with the motive that impels one to do that deed. Even so there is a very close relation between the concept of motive and the concept of purpose. We cannot say that a man has a right motive in doing something unless he tries to accomplish the right end with it. We may even find that the purpose of certain deeds lies in their purifying effect on the motive of future deeds of a similar sort or of future deeds in general. The doing of many individual good deeds of kindness will increase the kindness of our disposition. Yet there is always this distinction, that in the case of motive we deal with the condition of the will as it is at the time of the action under consideration, while in the case of purpose we think of a result that follows the deed itself.

In ethical writing this question of the purpose of man’s deed is usually discussed under the heading of the highest good—sumnum bonum. What is it that the individual and the race should strive for? Should the goal of man’s life be beyond man as an individual, or is it something for the individual alone? If it is beyond the individual, is it in his fellowman, or is it in God? Is morality independent of religion, or is there a dependence? If there is a dependence, is religion dependent upon morality or is morality dependent upon religion? On the other hand, if the goal of man is in the individual himself, is it something external to the individual or is it something internal to the individual? Is it happiness that should be man’s highest goal, or is it goodness? Should man seek for rewards, or should he be good whether or not there is a reward attached to his goodness? Is goodness perhaps its own reward? If it is, then what is goodness? Is it inherent in the nature of man, so that he is able of himself to do it? If it is inherent in the nature of man, then is it really goodness and not merely nature? If it is not inherent in man, then can it be its own reward? Will not evil overcome the good and destroy goodness itself so that it cannot be its own reward? All these and more are the questions that come under the general heading of the sumnum bonum or the end of ethics.

All ethics then deals with these three questions: (a) What is the motive of human action? (b) What is the standard of human action? (c) What is the end or purpose of human action?

The point now to be considered is whether it is of any great significance that these three questions be treated in the order stated. It may be argued that we cannot speak of the nature of the will at all unless we measure the actions of that will by the end toward
which it directs its effort. This is true, but it is equally true that we cannot speak of the end to which the will of man should direct its effort till we know what the will is. Similarly we may say that we cannot speak of the nature of the will unless we know according to what sort of standard it should act. But again the reverse of this is true. We cannot speak of the standard of the will unless we know the nature of the will. We see then that the three questions asked in ethics are subdivisions of one more comprehensive question. For this reason, we believe the only significance that can be attached to the point which of these subdivisions should be considered first is a methodological one. It is not necessarily indicative of any divergence of viewpoint if one writer chooses to begin at another point.

The method we shall follow in this course is to take first the matter of man’s chief end, then the matter of the law or standard, and finally the matter of the motive. We wish to consider first the goal that God has set for the will of man. We may compare this with the destination of a journey. Secondly, we shall consider the standard which God has set for the will of man. We may compare that with the road along which man is to make his journey. In the third place we shall consider the motive of man as it should be according to the will of God. We may compare this with the actual attitude of man as he makes the journey.

We propose then to make a sort of Pilgrim’s Progress affair of our discussion. The celestial city toward which our ethical pilgrim will wend his way is the kingdom of God. We speak of this as the object of ethics. The standard or chart of our pilgrim is the will of God. Walking along it, as along a road, our pilgrim is to reach the celestial city. The motive or compelling power which is to be the force that will move our pilgrim along the road to the celestial city is the will to do the will of God. We speak of this as the motive in ethics.

A Christian writer on ethics will naturally have to write according to the genius of Christianity while a non-Christian writer on ethics will naturally have to write in accordance with the genius of non-Christian philosophy. But it is often maintained that the genius of non-Christian, or at least of non-orthodox, thought is that it is free and unbound in its ethical investigation. On the other hand, it will be maintained that the genius of Christian, or at least orthodox Christian, thought is that it is bound to an absolute and extraneous authority. In the following chapters we shall return to this question. At present we are interested in it only insofar as to observe that as Christians we accept our bondage—if bondage it be—willingly. We have accepted Christianity as an interpretation of life for reasons we deem sufficient. Among these reasons for the acceptance of Christianity is the Christian interpretation of ethics itself. Hence, we do not feel bound, and maintain that we are not bound except as we feel that we should be bound.

But men will say that this is only a psychological abnormality and that as orthodox Christians we cannot really face any problems and therefore cannot really offer any solutions. The current viewpoint is that problems can arise in the history of human action only when unconsciously acquired habits of action no longer suffice for the situation in which men are placed. It is only when new wine has to be poured into old bottles that ferment sets in, and men begin to think about the nature of morality. So it is said that in the case of the Greeks there were accepted moral codes which were not questioned till Athens grew into the head of an empire and the Sophists brought about a general
restlessness. “Then,” said Muirhead, “a condition of doubt, uncertainty, and general perplexity was created, out of which in due time arose, under the influence of Socrates, the first sketch of science of morality.”¹ But such a claim rests upon the assumption of the truth of the non-Christian position. If Christianity is true, genuine problems can arise even if man is willingly subordinate to God in all his thinking. Not only that, but if Christianity is true, it is only in it that man can really face any problem at all. If Christianity be true the possibility of the asking of any questions about anything whether it be ethical or something else, depends upon the presupposition of God as revealed in Christ as absolute. To this point we shall return again and again.

Should we then make a distinction between philosophical and theological ethics and say that we, as Christians, are interested in theological ethics while non-Christians are interested in philosophical ethics? To put the matter in this way would be very misleading, to say the least. There is a Christian philosophy as well as a non-Christian philosophy. There is a non-Christian theology as well as a Christian theology. So there is a non-Christian philosophical and a non-Christian theological ethics. Again, there is a Christian philosophical and a Christian theological ethics. The line of cleavage should be deepest between that which is Christian and that which is non-Christian. Neither Christian philosophical ethics nor Christian theological ethics can forget at any time just what the requirements of Christianity are for its science. These requirements are that man must interpret man and his behavior in accordance with the interpretation of God.

For Christians the difference between theological and philosophical ethics can be no more than one of emphasis. Both have to interpret the moral life in all of its manifestation in the light of Scripture. We propose, therefore, self-consciously to ignore the distinction and to speak of philosophico-theological ethics, or rather simply Christian ethics. This procedure is justifiable the more so because the main purpose of the course is apologetical. It is meant to set forth and vindicate some of the main concepts of the Christian view of man’s goal, standard and motive of action.

But to vindicate the Christian view of ethics one cannot avoid the differences between Roman Catholic and Protestant ethics. One cannot even avoid the difference between Reformed and non-Reformed or evangelical ethics. As a Roman Catholic theology is a deformation of a true Christian theology, so its ethics is a deformation of a truly Christian ethics. And in a lesser degree this holds true for evangelical as over against Reformed ethics. Reformed ethics is the only fully Christian ethics, and as such is alone defensible against non-Christian views.

We propose then to give the Reformed interpretation of the ethical life. We believe that to be the consistently biblical and the consistently Christian interpretation of the ethical problem. And the reason for calling the course Christian Ethics, not Reformed Ethics, does not lie in the fact that we wish to catch anyone unawares by the title. The reason is rather that we take it for granted that at a Reformed seminary a Reformed interpretation will be given to everything that is taught. The reason for the existence of a Reformed seminary is simply the conviction on the part of the founders and supporters that Calvinism is Christianity come to its own.

¹ J. H. Muirhead: The Elements of Ethics, 1892, p. 10.
Chapter 2: The Scope Of Christian Ethics

We now ask where Christian ethics expects to find the material with which to discuss the questions that are asked in ethical inquiry. Non-Christian ethics naturally seeks its answers in the experience of the human race. Does Christian ethics have anywhere else to go?

The answer that comes naturally to mind is that in the person of the Christ there has been a unique experience that can somehow be set up as a standard for other human beings. Accordingly there have been many books written on such subjects as the ethics of Jesus. The purpose of such books is to show that Christian ethics does not differentiate itself from other ethics by leaving the common ground of human experience, but that it differentiates itself from other ethics by dealing with a special case of human experience as an ideal. We shall deal briefly with three such books in order to test the adequacy of such an approach.

The first book we wish to look at is that of Henry Churchill King. This first book we are to look at is Henry Churchill King’s The Ethics of Jesus. The significant thing about this book is that it illustrates very effectively that everyone who seeks an Ethics of Jesus and identifies that with Christian ethics finds nothing that is really specific at all.

The reason for this lies at hand. Those who are most anxious to deal with the ethics of Jesus usually apply the methods of higher criticism to Scripture in order to discover what Jesus has really said on ethical matters. So King, for example, seeks to find rock bottom by taking his final resting point on Schmiedel’s Foundation Pillars, and Burkitt’s “doubly attested sayings.” By thus accepting the results of higher criticism, King finds only that which he could expect to find, that is, a Jesus who has been stripped of all that is unique. True, Jesus might still be considered a wise man, and in this sense might be called unique, but he could in no sense be called the Son of God. If Jesus is to be considered as the Son of God we must accept his authority with respect to the Scripture and cannot play fast and loose with it as criticism does.

The net result, then, of the average writer on the Ethics of Jesus can be predicted in advance. He will find in Jesus some particularly attractive form of statement with respect to the object, the standard, and the motive of ethics, but he will find no absolute *summus bonum*, no absolute standard, and no absolute motive placed before men. It will of course invariably be found that Jesus said a great deal about love, but it will be taken for granted that man can by his own unaided ability love as he should. There will be no intimation that without the atoning blood of Calvary man cannot truly love God and his neighbor. In particular we may be sure that there will be no absolute authority given to Christ. Speaking of the matter of authority, King says, “It [that is, Jesus’ ethical teaching] is not to get its support from authority or labored argument; at the most He gives His hearers only a series of insights, and He insists most solemnly that no possible contempt of
Himself can compare in seriousness with unfaithfulness to one’s own best vision.” ¹ It is quite natural that if criticism has first cut out of the gospels all that is obnoxious to the natural man, nothing that is out of accord with the best insights of the natural man will be found to proceed from the mouth of Jesus.

We do not intend to enter upon the question of the New Testament evidence with respect to the question of the Messianic consciousness. ² We believe that on this ground alone it can be definitely and fairly established that according to the best evidence available Jesus thought of himself as the only begotten Son of God. If this is true, then the whole Ethics of Jesus literature drops away into uselessness. In that case Jesus is not merely one among many to whose advice and ideas we can, if we choose, listen. In that case Jesus must necessarily speak with authority that is absolute.

What we are more concerned to point out is that from a philosophical point of view too the Ethics of Jesus literature is unsound. That this is so may be observed if we think for a moment of the implications involved in the idea that Jesus should for some reason be singled out as a moral teacher. The question that must be asked at once is, What kind of moral teacher was Jesus? There have been many moral teachers in the past. It may be answered that his peculiarity lay in the fact that he lived what he taught, and thus made his teaching more actual than that of other teachers. This is no doubt true, but does not touch the main question involved. The question must inevitably lead on to a further question, namely, that of Jesus’ absolute divinity. It will not do to assume that somehow one person among the millions of men that have lived is somehow able to live the perfect life. Granted that he did, then it would follow that all men are by nature able to live the perfect life if only they make up their minds to do so and if they live in favorable circumstances. And with this assumption we are once more clearly upon non-theistic ground. Moreover, if we merely assume that Jesus as one human being among others lived the perfect life, we also assume that it is not necessary for man to be told by the medium of special revelation what sin is. We then assume that we are in ourselves able to judge of the nature of sin. Now the point in question is whether we are able to be our own standard with respect to the moral life or whether we are not. It will not do, then, especially if we are proposing to investigate the moral question with an open mind, to begin at the outset with the assumption that it cannot possibly be true that man must be told what the nature of his moral delinquency is.

What we actually find, then, is that King has not been able to obtain any ethics that is essentially higher than the ethics he might have obtained from non-Christian writers.

Charles Augustus Briggs

The second man we wish to discuss briefly is Charles Augustus Briggs. He gives in some ways a more satisfactory survey of the ethical sayings of Jesus than King, since he does not take as extreme a position with respect to higher criticism as does King. But this helps the matter very little indeed. At first glance one would think that Briggs is much more conservative than King. Yet what difference does it really make whether one takes a few more or a few less passages of Jesus so long as in all of them it is assumed that

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¹ Henry Churchill King: *The Ethics of Jesus*, p. 80.

Jesus is not essentially divine but is merely speaking as one human being to other human beings? Briggs, as well as King, has separated the ethical teaching of Jesus from the question of the person of Jesus. Both have taken for granted the pagan position that truth is truth in itself, and that Jesus only looks up to it. So also they have taken for granted that goodness is goodness in itself and does not proceed from the person of Christ as a standard. It is true that Briggs would hold that Jesus has perhaps embodied a larger measure of goodness in his life than any other man. But this does not remove the position of Briggs from the non-Christian position in his theory of ethics. The central question is whether Jesus spoke as the Son of God with absolute authority and therefore also as the source of goodness so that no one can be morally good unless it be upon the finished work of Christ.

That Briggs does not regard Jesus as the Son of God and as the true Messiah may be seen from his interpretation of Jesus’ temptations. We discuss only the one in which Jesus answered Satan that man shall not live by bread alone. Of this answer Briggs says: “Jesus thus recognizes for Himself and for His disciples that the Word of God is food for the soul, and that this is ever to be ethically higher than the satisfaction of the hunger of the body. It is a yielding to temptation when the hunger of the soul is neglected in order to satisfy the hunger of the body. There are times when the soul should be so absorbed in feeding upon the Word of God that the hunger of the body will not be experienced, or if experienced, will be altogether neglected.”

3 It is thus that Briggs puts Jesus in every important respect on the level with his disciples. True, he does say that Jesus’ temptation qualified him particularly for his messianic task. But this means no more than that Jesus was a human individual and therefore had a distinct task to perform. In this sense anyone’s particular preparation would be unique. The nature of Jesus’ preparation was, according to Briggs, no more than a learning to put the hunger of the soul above the hunger of the body and in this respect all his disciples must follow him. Now it is true that all the disciples of Jesus should put the hunger of the soul above the hunger of the body, but it is not true that this was the meaning of the temptation for Jesus if Christianity is to be taken in any higher than a purely naturalistic sense. If Christianity is true, the temptation of Jesus by Satan was the effort on the part of Satan to keep Christ from walking the via dolorosa to the cross. Such a temptation could come to no other human being because no other being could walk the via dolorosa, and if he could, Satan would be glad to see him go, since it would do no harm to his kingdom at all.

What we are concerned to note, then, is not the absurdity of the notion that Jesus should teach his disciples the desirability and even the absolute necessity of ascetic periods to the extent of forty days of hunger. It would reduce the person of Jesus to that of a moral fanatic, without giving him the benefit of a great national cause to work for, such as, for example, Gandhi had. What we are rather concerned to note is that in his interpretation of Jesus’ temptation Briggs has taken the whole of the non-Christian position for granted. The basic contention of Christianity with respect to the person of Christ is that he is the Son of God. If this is true, then it follows that we cannot take the experiences of Jesus and assume that they could all be experienced by ourselves, if circumstances required. Others may die on the cross, but their death would have no substitutionary significance for men in general. Others might be tempted to escape the

3 Charles Augustus Briggs: The Ethical Teaching of Jesus, p. 36.
cross, but a yielding to such a temptation would not cast untold millions into hell. Yet Briggs has not even related the temptation of Jesus to his cross. Before he ever got that far he had already leveled down the difference between Jesus and other men. He simply took for granted that the ethics of Jesus has nothing to do with his cross or even with the uniqueness of his divine sonship.  

This point brings out the general procedure of modernists so well that we stop to consider still further the results of such a beginning for the crises of the moral life. Surely an important crisis in the moral life as interpreted by Jesus is that of conversion or turning away from sin. Speaking of the forgiveness of sins, Briggs says: “The way in which sin is to be forgiven, covered over and obliterated, is by returning to God.” Speaking of Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus, he adds: “This internal change through the divine Spirit, is a change of mind, is a change of life such as is elsewhere designated by repentance and faith.” We see from such quotations as these that Briggs thinks it quite possible for the natural man to convert and to regenerate himself. Or rather, we should say that, according to Briggs, man does not need to be regenerated at all in order to lead the truly moral life. He identifies regeneration with conversion and then puts the power of conversion within man himself. He does indeed refer to “the divine Spirit,” but he nowhere teaches that the divine Spirit takes the things of Christ and applies them unto us. According to Briggs the cross of Christ has nothing directly to do with our ethical life.

It is on this naturalist basis too that Briggs makes his distinction between the “law of love” and the “liberty of love.” According to Briggs, Jesus teaches definitely in the Sermon on the Mount that his disciples may do more than they have to do. They ought naturally to be good. That is the law of love. But they need not go the second mile. This is the liberty of love. In other words Briggs plainly teaches that man can of his own accord do the morally right. He could do even more than he needs to do if only he has the encouragement. All this is simply non-Christian thought. And all this is taken for granted as being the specific teaching of Jesus. Yet what we are now concerned to note is that all this is naturally involved in the Ethics of Jesus literature. Naturalism lies at the basis of it all.

We see then that what might at first appear as a mere limitation of scope has in actuality turned out to be a denial of Christian ethics altogether. There is on this ground no reason why the ethics of Jesus, as usually spoken of, should not be woven into the fabric of general ethics and be made a chapter in the histories of ethical theories as they are usually given. Or we may say that the Ethics of Jesus might be given a place at best among the types of ethical theories as they are systematically presented.

James Stalker

The third man whose work on the Ethics of Jesus we wish to consider briefly is James Stalker. He is more conservative than either King or Briggs. Yet it soon becomes clear that he too falls under the same criticism that we have given of both King and Briggs,

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4 Cf. on the temptations of Jesus, the notes on New Testament Biblical Theology, by Vos.
5 Briggs: op. cit., p. 68.
6 Briggs: op. cit., p. 69.
7 Cf. James Martineau: Types of Ethical Theory.
namely, that that which seems to be nothing more than a limitation in scope turns out to be a reduction in standard as well.

That Stalker does not regard Christ as the second person of the Trinity whose word is therefore absolute, appears at once from the fact that he constantly speaks of the originality of Jesus. Speaking of Jesus’ relation to the Old Testament teachers he says: “All their doctrine on this subject Jesus accepts, sympathizing with it from the bottom of His heart.” Now the men of the Old Testament were but forerunners of Christ and spoke his words as plenipotentiaries sent by him. If an ambassador from the United States speaks in the name of the President at London, and if afterwards the President himself goes to London, one cannot say that the President accepts the word of the ambassador. Similarly, to say that Jesus agreed with the men of the Old Testament, when it is not qualified, means that the writers of the Old Testament were independent of Jesus in what they said.

And that it is this that Stalker really means appears from the fact that he goes on to speak of Jesus’ relationship to the Greeks in the same way. Stalker argues as though Jesus perhaps did not speak of some of the virtues the Greeks spoke most of because he was not acquainted with them. Now it may be that Jesus never read Aristotle’s Nicomachean ethics. Yet it is certainly true that as the second person of the Trinity he was the Logos of creation. As the Logos of creation it was through him only that the Greeks could make their speculations. In this respect then we may say that as the second person of the Trinity Christ had heard of the Greek virtues before the Greeks had heard of them. In other words, it was because in the pactum salutis that Christ took it upon himself to save the world, which would fall into sin and try in vain through its own ethics and its own virtues to save itself, that he now put forth his righteousness as the foundation of the virtues of those who should be in him. The whole question of Jesus’ being acquainted with or not being acquainted with Greek ethics is therefore beside the point. Jesus did not try to build a second story upon a foundation already laid. He laid a new foundation. This new foundation he began to lay by sending his servants, the prophets, ahead of him. This foundation he did not personally finish laying. He finished it through his servants the apostles. And it was upon this new foundation that he rebuilt every virtue.

Stalker has nothing of all this in his book. He knows of no Jesus who had so comprehensive a plan and purpose. He knows only of a Jesus who “missed being the king of the Jews, in order that He might be the King of kings and the Lord of lords.” Stalker knows only of a Jesus who, like one blind, “was led by a way which he knew not.” If one thinks of Jesus in this way it is no wonder that one should sum up the revelation of Jesus to his “predecessors” by saying: “Whilst, however, thus incorporating with His own teaching all noble conceptions of human conduct and character already in the world, He went far beyond them.” Jesus did, to be sure, go far beyond other men primarily because he was before them. “Before Abraham was I am” is of as great significance in ethics as it is in doctrine.

8 J. Stalker: The Ethics of Jesus, pp. 35, 41, 64, etc.
9 Idem., p. 65.
10 Idem., p. 50.
11 Idem., p. 65.
In consonance with this leveling of Jesus’ personality to that of the merely human is the practical limitation of the ethical teaching of Jesus to this life. Interpreting the beatitude “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” Stalker says: “This, at any rate, is a promise that those who are fighting on the side of righteousness shall not lack the footing they require to deliver their blows, and that those whose hearts are set on the extension of the kingdom of God shall have room and verge enough in a world of which God is the Author and Governor.” And even where Stalker does refer to a life beyond, he says that the thing we will be judged on is the character we have become. And all of this is said without so much as mentioning that we cannot be acceptable in the sight of God unless the blood of Christ has been shed for us. Stalker too has reduced Christian ethics to one ethical theory among many.

But apart from the most objectionable points that we have discussed, namely, that the Ethics of Jesus literature is essentially non-Christian, it is objectionable from the point of view of the scope of Christian ethics. There could be no true ethics of Jesus without a consideration of his divine person and work, and the work was not most fully explained by Jesus himself. It was most fully set forth by his apostles, and specifically by Paul. According to orthodox theology, these apostles were clothed with authority to set forth this significance of Jesus’ person and work by Jesus himself. Accordingly, the Ethics of Paul is nothing but the ethics of Jesus. We do not, of course, object to speaking of or writing of the Ethics of Paul or the Ethics of Jesus, just as we do not object to speaking or writing of Pauline theology. Yet it should be carefully noted that when we distinguish between the ethics of Jesus and the ethics of Paul the only meaning such a distinction can carry, if we wish to be true to the Christian interpretation, is that by the ethics of Jesus we signify that part of Christian ethics of which Jesus spoke while he was on earth, while with the ethics of Paul we mean that part of the ethics of Jesus which Jesus taught after he had gone to heaven. Both parts belong to the one great system of ethics which we generally speak of as Christian ethics.

**Christian Ethics**

The same difficulties spoken of with respect to the Ethics of Jesus literature appear even if the term Christian Ethics is used. So Newman Smyth gives his large work the title: *Christian Ethics*. Yet he too takes for granted that all that need be meant by that phrase is that which others speak of as the ethics of Jesus. He does indeed, at a certain point in his argument, bring out that one cannot really and finally separate ethics from metaphysics and that therefore a theism is presupposed in any discussion of Christian ethics. Yet he also takes for granted that theism is presupposed in other systems of ethics. To him it seems to be possible to have various systems of ethics based upon theism. Now this is true in the sense that Lutheran and Reformed ethics are both based upon theism. Or it may be true in the sense that Roman Catholicism and Protestant ethics are based upon theism. But to speak of theism as being presupposed by both Christians and non-Christians is to think of a theism so attenuated that it can give support to neither. It is to think of a bare theism.

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12 *Idem.*, p. 34.
Thus we are led to the realization that even the term Christian Ethics is not wholly satisfactory unless we mean by it no more than a subdivision of the term Christian-theistic Ethics. It is perfectly legitimate to deal with specifically Christian ethics just as it is perfectly legitimate to speak of the Christian church, meaning therewith the church of the new covenant. But just as we should constantly realize that we really mean the church of all ages, which God is gathering by his Word and Spirit from all nations and tribes, so we ought also to realize that when we speak of Christian ethics we speak of a subdivision of Christian-theistic ethics which includes the ethical principles that should control the people of God through all ages.

Old Testament And New Testament Ethics

For the same reason we should also keep in mind that when we speak of Old Testament ethics and New Testament ethics we refer to a difference in the stage of development of the revelational principle that lies at the heart of Christian-theistic ethics and of nothing more. From the non-Christian point of view there is not only a great difference, but a contrast between Old Testament and New Testament ethics. Now we do indeed recognize a great difference between the two. But even this difference is not the same difference that the non-Christian thinks he sees. For us the difference is merely that of stages of the development of the same redemptive principle. For non-Christians there is really no redemptive principle anywhere in the world. Hence, according to them, there can be no connection between stages in such a redemptive principle. Hence also they must disallow any real connection between Old and New Testament ethics. They may, to be sure, allow that there are certain similarities. These similarities will, however, have to be explained on the ground of nothing more fundamental than that of the peculiar genius of the Jews for righteousness, or for some other religious and moral characteristics which Jesus and Paul, Jews as they were, naturally inherited.

What we mean, then, by Christian-theistic ethics is not that we are merely tracing certain historical antecedents of the ethics of Jesus or the ethics of Paul when we go to the Old Testament. What we mean is that the Old and the New Testaments together contain the special revelation of God to the sinner, without which we could have no true ethical interpretation of life at all. We must state the teaching of the whole Bible in order to have a true interpretation of the ethical life. So then we should rather speak of Christian-theistic ethics than of the ethics of the Old and the ethics of the New Testament.

Biblical Ethics

But it will now be asked whether it is not well, then, to speak of biblical ethics, since it is from the Bible as a whole that we must gain our interpretation. It must be granted at once that when we speak of biblical ethics we do in a large measure avoid the difficulties that we encounter in the other appellations. No one who is interested in the propagation of some form of non-Christian ethics will maintain that there is essentially one principle of ethics running through both the Old and the New Testaments. Yet the term biblical ethics is likely to be interpreted too narrowly. It calls very particular attention to the fact that Christian-theistic ethics is redemptive to the core. It also calls attention to the fact that it is only in the Scriptures that we can find the material for the interpretation of
Christian-theistic ethics. Yet what we are interested in bringing out at once is that in Christian theistic ethics we deal with an interpretation that leaves out of consideration nothing that can have any bearing upon the moral life. It uses all the results of all the sciences in its interpretation of the ethical life. True, it interprets these results themselves in the light of Scripture, but that is because Scripture has a definite place in the organism of Christian-theistic thought as a whole. In order then to bring out as fully as we can the all-inclusive scope of the subject with which we deal and in order to avoid, as far as possible, the misunderstanding that we are dealing with our subject in any but a truly Christian way, we prefer to speak of Christian-theistic ethics.

We may not always use this term. We may sometimes speak of Christian ethics. But this will be merely for the sake of brevity unless it is specifically noted that we refer to the ethics of the new dispensation in particular.

**Revealed Ethics And Natural Ethics**

In conclusion we would point out that just as we prefer the name Christian-theistic to the name biblical ethics, so we also prefer the name Christian-theistic ethics to the name revealed ethics. One does, however, constantly meet with the distinction between revealed and natural theology. And corresponding to this distinction there are such titles as The Ethics of the Gospel, and The Ethics of Nature.

The distinction between revealed and natural theology as ordinarily understood readily gives rise to a misunderstanding. It seems to indicate that man, though he is a sinner, can have certain true knowledge of God from nature but that for higher things he requires revelation. This is incorrect. It is true that we should make our theology and our ethics wide enough to include man’s moral relationship to the whole universe. But it is not true that any ethical question that deals with man’s place in nature can be interpreted rightly without the light of Scripture.

For these reasons we prefer the name Christian-theistic ethics. It is as wide in scope as we need to take our subject. It leaves no ethical question of any human being out of its purview. On the other hand it calls attention to the indissoluble union between Christianity and theism, between the ethics of nature and the ethics of the gospel. It brings into harmony the Old and the New Testament. It will have nothing to do with a false antithesis between Paul and Christ or with any other false antitheses. Christian-theistic ethics deals with man’s *summum bonum*, man’s standard of living, and with man’s ethical motive, and obtains its light on all these problems from the Scriptures.
Chapter 3: The Epistemological Presuppositions Of Christian Ethics

Christian ethics does not differ from other ethics in that it seeks to answer any different questions than other ethical theories do, but it differs from other ethical theories in that it answers these questions differently. We have also found that Christian ethics does not differ from other ethical theories in that it is more limited than they. On the contrary, it is as comprehensive in its sweep as any ethical theory could be. The difference is therefore basically one of approach.

We wish therefore to consider first the presuppositions of Christian ethics. It is, in the last analysis, these basic presuppositions that make all the difference between Christian and non-Christian ethics. It was a non-Christian epistemology and metaphysics that made the men who wrote on the Ethics of Jesus give the answers that they gave to the ethical questions that they discussed. So too it is the epistemological and the metaphysical presuppositions of Christianity that make us give the answers that we give to the ethical questions that we discuss. Accordingly, we shall in the present chapter speak of the epistemological and in the following chapter of metaphysical presuppositions of Christian ethics.

Christian Consciousness

In the case of non-Christian ethics, it is in the last analysis the “moral consciousness” of man from which the information is sought in answer to the ethical questions discussed in Chapter 1. That this is so may not be immediately apparent. There are schools of ethical philosophy which maintain that the ethical good is totally independent of moral consciousness to begin with. According to them it is the business of the moral consciousness of man merely to recognize what is good and then set itself in action toward the realization of it. From Plato to Kant there have been those who have insisted on the “objectivity” of morality. They would accordingly disagree if we classified them with those who have set the moral consciousness of man as the only final source of information on things moral.

Now we fully recognize that there is a great difference between those who advocate the “subjectivity” of morality and those who maintain what they term the “objectivity” of morality. We may compare these two types of moral interpretation among non-Christian writers on ethics with the two divisions that we find in philosophy, namely, pragmatism and idealism. Though these two types of philosophy differ among themselves, that difference falls into oblivion when their common characteristics are brought to light. And it is about this common characteristic that we are now concerned. This common characteristic is that according to them all, thought, human and divine, if divine thought there be, is essentially of one type.

By that we mean that according to both the idealist and the pragmatic mind it is impossible to speak intelligently of man’s thought as being analogical of God’s thought. Human thought may be surrounded by a universe which is independent of itself, but the environment which surrounds it is still impersonal. By that we do not mean that according to idealism and pragmatism there are no other persons in the universe besides
man. Some hold that there is a personal God and that there are higher intelligences that have in the past been designated as angels. But what we mean is that according to both idealism and pragmatism this God, if he exists, and these intelligences, if they exist, are themselves surrounded by an impersonal environment. The point is that if the most ultimate environment that surrounds man is impersonal it is in the last analysis the task of the consciousness of man to determine the nature of that impersonal environment. It is in this way that the “objective” morality of the idealist is at bottom as “subjective” as the “subjective” morality of the pragmatist.

When we put the matter in this way neither the idealist nor the pragmatist has reason to complain. Both of them are equally anxious to disown the opposite of the position we have outlined. If one should ask an idealist whether he would care to maintain that it is God who must speak first to the moral consciousness of man before the moral consciousness of man can say anything about moral matters, he would be quick to say no. It is a most fundamental aspect of idealist epistemology that all dualism must be avoided, dualism in epistemology as well as dualism in metaphysics. Now idealism would consider the idea that God’s “moral consciousness,” if we may speak of God in this way, should be the absolute and original standard of the moral consciousness of man as an, evidence of unpardonable dualism. And as for the pragmatist it is too obvious to need comment that he would reject the Christian view.

We are not now concerned to defend the Christian-theistic epistemology in opposition to non-Christian epistemology. We are at present concerned to set the main points of difference between the Christian and the non-Christian epistemology in clear-cut opposition against one another, in order to point out that the ethics of the non-Christian will have to be in accordance with his non-Christian epistemology, and that the ethics of the Christian will have to be in accordance with his epistemology. We are concerned, moreover, to indicate that the nature of the opposition in the ethical field will be similar to the nature of the opposition in the field of epistemology. In both cases there is a basic difference in the interpretation of the human consciousness.

The Difference Between Christian And Non-Christian Epistemology

Just what then, we ask, is the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian interpretation of the moral consciousness as far as its being a source of the answer to ethical inquiry is concerned? The most comprehensive way in which this difference can be intimated is by saying that according to non-Christian thought the moral consciousness is no more than the immediate or proximate source of information on ethical problems. For Christian ethics the revelation of the self-contained God, the ontological Trinity, as found in Scripture, is the ultimate reference point in all ethical as well as in all other questions. For non-Christian ethics the autonomous moral consciousness of man is the ultimate reference point in all ethical as well as in all other questions.

The God of Scripture is the ultimate category of interpretation for man in every aspect of his being. This God is the self-contained triune God. Every attribute of God will, in the nature of the case, be reflected primarily in every other attribute of God. There will be mutual and complete exhaustiveness in the relationship of the three persons of the Trinity. Consequently no one of the persons of the Trinity can be said to be correlative in
its being to anything that exists beyond the Godhead. If then man is created, it must be
that he is absolutely dependent upon his relationship to God for the meaning of his
existence in its every aspect. If this is true, it means that the good is good for man
because it has been set as good for man by God. This is usually expressed by saying that
the good is good because God says it is good. As such it is contrasted with non-Christian
thought which says that the good exists in its own right and that God strives for this good
which exists in its right. We should remember, however, that when as Christian theists
we say that our thought may be contrasted to non-Christian thought on the moral question
by saying that we hold that the good is good because God says so, and the non-theist says
that the good is good in its own right, we do not artificially separate the will of God from
the nature of God. What we mean is that the will of God expresses the nature of God. It is
the nature of God as the will of God that is ultimately good. Yet since this nature of God
is personal there is no sense in which we can say that the good exists in its own right.

With these considerations as a background we can think of man as he first appeared
upon the face of the earth. Scripture tells us that he appeared upon the earth as a perfect
though finite replica of this Godhead. We do not intend to say anything in detail about
this here, since what we have to say in detail about this matter comes under the head of
the motive of ethics. Yet it is necessary here to point out that the original perfection of
man in every respect, and in particular in the moral respect, is implied in
the conception
of God which lies at the foundation of the whole structure of Christian thought. Man is
created in the image of God. As such man was perfect when first created.

There is not and cannot be any evil in God. This is involved in the very idea of God
as an absolute person. If there were evil in his being there would be a mutual cancellation
instead of a mutual complementation of the attributes of God. Absolute negation and
absolute affirmation would cancel one another. Plato saw that somehow the Good had to
be supreme if there was to be intelligible predication, but he could not get rid of the “mud
and hair and filth” in the ideal world. Christianity has no “mud and hair and filth” in its
ideal world. Satan is not as old as God, but was a creature of God and sinned as a creature
of God.

Now if there is not and cannot be any evil in God it would be quite impossible to
think that he should create man as evil. Again this is true not only because we abhor the
idea of attributing such a deed to God, but because it would be a contradiction of his
being to do so. Thus we hold that man appeared originally with a perfect moral
consciousness. It is this that the Genesis narrative tells us. We take our information from
Scripture and then realize that what it teaches must be true.

The difference between Christian ethics and non-Christian ethics has not been made
perfectly clear at this point unless we dwell on the fact that even in its original perfect
condition the moral consciousness of man was derivative and not the ultimate source of
information as to what is good. Man was in the nature of the case finite. Hence his moral
consciousness too was finite, and as such had to live by revelation. Man’s moral thought
as well as the other aspects of his thought had to be receptively reconstructive. God
therefore spoke to man in paradise, telling him what to do and what not to do with the
facts of nature.

In the case of non-Christian thought, man’s moral activity is thought of as at once
creatively constructive, while in Christian thought, man’s moral activity is thought of as
being receptively reconstructive. According to non-Christian thought there is no absolute
moral personality to whom man is responsible and from whom he has received his conception of the good, while according to Christian thought God is the infinite moral personality who reveals to man the true nature of morality.

It is necessary, however, to think of this revelation of God to man as originally internal as well as external. Man found in his own makeup, in his own moral nature, an understanding of and a love for that which is good. His own nature was revelational of the will of God. But while thus revelational of the will of God, man’s nature, even in paradise, was never meant to function by itself. It was at once supplemented by the supernatural, external and positive expression of God’s will as its correlative. Only thus can we see how basic is the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian view of the moral nature of man in relation to ethical questions.

**Evil**

The second point of difference that must be included in our general antithesis stated above concerns the question of the influence of sin on the moral consciousness of man. We cannot begin to give a survey here of all the biblical material that bears on this question. Nor is this necessary. The main point is clear enough. Just as sin has blinded the intellect of man, so it has corrupted the will of man. This is often spoken of as the hardening of man’s heart. Paul says that the natural man is at enmity against God. The natural man cannot will to do God’s will. He cannot even know what the good is. The sinner worships the creature rather than the Creator. He has set all the moral standards topsy-turvy.

This doctrine of the total depravity of man makes it perfectly plain that the moral consciousness of man as he is today cannot be the source of information about what is good or about what is the standard of the good or about what is the true nature of the will which is to strive for the good. It would seem plain enough that men have to choose on this point between the Christian and the non-Christian position.

It is this point particularly that makes it necessary for the Christian to maintain without any apology and without any concession that it is Scripture, and Scripture only, in the light of which all moral questions must be answered. Scripture as an external revelation became necessary because of the sin of man. No man living can even put the moral problem as he ought to put it, or ask the moral questions as he ought to ask them unless he does so in the light of Scripture. Man cannot of himself truly face the moral question, let alone answer it.

Man’s moral consciousness then as it is today is (a) finite, and (b) sinful. If it were only finite and not sinful we could go to the moral consciousness of man for our information. Even then, however, we should have to remember that we could go there not because the moral consciousness would be able either to ask or to answer the moral question correctly in its own power, but because its own activity would be in fruitful contact with God from whom the questions and the answers would ultimately come. But now that man is sinful as well as finite we cannot go to that moral consciousness at all unless that moral consciousness be regenerated.

It is true that the non-regenerate consciousness of man cannot entirely keep under the requirements of God that speak to it through its own constitution. Thus God’s will is heard through it in spite of it. Hence the natural man excuses or accuses himself for his
ethical action. But for the main point now under consideration, this point may be ignored. For to the extent that man is not restrained by God’s common grace from living out his sinful principle, the natural man makes his own moral consciousness the ultimate and normal standard of moral action.

The Regenerated Consciousness

What then of the regenerated moral consciousness? In the first place the regenerated consciousness is in principle reinstated to its former place. This implies that we can go to it because we could originally go to it for our answers. This is of basic importance, for it furnishes the point of contact between Christian and non-Christian ethics. As Christians we do not maintain that man’s moral consciousness cannot under any circumstances and in any sense serve as a point of reference. But man’s moral consciousness must be regenerated in order to serve as a reference point. Moreover, the regenerated consciousness is still finite. It must still live by revelation as it originally lived by revelation. It can never become an ultimate information bureau. Finally, the regenerated moral consciousness is changed in principle only, and therefore often errs. Consequently it must constantly seek to test itself by Scripture. More than that, the regenerated consciousness does not in itself fabricate any answers to the moral questions. It receives them and reworks them. Now if this receiving, insofar as it implies an activity of the mind, be called the function of the moral consciousness, we may speak of it as a source of information. The regenerated moral consciousness which constantly nourishes itself upon the Scripture is as the plenipotentiary who knows fairly well what his authority desires.

So then we have before us the Christian and the non-Christian conception of the moral consciousness of man. Summing up the matter we may say (a) that there once was a moral consciousness that was perfect and could act as a source, but only as a proximate source, of information on moral questions; (b) that there are now two types of moral consciousness which ultimately agree on no ethical answer and on no ethical question, namely, the non-regenerate and the regenerate consciousness; (c) that the non-regenerate consciousness denies while the regenerate consciousness affirms that the moral verdict of any man must be tested by Scripture because of the sin of man.

Difficulties

According to the Christian position, then, the moral consciousness must be simply and without any qualification subordinate to Scripture. But this position involves certain difficulties that we must now consider. The first and most important difficulty appears when it is asked: “To what is the authority of the Bible addressed?” ¹ It is by the implication of this question alone that Newman Smyth thinks he has overthrown the position we have outlined above. Since his position is typical of the modern viewpoint in general, we may with profit consider it. Smyth thinks that by asking us to what the Bible addresses itself he has cornered us. Of course, he implies, no one can deny that the Bible itself, in the nature of the case, appeals to the moral consciousness of man. The Bible

throughout follows the method of Isaiah when he said, “Come let us reason together.” Now if we seek to reason with someone we appeal in the last analysis to the consciousness of the person whom we seek to persuade. It is thus that Smyth argues.

What would he answer then to the question of the relative priority of the Scripture and the moral consciousness? He tries to give both of these equal authority, or at least he tries to give to each a measure of authority. “Yet we have granted that each has truth and authority.” ² He soon realizes that this division of authority is untenable. “Obviously, as already observed, we cannot admit two independent rules, two final authorities. We cannot hold that both the Bible and the Christian consciousness are courts of final appeal.” ³ Now since Smyth deems the solution that the Scriptures alone are normative an “easy solution” which, “like most easy solutions of profound spiritual problems, needs to be followed but a little way before it will be seen to plunge into difficulties and to lose itself in hopeless confusions,” he ought to point out to us that his theory, which amounts to saying that only the Christian consciousness is normative, does not lead to hopeless confusion. But this he cannot do. On the contrary, it is perfectly plain that if anyone starts on the road on which Smyth starts, and on which the average modernist starts, there is no stopping till one has gone the whole way of pagan or non-Christian ethics. If the Christian consciousness has no absolute standard by which to judge itself, it is soon lost in the ocean of relativity, in which all the standards of non-Christian ethics swim. More than that, if the Christian consciousness does not completely submit itself to the Scripture it is already pagan in principle. All that does not spring from obedience to God is sin.

What Smyth should have done is to show that ethical predication is possible upon a non-Christian basis. To do this he should have shown that not only ethical predication, but predication as such, is possible upon a non-theistic basis. In other words, he should have attempted to meet the Christian position squarely and should have attacked it in its foundation. He ought to know that the Christian theory of the relation of the Christian consciousness to Scripture is involved in the very bedrock of Christian theism itself. He should have realized that he could not dispose of the orthodox position by taking for granted that it is mere traditionalism and by mentioning a few “difficulties” with respect to it.

The non-Christian position assumes that a personal act, to be personal, must be unpersonal. It takes for granted that if man is to be responsible for his deeds he must be wholly independent. The non-Christian position puts man in an ultimately impersonal atmosphere. It is this that is implied in Smyth’s objection to the submission of the moral consciousness to Scripture. Scripture is nothing but the voice of the absolute God in a world of sin. Even in the state of perfection God would be addressing his commands to the consciousness of man. Even in such a case, however, this would not mean that God was submitting his commandments to the final judgments of man. God always expects implicit obedience when he addresses his commands to the consciousness of man. This was true of Adam in paradise. Now that God speaks to sinful man through the Scripture, he has not thereby forfeited his claim to absolute obedience. When God says to the sinner, “Come let us reason together,” he does not therewith put the sinner on an equality

² Idem., p. 71.
³ Idem., p. 71.
with himself. He asks man himself to see that obedience to God is the best for him, but whether or not man sees this he must be obedient still, or suffer the consequences.

What the objection of Smyth amounts to, then, is to saying that there is no absolute God who has full authority over his creatures. Smyth has reduced the command of an absolute God to the advice of a finite God. And this can be done only on the assumption spoken of before, that there is an ultimately impersonal atmosphere surrounding both God and man.

It is of particular importance to note these consequences of a refusal to make the Christian consciousness of man subject to the Scriptures without any qualification, because the objection of Smyth is typical of a general attitude that is very widespread. One form in which this attitude manifests itself is in the contention of many Christians that there are many moral questions about which the Bible has nothing to say.

This limitation of territory amounts in the end to the same thing as the limitation spoken of in the case of Smyth. The various territories of ethical endeavor are so closely interrelated that it is impossible to live in one territory from one principle and in another territory from another principle. Christ has shed his light over the whole of life in all its ramifications. Sin has gone as far as anything human has gone. Far as the curse is found, so far salvation is found.

If it be objected that the Bible clearly does not say anything about many problems of the day, we reply that this is not really true. The Bible does say something about every problem that we face if only we learn the art of fitting to our situation that which Scripture offers either in principle or example.

We may point out still further that if this conception of the complete and unqualified submission of the Christian consciousness to the Scripture be understood, and the reason for the necessity of it be clearly seen, then many difficulties of detail fall away. Smyth asks, for instance, “Would a plain grammatical rendering of some accredited word of an apostle warrant us in thinking evil of God?”  The implication of the question is that there are some passages of Scripture, or at least that there may be, which, if taken as they are meant to be taken, would make us think evil of God. Now that is the point in dispute. The whole question is whether we are to get our idea of God from the Bible or whether we are to get it somewhere else. If we are to get it from the Bible it follows that the idea that we get from the Bible by good exegesis is the right idea. We see then that Smyth assumed what he sets out to prove, namely, that the Christian consciousness must be the judge of the Scriptures.

A passage such as is found in Romans 9 illustrates what we mean. Paul speaks of man being in the hands of God as clay is in the hands of the potter. In other words Paul, without any qualification, teaches the sovereignty of God. This sovereignty is Paul’s last court of appeal. Against this many a Christian consciousness rebels, and in rebelling takes for granted that it has the right of rebellion. But this is not the case. God is man his creature’s rightful sovereign.

Still further we would observe that the subordination of the Christian consciousness to Scripture applies to the Old as well as to the New Testament. There is often a difference between the Old and the New Testament as to what they command because of the difference in dispensations which they primarily serve. Yet it remains true that

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whatever can be shown to be meant for us from the Old Testament must be as implicitly obeyed as what is taught in the New Testament.

The reason for emphasizing this point lies in the effort on the part of many to find a difference of principle between the Old and the New Testaments. We cannot here speak of this in detail. We wish only to illustrate what we mean by Smyth’s interpretation of the story of God’s command to Abraham to offer Isaac. Smyth says: “What is right for Abraham? Whatever God orders. What shall Abraham do? Not what he thinks God ought to desire of him; but he shall bring the sacrifice which God has required of him. The story of the offering of Isaac can be ethically interpreted only as we put ourselves back into the primitive moral conditions of Abraham’s life. The question which on our moral plane at once arises is, How could Abraham have supposed that Jehovah could have required of him the life of his firstborn son? We see from the result, when a ram was substituted for the son whom Abraham had bound to the altar, that God did not desire the offering of human sacrifices. Had Abraham known God at the mountain’s foot as well as he knew him at the mountain’s top, there would have been no need of that long, silent, heartbreaking journey up the mountain’s side.”

We have in this interpretation the product of a typical modernist method of procedure. The major premise which is taken for granted at the beginning of the interpretation is that whatever seems to violate the moral consciousness must be taken out of Scripture, or ignored if it cannot be taken out. Smyth takes for granted that God could not have commanded Abraham to offer his son. Now it is true that we can at our state of revelation see that God did not wish such a command actually to be carried out. But it is equally true that according to the narrative God actually commanded Abraham to offer his son, in order to test whether he was willing to be completely obedient to Jehovah. When Abraham showed that he was perfectly obedient, inasmuch as he had faith that God was so great as to be able to raise his son from the dead, thus overcoming any harm that would seemingly result from strict obedience, the offering was not necessary at all.

It was not a mistake of Abraham, as Smyth says we now see that it was, to think that God could have asked such a thing of him. The mistake lies with us if we do not show the same obedience that Abraham showed. And it is this unwillingness to show this same obedience that makes us give such an interpretation as Smyth gives.

Of course the contention of Smyth, and of modernists in general, is that the New Testament presents the principle of love instead of that of obedience. This is simply untrue. It is the same God in both Testaments, who by virtue of his creation expects of his creatures implicit obedience. The New Testament, if anything, reveals to us more clearly than the Old that by redemption we are restored to the recognition that we are the creatures of God. The conception of love in the New Testament means, as far as its ethical interpretation is concerned, nothing but the complete willingness and the internal desire to be perfectly obedient to God. It is for this reason that Abraham is called father of those that have faith. It is not the New Testament that has introduced changes in this respect, but it is the perverted “Christian consciousness” that has tried to introduce changes into both the Old and the New Testaments. Those who reject the story of the sacrifice of Abraham because it violates their moral consciousness can usually, if not always, be depended upon to reject the New Testament teaching of eternal punishment as

\[5 \text{Idem., p. 160.}\]
taught by Christ. That, too, is objectionable to their moral consciousness. And all this brings out once more the necessity of facing this problem squarely and of choosing without reserve.

Summing up the whole matter with respect to the epistemological presuppositions of Christian ethics we may say that the Christian-theistic conception of an absolute God and an absolute Christ and an absolute Scripture go hand in hand. We cannot accept one without accepting the others. It is with the Scriptures as an absolute and an absolutely comprehensive authority that we enter upon a discussion of ethical questions as they confront us. We are fully persuaded that the only alternative to this position is the position of an out and out positivism and pragmatism. All half-way positions eventually lead to either one or the other of the two positions spoken of, an absolute submission to Scripture and to God, or an absolute rejection of both.

The Position Of Roman Catholicism

On the question discussed in this chapter, Roman Catholicism takes a position half way between that of Christianity and that of paganism. The notion of human consciousness set forth in the works of Thomas Aquinas is worked out, to a great extent, by the form matter scheme of Aristotle. In consequence a large measure of autonomy is assigned to the human consciousness as over against the consciousness of God. This is true in the field of knowledge and it is no less true in the field of ethics.

In the field of ethics this means that even in paradise, before the fall, man is not thought of as being receptively constructive in his attitude toward God. In order to maintain man’s autonomy—or as Thomas thinks, his very manhood as a self-conscious and responsible being—man must, from one point of view at least, be wholly independent of the counsel of God. This is implied in the so-called “freewill” idea. Thomas cannot think of man as responsible and free if all his actions have their ultimate and final reference point exclusively in God and his will. Thus there is no really scriptural idea of authority in Romanism.

It follows that Rome has too high a notion of the moral consciousness of fallen man. According to Thomas, fallen man is not very dissimilar from Adam in paradise. He says that while the sinner needs grace for more things than did Adam, he does not need grace more. Putting the matter somewhat differently Thomas says, “And thus in the state of perfect nature man needs a gratuitous strength superadded to natural strength for one reason, viz., in order to do and wish supernatural good: but for two reasons, in the state of corrupt nature, viz., in order to be healed, and furthermore in order to carry out works of supernatural virtue, which are meritorious. Beyond this, in both states man needs the Divine help, that he may be moved to act well.” In any case, for Thomas the ethical problem for man is as much one of finitude as it is one of ethical obedience. Man is naturally finite. As such he tends naturally to evil. He needs grace because he is a creature even though he is not a sinner. Hence God really owes grace to man at least to some extent. And man does not become totally depraved when he does not make such use of the grace given him as to keep himself from sin entirely. For in any case the act of his

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7 *Idem.*, Vol. 8, p. 326.
free will puts him naturally in grave danger. Fallen man is therefore only partly guilty and
only partly to blame. He retains much of the same ethical power that man had in paradise.
Ethical ability is virtually said to be implied in metaphysical ability or free will.

It follows still further that even the regenerate consciousness need not and cannot
subject itself fully to Scripture. Thomas is unable to do justice to Paul’s assertion that
whatever is not of faith is sin. His entire discussion of the cardinal virtues and their
relation to the theological virtues proves this point. He distinguishes sharply between
them. “Now the object of the theological virtues is God Himself, Who is the last end of
all, as surpassing the knowledge of our reason. On the other hand, the object of the
intellectual and moral virtues is something comprehensible to human reason. Wherefore
the theological virtues are specifically distinct from the moral and intellectual virtues.”

In respect to the things that are said to be knowable by reason apart from supernatural
revelation the Christian acts, and should act, from what amounts to the same motive as
the non-Christian. Faith is not required for a Christian to act virtuously in the natural
relationships of life. Or if the theological virtues do have some influence over the daily
activities of the Christian, this influence is of an accidental and subsidiary nature.

All in all it is clear that Rome cannot ask its adherents to submit its moral
consciousness to Scripture in any thorough way. And accordingly Rome cannot challenge
the non-Christian position, such as that set forth by Newman Smyth, in any thorough
way.

A position similar to that of Rome is frequently maintained by evangelical
Protestants. As a recent illustration we mention the case of C. S. Lewis.

Like Rome, Lewis, in the first place, confuses things metaphysical and ethical. In his
book Beyond Personality, he discusses the nature of the divine Trinity. To show the
practical significance of the doctrine of the Trinity he says: “The whole dance, or drama,
or pattern of this three-Personal life is to be played out in each one of us: or (putting it the
other way round) each one of us has got to enter that pattern, take his place in that
dance.” The purpose of Christianity is to lift the Bios or natural life of man up into Zoe,
the uncreated life. The incarnation is one example of how this may be done. In Him
there is “one man in whom the created life, derived from his mother, allowed itself to be
completely and perfectly turned into the begotten life.” Then he adds: “Now what is the
difference which He has made to the whole human mass? It is just this; that the business
of becoming a son of God, of being turned from a created thing into a begotten thing, of
passing over from the temporary biological life into timeless Spiritual life, has been done
for us.”

All this is similar in import to the position of Aquinas which stresses the idea that
man is, through grace, to participate in the divine nature.

It is a foregone conclusion that the ethical problem cannot be fairly put on such a
basis. Perhaps the most fundamental difference between all forms of non-Christian ethics
and Christian ethics lies in the fact that, according to the former, it is man’s finitude as
such that causes his ethical strife, while according to the latter it is not finitude as such

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9 C. S. Lewis: *Beyond Personality*, p. 27.
10 *Idem.*, p. 28.
but created man’s disobedience of God that causes all the trouble. C. S. Lewis does not signalize this difference clearly. Lewis does not call men back with clarion voice to the obedience of the God of the Bible. He asks men to “dress up as Christ” in order that while they have the Christ ideal before them, and see how far they are from realizing it, Christ, who is then at their side, may turn them “into the same kind of thing as Himself,” injecting “His kind of life and thought, His Zoe” into them.\textsuperscript{12}

Lewis argues that “a recovery of the old sense of sin is essential to Christianity.”\textsuperscript{13} Why does he then encourage men to hold that man is embroiled in a metaphysical tension over which not even God has any control? Lewis says that men are not likely to recover the old sense of sin because they do not penetrate to the motives behind moral actions.\textsuperscript{14} But how shall men ever be challenged to look inside themselves and find that all that is not of faith is sin if they are encouraged to think that without the light of Scripture and without the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit they can, at least in the natural sphere, do what is right? Can men really practice the “cardinal virtues” of prudence, temperance, justice and fortitude in the way that they should, even though they have no faith? No Protestant ought to admit such a possibility.

Lewis seeks objective standards in ethics, in literature, and in life everywhere. But he holds that objectivity may be found in many places. He speaks of a general objectivity that is common between Christians and non-Christians, and argues as though it is mostly or almost exclusively in modern times that men have forsaken it. Speaking of this general objectivity he says: “This conception in all its forms, Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Christian, and Oriental alike, I shall henceforth refer to for brevity simply as ‘the Tao.’ Some of the accounts of it which I have quoted will seem, perhaps, to many of you merely quaint or even magical. But what is common to them all is something we cannot neglect. It is the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are.”\textsuperscript{15} But surely this general objectivity is common to Christians and non-Christians in a formal sense only. To say that there is or must be an objective standard is not the same as to say what that standard is. And it is the what that is all important. Granted that non-Christians who hold to some sort of something somewhere above man are better than non-Christians who hold to nothing whatsoever above man, it remains true that in the main issue the non-Christian objectivists are no less subjective than are the non-Christian subjectivists. There is but one alternative that is basic; it is that between those who obey the God and Christ of Scripture and those who seek to please themselves. Only those who believe in God through Christ seek to obey God; only they have the true principle in ethics. One can only rejoice in the fact that Lewis is heard the world around, but one can only grieve over the fact that he so largely follows the method of Thomas Aquinas in calling men back to the gospel. The “gospel according to St. Lewis” as well as the “gospel according to St. Thomas” is too much of a compromise with the ideas of the natural man to constitute a clear challenge in our day.

\textsuperscript{12} Idem., p. 37.
\textsuperscript{13} C. S. Lewis: \textit{The Problem of Pain}, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{14} Idem., p. 47.
\textsuperscript{15} C. S. Lewis: \textit{The Abolition of Man}, p. 17.
Chapter 4: The Metaphysical Presuppositions Of Christian Ethics

In the preceding chapter we have contrasted the Christian and the non-Christian types of epistemology, as far as they have bearing upon the problems of ethics. The main point of dispute was that of authority. The Christian position maintains that man, as a creature of God, naturally would have to inquire of God what is right and wrong. Originally God spoke to man directly and man could speak to God directly. Since the entrance of sin man has to speak to God mediately. He has now to learn from Scriptures what is the acceptable will of God for him. In opposition to this the non-Christian position holds that man does not need Scripture as a final authority. And this is maintained because the non-Christian does not believe that man ever needed to be absolutely obedient to God. Non-Christian ethics maintains that it is of the nature of the ethical life that man must, in the last analysis, decide for himself what is right and what is wrong.

The same difference between the Christian and the non-Christian position meets us again when we consider the metaphysical presuppositions of the ethical life. In a discussion of the metaphysical presuppositions of the ethical life, we deal with the will of man from the point of view of its ultimate environment. Is human personality independent of its environment? If it is not independent of but dependent upon its environment, how then can it be held responsible for its choices? Can there be any ethics if the will is wholly independent? Can there be any ethics if the will is wholly dependent?

In theological language we call this the problem of the will in its theological relations. We should have a clear understanding of the most fundamental question about the freedom of the will, if we wish to understand the church’s doctrines with respect to the original perfection of man, his fall into sin, the substitutionary atonement, regeneration, etc. The church believes that man was created as a character, not as an amoeba. It believes that Adam was a character before he had done any ethical deed. It believes, moreover, that it is possible for ethical substitution to be made. It believes that the death of Christ has removed the evil out of other human characters, so that they are no longer guilty. It believes that the Holy Spirit creates in man a new heart. How can these things be? The non-Christian position says that these things cannot be. It says that the notion of a created character is an absurdity. It says that the notion of substitution is an ethical monstrosity. It says that regeneration violates the very idea of personality.

The first point to note here is the nature of the Christian God-concept. It is in the Christian idea of God that we finally rest, both for our metaphysics and our epistemology.

The God-Concept of Christian Ethics

As God is absolute rationality so God is also absolute will. By this we mean primarily that God did not have to become good, but has from everlasting to everlasting been good. In God there is no problem of activity and passivity. In God there is eternal accomplishment. God is finally and ultimately self-determinative. God is finally and absolutely necessary and therefore absolutely free.
It should be especially noted that Christians put forth this concept of God, not as something that may possibly be true, and may also possibly be untrue. From the non-theistic point of view our God will have to appear as the dumping ground of all difficulties. For the moment we waive this objection, in order to call attention to the fact that all the differences between the Christian and the non-Christian point of view, in the field of ethics, must be ultimately traced to their different God-concepts. Christians hold that the conception of God is the necessary presupposition of all human activity. Non-Christian thought holds that the Christian conception of God is the death of all ethical activity. All non-Christian ethics takes for granted that such a God as Christians believe does not exist. Non-Christian thought takes for granted that the will of God, as well as the will of man, has an environment. Non-Christian ethics assumes an ultimate activism. For it, God has to become good. Character is an achievement for God as well as for man. God is thought of as determined as well as determinative.

Non-theism starts with the assumption of an ultimately indeterminate Reality. For it, all determinate existence, all personality, is therefore derivative.

Idealists may object that in the eternally Good of Plato, and in the modern idea of the Absolute, there is no mention made of achievement. In those concepts, it will be said, you have absolutely self-determinative experience. In answer to this we only point out that the God of Plato was not really ultimate. The Good rather than God was Plato’s most ultimate concept. His God, to the extent that he was personal, was metaphorical and, in any case, dependent upon an environment more ultimate than himself. The element of Chance is absolutely ultimate in the philosophy of Plato. And it is this ultimacy of Chance that either makes the determinate good an achievement, or sets the Good out of relation to its environment, and therewith destroys its value.

Then as to the modern idealist conception of the Absolute, it is to be noted that it is the result of a definite and prolonged effort to find the conception of an absolutely self-determinative Experience. The idealists have been basically convinced, it seems, that unless an absolutely self-determinative Experience can be presupposed, all human experience in general, and ethical experience in particular, would be meaningless. Modern idealism has definitely attempted to set the Good of Plato into a fruitful relation to its environment. Yet it has not overcome the difficulties inherent in Plato’s ethics. It has ended with a determined instead of with a self-determinative God. It has taken for granted that the space-time universe is a part or aspect of ultimate existence. With this assumption it made time as ultimate as eternity, and made God dependent upon whatever might come out of the space-time matrix.

The basic difference, then, that distinguishes Christian from non-Christian ethics is the acceptance, or denial, of the ultimately self-determinative will of God. As Christians we hold that determinate human experience could work to no end, could work in accordance with no plan, and could not even get under way, if it were not for the existence of the absolute will of God as portrayed in Scriptures.

It is on this ground, then, that, from the point of view of the necessity of the ethical life, we hold to the absolute will of God as the presupposition of the will of man. Looked at in this way, that which to many seems to be the greatest hindrance to human responsibility, namely, the conception of an absolutely sovereign God, becomes the very foundation of its possibility.
In order to avoid misunderstanding, however, we should distinguish the concept of the absolutely personalist environment in which the Christian believes, from philosophical determinism. It is all too common for men hastily to identify consistent Christianity with philosophical necessitarianism. Yet they are as the poles apart. Philosophical necessitarianism stands for an ultimate impersonalism: consistent Christianity stands for an ultimate personalism. What this implies for the activity of the will of man itself we may now briefly examine.

The Man Concept Of Christian Ethics

If man acts self-consciously before the background of an absolutely personal God he acts analogically. On the other hand, if man acts self-consciously before the background of an ultimately impersonal principle, he acts univocally.

To act analogically implies the recognition that one is a creature of God. If man is a creature of God, he must, to think truly and to act truly, think and act analogically. Man is created as an analogue of God. Hence man has been created as a character. God could not create an intellectual and moral blank. It would be a denial of his own ultimately self-determinate Experience to create a blank. Hence, too, the idea of a created character is as defensible as the idea of a self-determinative God. This point is worthy of particular notice. Many Christians in effect deny that man was created a character, but will not go further and deny that God is the eternal character. Now it is plain that if one denies that man was created a character, one will also logically have to deny that God is self-determinative.

One of the most common forms in which the objection to the idea of a created moral character appears on the part of Christians, is in the effort they make to hold man exclusively responsible for the entrance of sin. The argument runs as follows: If the sin of man is in any way connected with the plan of God, it is not man but God who is responsible for its entrance. The assumption of this mode of argumentation is that man, in order to be responsible, must act univocally, that is, against an impersonal background. But we have found that determinate action would be wholly impossible on such a non-theistic basis. On such a basis man could neither sin nor do good. He could do nothing. Christians need to become fundamentally conscious of the fact that man cannot think and cannot act truly unless he thinks and acts analogically. The very presupposition of man’s being able to sin is that from the outset God created him a perfect moral character. And the very possibility of sin implies the plan of God as its background. Man cannot sin in the blue. Does this make God responsible for sin instead of man? On the contrary, this is the only way in which man can be considered responsible. Only an analogical act is a responsible act.

It will be noted, then, that if we are anxious to establish human responsibility, and if in order to establish human responsibility we seek to establish what is ordinarily spoken of as the freedom of the will, we are defeating our own purposes. It is often said that God created free personalities and treated them as such after he had once created them. By this is meant that God realized that when he wished to create free personalities he should have to limit himself in order to make room for their activities. This idea of the self-limitation of God is quite commonly put forth as a solution to the problem of human responsibility. Yet it is plainly a compromise with the anti-theistic motif. In the first place it would be
self-contradictory for God to limit himself. It is of his very essence to be self-
determinative. And since he is eternal he cannot be self-determinative at one time and no
longer self-determinative at another time. The idea of self-limitation of God sacrifices the
self-sufficiency of God. It is the self-sufficiency of God in which our whole hope for any
solution to any problem lies. The more you break it down the more you work into the
hands of the enemy. And for that reason it is that, so far from establishing freedom for
man by reducing this relationship to the plan of God, you are destroying his freedom and
therewith the responsibility of man by doing so.

True freedom for man consists in self-conscious, analogical activity. If man freely
recognizes the fact that back of his created character lies the eternal character and plan of
God, if man freely recognizes that his every moral act presupposes back of it this same
unlimited God, he will be free indeed. On the other hand, if man tries to “liberate”
himself from the background of the absolute plan of God, he has to start his moral
activity in a perfect blank, he has to continue to act as a moral blank and he has to act in
the direction of a moral blank.

It is only if one holds unequivocally to the theistic motif that one can justify the ethics
of the substitutionary atonement. If God can and must create character, Christ can and
must, once sin has entered into the world and man is to be saved, recreate character. If
man can be held responsible for the evil deeds of a God-given character, man can also be
accounted ethically perfect through the righteousness of Christ. On the other hand, if
character had to be an accomplishment on the part of man in the first place, the re-
creation of character has to be an accomplishment on the part of man also. If Adam could
not be accounted guilty because he acted with a given character, and against an
absolutely personal background, then the Christian cannot be accounted guiltless because
salvation is a gift of God and faith itself a work of the Spirit within us. If we insist on
univocal action at one place we must, to be consistent, insist on univocal action at every
other place.

The Non-Christian Conception Of The Relation Of God
And Man

To bring out fully the great importance of holding clearly to the concepts of (a) God
as absolute self-determination and (b) man’s will as an analogue of God’s will so that
man’s activity as well as man’s thought must be analogical, we propose to discuss the
position of A. E. Taylor in some detail. Taylor has a two-volume work entitled The Faith
of a Moralist. It is perhaps the most comprehensive work on ethics published in modern
times by an idealist. Moreover, Taylor is a first rate metaphysician. He gives the ethical
problems a metaphysical and epistemological setting, and it is that with which we are
here concerned.

A discussion of Taylor’s position will bring out the necessity of thinking clearly on
the metaphysical and epistemological presuppositions of ethics. Bringing to light this
close relation will serve to bring our two chapters on these subjects into close contact
with one another. It will show that a mixture of eternity and time, which is the very
opposite of that for which Christianity stands in the field of metaphysics, is the source of
the rejection of biblical authority in the field of ethics.
In the first volume of his book, Taylor discusses the more direct theistic questions, and in the second volume he discusses questions that pertain more directly to Christianity. In the first volume he has a chapter on Eternity and Temporality. It is here that he lays the foundation for his conception of the relation of God to man. It is here that we can see something of the far-reaching significance of beginning one’s ethical discussion with a clear understanding of the metaphysical position that one wishes to maintain.

In this chapter Taylor attaches his reflections to the discussion Plato gives in the *Timaeus* on the relation of the eternal and the temporal. According to Plato the “world soul,” by which he means the physical universe, is made up of two ingredients, namely, “the same” and “the other.” They are, says Taylor, “just object and event, the eternal and the temporal.” Taylor holds it to be a fact, from which we may begin our reasoning process, that this Platonic concept of the relation of the eternal and the temporal is essentially true. He says: “As morality becomes conscious of itself, it is discovered to be always a life of tension between the temporal and the eternal, only possible to a being who is neither simply eternal and abiding, nor simply mutable and temporal, but both at once. The task of living rightly and worthily is just the task of the progressive transmutation of a self which is at first all but wholly mutable, at the mercy of all the gusts of circumstance and impulse, into one which is relatively lifted above change and mutability. Or, we might say, as an alternative formula, it is the task of the thorough transfiguration of our interests, the shifting of interest from temporal to non-temporal good.”

In this quotation we have the gist of the matter. We observe three things with regard to it. In the first place Taylor takes it to be a fact that morality is a struggle between the eternal and the temporal within us. About this matter he thinks there can be no dispute. Yet it is exactly this that is in dispute between theists and non-theists. There is no inherent logical reason why the theism that comes to expression in the Scripture, when it says that original man was a wholly temporal being with no aspirations whatsoever to become eternal, but with the truly temporal aspiration to do the will of eternal God, would be considered to be so absurd as not to require refutation. Original man may be conceived as being truly interested in “eternal good” if he seeks to live according to it as a standard which has been given to him. At the same time he could be interested in temporal things. Why should the temporal be thought of as necessarily the source of evil? If an absolute God has created it, the temporal is inherently good, and man could seek God in the temporal. According to theism there was no tension originally between the eternal and the temporal. The reason for reducing the tension to a metaphysical strain between time and eternity is that men do not want the tension to be found in the exclusively ethical sphere. If the tension can be thus reduced to something metaphysical, its seriousness is reduced or taken away, and man is no longer fully responsible for it. For this reason, we hold, it is but to be expected that the “unregenerated consciousness” shall seek to find the very nature of morality to be a strife between the temporal and the eternal in man. And, as noted in the previous chapter, the Roman Catholic position holds a halfway position on this matter.

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In the second place, we must observe that the whole antitheistic position is involved in Taylor’s assumption that the nature of morality consists in a tension between the eternal and the temporal. Scripture teaches that there is no being, and can be no being, who is a mixture of the ingredients of eternity and temporality. God is eternal and man is temporal, and not even Christ is a mixture of the two. In the incarnation, the church has been anxious to maintain, Christ’s personality remained divine; it was human nature, not a human person, that he assumed when he became incarnate.

In the third place, the truth of the anti-Christian position is taken for granted in Taylor’s position. According to Christianity, the redemption wrought by God is not that of the eternalization of man, but his restoration and perfection in the temporal sphere. Even the conception of “eternal life” as it is spoken of especially by the apostle John, does not in the least blur or annihilate the distinction between the eternity of God and the temporality of man. By eternal life the New Testament means a continuation of man’s temporal existence, while the conception of eternity, when applied to God, has nothing to do with time. Only God is and remains supra-temporal.

We need not discuss Taylor’s position any further. Its essential contention has been mentioned. In this essential contention we meet with a fundamental confusion between ethical and metaphysical categories. This is typical of all non-Christian thought. It is therefore of essential importance that we observe how the metaphysical presuppositions of Christian ethics are calculated to furnish a foundation for an ethics in which God’s will is the supreme authority for man, and God’s will alone. The ethical problem is for the Christian not at all a question of outgrowing temporality, but of obedience to God his Creator.
Chapter 5: The Summum Bonum Ideally Considered: The Individual

We turn now to a consideration of man’s *summum bonum*. The ethical ideal that man, as originally created, naturally had to set for himself was the ideal that God wanted him to set for himself. This is involved in the fact that man is a creature made in the image of God. God himself is naturally the end of all of man’s activity. Man’s whole personality was to be a manifestation and revelation on a finite scale of the personality of God.

When we use the common expression that the world, and man especially, was created to glorify God, it is necessary to make a distinction between the religious and the ethical meaning of these words. In a most general way we may say that God is man’s *summum bonum*. Man must seek God’s glory in every act that he does. Yet there is a difference of emphasis between seeking the glory of God religiously and seeking it ethically. To seek the glory of God religiously is to seek it directly. To seek the glory of God ethically is to seek it indirectly. This distinction, however, needs explanation and qualification. In explanation we want to make clear that we do not mean the distinction to be taken strictly and absolutely. There is a sense in which all of man’s activities glorify God indirectly only. Man’s activities fall in the temporal sphere. God alone is eternal. This means that, strictly speaking, God’s glory cannot be increased. No temporal being can add anything to the eternal being. In this sense, then, all activity of man can only indirectly glorify God. The glorification of God on the part of man must always take place in the temporal sphere. And it is this fact that should be kept in mind when the distinction is frequently made that religion is directed toward God, while ethics is directed toward man. This is only relatively true. In one sense all of man’s activity is directed toward God. Man’s ethics is not only founded upon a religious basis but is itself religious. Though we do not mean it in the way that modernism means it, it is true that in seeking the welfare of our fellow men we seek the glory of God.

For this reason, too, we cannot make an absolute distinction between the religious attitude and the moral attitude on the part of man. It is sometimes said that in the case of religion we have adoration of God, while in the case of ethics we have obedience to God. This is only relatively true. We need obedience in our adoration, and if we are truly obedient, we adore God.

Again, it is said that religion deals with the *credenda* and ethics deals with the *agenda* of the Christian faith. This, too, is only relatively true. Faith is, to be sure, that activity of the human soul that seeks God, but it is also the foundation of ethical activity. More than that, faith in God must find expression in good deeds to our fellow man.

Finally, we cannot discover an absolute distinction between religion and ethics by saying that in religion we deal with the inner attitude of the soul while in ethics we deal with the deeds of man. We cannot make a clear-cut distinction between internal activity and external activity. Just as we need a true adoration, so we also need a true internal moral attitude; we need a true obedience. On the other hand, just as we need to express our obedience to God in external deeds, so we also need to express our adoration of God in external deeds. We need to worship as well as we need to work.

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With these qualifications in mind we may now try to state constructively what is meant by saying that in religion man seeks God’s glory directly, while in ethics man seeks God’s glory indirectly.

In the first place, in both ethics and religion we deal with the whole personality of man. We do not try to divide man into watertight compartments.

In the second place, both ethics and religion deal with the whole personality of man. We do of course speak of Christian theology and Christian ethics, but the contention is that in Christianity theism is restored, so that the demands made upon the Christian are really the demands made upon man as such. One cannot be a true man unless he be a Christian. One cannot act as a man unless one acts as a Christian.

In the third place, both ethics and religion deal with the whole personality of man in the configuration of the entire human race. We deal with mankind. We deal always either explicitly or implicitly with society as well as with the individual. The one does not exist without the other. The one never did exist without the other. The one has no meaning apart from the other.

In the fourth place, both ethics and religion deal with the human race as it is seen under the aspect of history. All of man’s activities, whether mental, emotional, or volitional, are temporal acts. It is in history that man must be studied. In neither ethics nor religion can it be truly man’s desire to become anything but temporal. Man but stultifies himself if he tries to become eternal. Religious activity as well as ethical activity is always temporal activity. Romanism virtually denies this and evangelicalism all too constantly forgets it.

In the fifth place, both ethics and religion deal with historical mankind as genuinely revelatory of God and as genuinely significant for the development of God’s purpose with the universe. The end and purpose of the universe is the glory of God. It is to us a relative mystery how history can glorify God. It is a mystery the solution of which lies in God himself. We are not now concerned to discuss this point. We only wish to indicate that the distinction between religion and ethics cannot be found ultimately by saying that in religion we seek God while in ethics we seek something else. We seek God in everything, if we look at the matter from the most ultimate point of view.

In the sixth place, both ethics and religion deal with that aspect of the whole of human personality which we speak of as the will. Here, however, we would insert the first distinction between ethics and religion. Religion, even when for specific purposes it deals with the will of man, tends constantly to relate the volitional aspect closely to the intellectual and the emotional aspects of man. Ethics, on the other hand, tends more to busy itself with the volitional aspect of man alone. Religion tends to emphasize the fact that the king is also the priest and the prophet, while ethics, though not denying or forgetting this, tends to deal with man as king alone. Ethics tends to think of man as the actor rather than as the thinker and the feeler.

Ethics is concerned more exclusively than religion is with the driving and directing forces of human personality. It is for this reason that there is justification for saying that in ethics we deal primarily with obedience, while in religion we deal primarily with adoration. We should observe, however, that when we speak of obedience we are not thinking of a passive virtue. Obedience does, to be sure, emphasize man’s receptivity. But it does not emphasize his passivity. Obedience is the foundation of a great activity. It is the foundation of a great constructive program of action. But it is the foundation of a
constructive program which is reconstructive. By this we do not mean that a program which has once been constructed has broken down so that it needs reconstruction. We mean rather that back of the constructive activity of man lies the constructive activity of God. God has a program for man to realize on earth. When man willingly and spontaneously accepts this program with all his power, then he is truly obedient.

In the seventh place, a further difference between ethics and religion appears when we consider that the volitional activity with which ethics chiefly deals is contemplated under the view of its immediate results in history. In contrast to this, religion seeks to bring the individual and the race in constant and more direct contact with God above history. This thought is often expressed by saying that in religion man deals with God, while in ethics he deals with his fellow man.

The Kingdom Of God As Man’s Summum Bonum

We need all this background in order to understand what is meant by saying that the kingdom of God is man’s summum bonum. By the term kingdom of God we mean the realized program of God for man. We would think of man as (a) adopting for himself this program of God as his own ideal and as (b) setting and keeping his powers in motion in order to reach that goal that has been set for him and that he has set for himself. We propose then briefly to look at this program which God has set for man and which man should have set for himself.

The most important aspect of this program is surely that man should realize himself as God’s vicegerent in history. Man was created God’s vicegerent and he must realize himself as God’s vicegerent. There is no contradiction between these two statements. Man was created a character and yet he had to make himself ever more of a character. So we may say that man was created a king in order that he might become more of a king than he was. We may see what this means first for the individual, and secondly, for society.

The Individual

For the individual man the ethical ideal is that of self-realization. Let us first see why this should be so, and secondly, what it means in detail.

That the ethical ideal for man should be self-realization follows from the central place given him in this universe. God made all things in this universe for himself, that is, for his own glory. But not all things can reflect his glory self-consciously. Yet it is self-conscious glorification that is the highest kind of glorification. Accordingly, God put all things in this universe into covenant relation with one another. He made man the head of creation. Accordingly, the flowers of the field glorified God directly and unconsciously, but also indirectly and consciously through man. Man was to gather up into the prism of his self-conscious activity all the manifold manifestations of the glory of God in order to make one central self-conscious sacrifice of it all to God.

If man was to perform this, his God-given task, he must himself be a fit instrument for this work. He was made a fit instrument for this work, but he must also make himself an ever better instrument for this work. He must will to develop his intellect in order to grasp more comprehensively the wealth of the manifestation of the glory of God in this
world. He must will to be an ever better prophet than he already is. He must will to develop his aesthetic capacity, that is his capacity of appreciation; he must will to be an ever better priest than he already is. Finally, he must will to will the will of God for the whole world; he must become an ever better king than he already is. For this reason then the primary ethical duty for man is self-realization. Through self-realization man makes himself the king of the earth, and if he is truly the king of the earth then God is truly the king of the universe, since it is as God’s creature, as God’s vicegerent, that man must seek to develop himself as king. When man becomes truly the king of the universe the kingdom of God is realized, and when the kingdom of God is realized, God is glorified.

**Self Realization**

But what then, more in detail, is involved in this goal of self-realization that man must set for himself? We can bring this out by working out the idea expressed above, when we said that man must learn to will the will of God. Man must work out his own will, that is, he must develop his own will first of all. Man’s will needs to become increasingly spontaneous in its reactivity. Man was created so that he spontaneously served God. For this reason he must grow in spontaneity. Whatever God has placed within man by way of activity must also be regarded by him as a capacity to be developed. Man was not created merely with a will to will the will of God. In his heart there was an inmost desire to serve God. But just because man was created with this will, God wants men to develop this will.

In the second place, man’s will needs to become increasingly fixed in its self-determination. In other words, man must needs develop the backbone of his will. Not as though man was created a volitional amoeba, which had to pass through the invertebrate stage before it finally acquired a backbone. Man was created a self. He was the creature of an absolute self and could not be otherwise created than as a self. But for this very reason again man had to develop his self-determination. Man’s God is absolutely self-determinate; man will be Godlike in proportion that he becomes self-determining and self-determinate under God. In proportion that man develops his self-determination does he develop God’s determination or plan for his kingdom on earth. God accomplishes his plans through self-determined characters. An unstable man would be useless in the kingdom of God.

In the third place, man’s will must increase in momentum. Man’s will would naturally increase in momentum in proportion that it increased in spontaneity and self-determinateness. Yet the point of momentum must be separately mentioned. As man approaches his ideal, the realization of the kingdom of God, the area of his activity naturally enlarges itself. Just as the manager of a growing business needs to increase with his business in alertness, stability and comprehensiveness of decision, so man, with the development of his progress toward his ideal, would have to develop momentum in order to meet his ever increasing responsibility.
Righteousness

It is customary in systematic theology to make a distinction between the image of God in the wider and the image of God in the narrower sense. In accordance with this distinction it is said that the will itself is a part of the image of God in the wider sense, while the particular moral character of the will, namely, its being righteous, is a part of the image of God in the narrower sense. When we make such a distinction, however, we should not forget that it is only relatively satisfactory. We cannot think of the will as an aspect of the human personality without thinking of its attitude toward God any more than we can think of man as such without moral qualities. The will never did exist as a mere faculty without function. The will of man was created good, that is, with a definite attitude of obedience to God.

For this reason too we have spoken of the development of the will in no neutral terms. The only way in which the will could really be developed was in its exercise toward God. A neutral will cannot develop because it cannot function.

When we say that originally man’s will was righteous, and that it sought after righteousness, this is really nothing more than what is implied in what has already been said about the development of the will in the preceding paragraphs. Yet we may give the point a separate emphasis.

What is meant by righteousness we may perhaps best express in the words that Geerhardus Vos uses when he describes what Jesus means by righteousness in his discourses. Speaking of the use of the word righteousness, Vos says: “Righteousness is always taken by Jesus in a specific sense which it obtains from reference to God as lawgiver and Judge. Our modern usage of the word is often a looser one, since we are apt to associate with it no further thought than that of fair and equitable, inherently just. To Jesus righteousness meant all this and more than this. It meant such moral conduct and such moral state as are right when measured by the supreme norm of the nature and will of God, so that they form a reproduction of the latter, a revelation, as it were, of the moral glory of God.”² It is particularly in the last words of this quotation that, it would seem, we may sum up what may be put into the term righteousness as applied to man in paradise. Righteousness, when taken as an attribute of God, describes that aspect of the entire personality of God by which he maintains within his being and within his created universe that relation of coordination and subordination which is proper to the station of each personality. Accordingly, man’s righteousness, which should be a reproduction of the righteousness of God, would be, first, a proper sense of subordination of himself to God and of coordination of himself with his fellow man. And man’s seeking righteousness would mean (a) that he was becoming increasingly sensitive to the meaning of these relationships of subordination and coordination and therefore increasingly spontaneous in his desire to maintain these relationships, (b) that he was becoming ever stronger in his determination to see these relationships maintained and developed, and (c) that he therefore would actually increase in his power to maintain these relationships.

If we put the matter in this way we can see that the distinction which appears in Scripture between forensic and moral righteousness has not in the least been denied, but has not yet been made in our description of the original righteousness of man. The

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² G. Vos: The Kingdom of God and the Church, p. 104.
elements of the later distinction are latent in the more comprehensive and more general, because earlier, term. After all, the later distinction between forensic and moral righteousness cannot be fully understood unless one contemplates them as aspects of an underlying unity. By the forensic righteousness of Christ man is once more enabled to become morally righteous, and as such reproduce in a finite way something of the moral glory of God.

If we contemplate righteousness as a matter of right relations among all creatures, and of the right relation of all creatures to their Creator, it becomes clear that the will of man had a great comprehensive task to perform. By seeking righteousness, the will of man was seeking the kingdom of God. Righteousness is the sinews of the kingdom of God.

**Freedom**

It may be well, in this connection, to indicate that if man would seek his own self-realization as the first aspect of the kingdom of God, and righteousness in the relations between himself and his fellow man, he would be developing his own true freedom. In order to point out this fact, however, it is necessary to state briefly what we mean by freedom.

In stating what we mean by freedom we shall not enter upon a detailed discussion of all that has often been brought under that subject. All that we shall discuss is that which is necessary for the understanding of the ethical position of man when he was in paradise.

With respect to this we may say that all believers in Christianity will, if they see the implications of their position, be opposed not only to determinism but also to indeterminism, as these terms are usually understood. Both determinism and indeterminism place man in an impersonal environment, from which God is wholly excluded. In contrast to this we must, as Christians, think of man as a creature of God. And this is of the utmost significance for the proper conception of his freedom. It implies that man’s freedom consists in doing of his own accord the will of God. It implies that there was nothing in man’s environment, or in man himself, that would force him not to do the will of God.

With this general conception of freedom in mind, we can see how man was free to develop his freedom.

It is customary in modern psychology to speak of a subliminal self. Everything that lies beneath the “threshold” of consciousness, namely, such matters as are usually spoken of as drives and instincts, have a great determining force upon our conscious activity. Now this “subliminal self” with its urges of various sorts is usually looked upon as a source of limitation upon the freedom of man’s will. Determinists in psychology and determinists in literature picture man as being driven to and fro between various passions over which he has no control. We are not here concerned to debate this question. The Bible plainly teaches that what we are determines what we do. But we are here concerned to point out that in the case of original man his instincts did not hamper his freedom. We might be tempted to express this idea by saying that before the fall man’s will controlled his subconscious life, while after the fall man’s subconscious life controlled his will. This we believe is largely true. Man was created to be, as nearly as that was possible for a creature, a replica of the being of God. In God there is no difference between potentiality and act. There are in God no instincts and no drives of any sort. He is perfectly self-
conscious. A temporal being, on the other hand, cannot be entirely self-conscious. Man can never become pure act as God is pure act. Man’s life is subject to the process of time, and this process of time, when it is an aspect of the conscious creature, involves a transition from some measure of potentiality to an ever increasing actuality. The future will reveal to man an ever increasing opportunity to do more of the will of God. Yet we have to be careful at this point. We cannot speak with any great certainty. The fall of man wrought no metaphysical change in man. We do not mean, therefore, by saying that before the fall man’s will controlled his subconscious life while after the fall man’s subconscious life controlled his will, that any real change has taken place in man’s metaphysical and psychological makeup. What is meant is that a moral turnover has taken place.

Hence we can more fully and more definitely distinguish man as he was originally from man as he became after the fall, by saying that before the fall the will of man, insofar as it was controlled by his instincts, was not therewith hindered in the least in the freedom of its action, while after the fall the will of man, insofar as it is controlled by his instincts, is practically a slave of those instincts. Before the fall both man’s instincts and his will in the narrower sense of the term, that is, insofar as it acts self-consciously, were good, while after the fall both the instincts and the will, in the narrower sense of the term, became evil.

It may now be clear what we meant by saying that man had to develop his will by developing the spontaneity of its reaction. The spontaneity of man’s action has to do primarily with man’s subconscious life. This can be seen when we are called upon to act very quickly, when we have to act before we have time to think. In such cases it often appears what is really in us, whether we love the good or love the evil. Now though Adam was created perfect, in his instincts as well as in his self-conscious voluntary life, it was especially his moral instinct to do the will of God that had to be developed. We may compare this to the action of a spring. If a spring is wound up loosely it does not react quickly. If, on the other hand, it is wound tightly, it reacts quickly. So man’s moral nature had to grow in its spontaneity and swiftness of reaction. Take the incident of Jesus’ rebuke of Peter. What would seem to us at first as an innocent, or at least a merely incidental thing, the Lord evaluates in its true bearings, and traces to its ultimate source. He sees in Peter’s desire to keep his master from suffering an effort on the part of Satan to keep him from going to the cross. Quick as a flash he casts the temptation from him.

We are not primarily concerned with the moral coloring of this story. We are not suggesting that the quick responses of Adam should have been directed against evil. We are concerned to indicate that man’s will to do the will of God should be as swift and sure as was Jesus’ will to do the will of God, which was in this case manifested by directly opposing the will of Satan.

But in the second place, we have seen that man’s moral nature should not only increase in the swiftness but also in the stability of its reaction. The will of man had to become stronger as well as swifter in its actions and reactions. Again this has reference to man’s subconscious processes as well as to man’s self-conscious processes. Man needed to develop solidity of character. A man’s character includes his whole moral nature. Now he was, as we have seen, created a moral character, but in developing his character man was meant to become increasingly like the character of God, which is absolutely
determined and therefore absolutely free. Of course, man would always remain a creature.

Finally, it has been pointed out that if man thus develops his swiftness and stability of reaction to the will of God, he develops momentum for the doing of the will of God. Now if we think of every individual man and the whole race of men swiftly and with determination doing the will of God, we can see that the possibility for its being led astray would constantly diminish. And not only would the possibility of its being led astray be diminished, but the capacity for doing more for the realization of the kingdom of God would be increased, and therewith man would be given an ever new freedom to do the will of God in areas formerly unknown to him. He would be free indeed.
Chapter 6: The Summum Bonum Ideally Considered: Society

If it is the task of the individual man to seek the kingdom of God, it is also the task of the society as a whole to seek the kingdom of God. We have seen that the individual man would have to seek the kingdom of God by his own self-realization above all. We have also seen that the individual would have to seek the realization of the kingdom through a process of history in which his own will and power would be developed in order to become an ever better king under God.

This ideal stood before man in paradise. The self-realization of every finite personality would be the immediate task of the whole of society.

This would in the first place be the ideal that parents would have for their children, and in general, the ideal that all grown up men would have for the young. We are not saying that it would be the ideal that each generation would have for the next generation, because before the entrance of sin the generations of men would not disappear from the earth by death. Neither would their strength diminish by old age. We need not speculate far upon this path. We might think of the far smaller percentage of men that would be needed for the education of the rising generation than is now the case. We might think of the energy released for constructive work in the kingdom if the time did not have to be so largely taken up with repairing the damages of sin. We might think of what science would accomplish if the mind of man had not been darkened by sin, and if the will of man were anxious in every individual instance to bring out the mysteries laid in the universe by God. The possibilities for the development of the kingdom of God were simply unlimited. As the race would grow older, as each member of the race would increase in spontaneity and in stability in his seeking of the kingdom of God, it is simply impossible for us to think now what might have been achieved.

Parents would first of all regard their children as substantives and not as adjectives to themselves. Every individual human personality that was to be born is known of God from all eternity and must be treated as a personality from his beginning in life. This does not mean that the child could at once be treated as a self-conscious personality. He would have to be treated as a dormant personality.

If the child would have to be treated as a dormant personality, the parents would have to act for it in a representative capacity. The parent would have to be God’s representative with the child and the child’s representative with God. As God’s representative with the child the parent would seek in every possible way to develop the will of the child. This work would have an intellectual aspect in the sense that the parent would have to place before the child the ideal kingdom of God, just as he had to set that ideal before himself. But this work, and it is that in which we are now directly interested, as far as the will is concerned, would be primarily that of developing the spontaneity and stability of obedience to the laws of God. These laws of God would, in large measure, as long as the child would be very young, be identical with the laws of the parent for the child. Hence if the child would exercise its will in quickly and with determination doing the commands of its parents, it would be developing its will in order later to become more directly useful in the realization of the kingdom of God.
However, as soon as the child would be able to distinguish between the voice of his parents and the voice of God, the parents themselves ought to help him to do so, in order that the growth of his personality might be hastened as much as possible. And if this were done, the son would soon stand next to as well as under the father, and together they would build the walls of the kingdom of God.

In this way, too, the son would soon be the neighbor. On the other hand, there would be no neighbors who were not sons and fathers. Or we may say that all men would indeed be brothers. Hence the problem with respect to the realization of the individual and society would be solved in the same way that we have seen the problem between parents and children would have to be solved. There would be no new problem at all. Self-realization of the individual would bring about righteousness in society.

From this point of view we may regard some of the problems that ethicists take up when they discuss the relations of individuals to society.

Altruism

The history of ethics has been replete with discussions about altruisms and selfishness. We shall soon have occasion to remark on this phenomenon more in detail. Suffice it here to say that there would be no such problem in the original kingdom. The advantage of the one would be the advantage of all. Personalities would depend for their own self-realization upon the realization of others. The more they would seek to develop the personalities of others, the more their own personalities would be developed. There would be universal covenant responsibility. Society would form an organism.

The Roman Catholic position has no such philosophy of human personality as here presented. Its principle of individuation is ultimately non-rational. Accordingly, one man’s individual personality can be developed only by way of contrast to other men’s individual personalities. And if the various individual personalities are thought of as subject to the common law of God, this law is at most correlative to non-rational individuality. This makes for an original metaphysical strife between the individual and the law above him. The law will come to all men but only as a formal something. It will make universal but abstract assertions, leaving it to every individual man to make his own applications. This implies that self-realization on the part of the individual would always be at the expense of the universal progress of the kingdom of God and therefore also at the expense of social righteousness. On the other hand, if the law did reign supreme it would be at the expense of the self-realization of the individual.

This dilemma is that which is involved in the non-Christian concept of ethics. And Romanism has not outgrown it inasmuch as it has sought to make an alliance between Aristotle and Christ in ethics as much as elsewhere.

Moreover, what is true of Romanism is true, though in a less obvious way, of Arminian ethics.

It is characteristic of an organism that each member of it has some particular function to perform. Paul has brought this out beautifully with respect to the New Testament church. No member can say to another member that it has no need of that other member. A body would not exist without a heart. Hence if the ear wants to exist as an ear, it is in its own interest that the heart should exist as the heart. Hence there would not be mere monotonous repetition in the kingdom of God. There would be an inexhaustible variety.
Individuality would be at a premium. And no one could develop his individuality at the expense of others. The more anyone would develop his own individuality, the more would he give others an opportunity to develop their own individualities. And in this way they would together bring the kingdom of God to realization. Each would help the other to display more of the moral excellence of God.

**Prosperity**

Would there be any limitation upon the individual and upon society as a whole in their seeking to realize the kingdom of God because of any untoward physical conditions? Plainly there would not. In the first place there would be plenty of food and of the other necessities of life for all. There would be no financial depressions. There would be no bank failures. There would be no pestilences. There would be no physical handicaps through sickness or accident. The animal world and inanimate nature would be friendly to man, and would, so to speak, be anxious to be transformed for the realization of the kingdom of God.

Now if such would be the situation with respect to the physical universe as a whole, it is especially to be noted that man’s ethical strife could not consist in seeking to escape the sense world in order to flee into an ideal world. Asceticism would not be an ideal in the kingdom of God. It is true that man would constantly have to develop his will so that he should not at any time make the body stand prior to the soul. But it is equally true that he would have to stand guard that the soul would not be developed at the expense of the body. The body is lower than the soul in the sense that the physical aspect of created universe is metaphysically lower in the scale of being than the spiritual, but the body is not lower than the soul in the sense that it is any less perfect than the soul. The body was created a willing instrument of the soul through which the soul might seek to realize the kingdom of God insofar as the kingdom was to have a physical manifestation. The body would not be ethically lower than the soul. It is therefore a part of the program of the realization of the kingdom of God that the body should be developed to its utmost capacity. A sound mind in a sound body is a true kingdom ideal.

In the ethics of Thomas Aquinas we are confronted again with what is virtually the pagan principle of the evil inherent in matter. To be sure, Thomas does from time to time assert his objection to Manichaeism. But he seeks to overcome Manichaeism by a premature insertion of the doctrine of grace. He holds that even in paradise, before the entrance of sin, it was grace that held down a natural tendency toward non-being and therefore also toward evil that was inherent in all created reality. He identifies the good with being. Hence temporal being is for him in the nature of the case, merely because it is finite rather than infinite, something short of good.

For this reason Roman Catholicism cannot make the original condition of paradise normative for ethical life. It can do no more than use this original condition as a limiting concept similar to the limiting concepts employed in modern non-Christian ethical theory. On its position Rome cannot require of men that they realize fully the kingdom of God in this temporal world. They themselves say it is metaphysically impossible that this should take place. How then can man be held responsible for its realization?

And what is true of Rome is again true, in a lesser degree, of Arminianism. It is only true in the covenantal view of the Reformed faith that the Genesis narrative with respect
to paradise can receive its full application to ethical as well as to more strictly theological problems. It alone makes plain that the realization of the kingdom of God is, metaphorically speaking, an historical possibility. It alone makes plain that man was originally placed upon the way toward the realization of this historical possibility and that it was only because he forsook the way of covenant obedience that he brought ruin upon himself.

**Happiness As An End**

The question of happiness as the goal of ethical endeavor may be approached in similar fashion. The only way in which happiness could be obtained by man was through self-realization. A realized self is a happy self. On the other hand, it is equally true to say that only a happy self is a completely realized self. God created man happy in order that he might become more happy. We may say, in all reverence, that God himself is happy. God’s blessedness is the overtone of his righteousness. So also if righteousness prevails among his creatures they are happy, and if unrighteousness prevails, they are unhappy. We may perhaps compare the relation of happiness and righteousness to that of exercise and health in the case of the human body. If we exercise, health comes to us. So if man seeks righteousness, happiness is added unto him.

Originally there could not possibly be any contrast between seeking happiness and seeking righteousness in the kingdom of God. A man could not possibly wish for happiness unless he also wished for righteousness. It is only after the entrance of sin that these ideas have been separated. The members of the kingdom would not think of the one without also thinking of the other.

From the modern non-Christian point of view happiness is a non-rational principle. It is sought by the individual to the extent that he has an animal nature, to the extent that he has a sensuous aspect to his being. Modern ethicists, such as Reinhold Niebuhr, are therefore becoming more and more pessimistic. They say that society can never become happy. This, they assert or imply, is due to the nature of reality. There are ultimate irrational or non-rational forces that can never be controlled. Ethics must therefore at most be melioristic. Men must help one another to make the most of a situation in which they find themselves as finite beings.

If men seek to escape this modern irrationalism by means of a return to a rationalistic conception of individuality, the problem of happiness is still unsolved. Rationalists will assert that the individual must submit his will entirely to that of law, eternal, unchangeable, law. But as long as this law is not based upon the self-sufficient God of Christianity, it is not eternal or unchangeable or objective. For it is then still up to every man to interpret the law for himself without reference to God. And the result would again be the same.

Rome again occupies a half-way position between the Christian and the non-Christian view on happiness as the ethical ideal for men. As far as its philosophy is concerned, it stands midway between rationalism and irrationalism. Then when its theology is added to its philosophy the situation is not radically changed. For a theology that has to make its influences felt by means of adjustment to a philosophy built upon pagan principles is never effective for the curbing of paganism. This appears in the lengthy discussion of Aquinas on the various virtues, passions, etc. On the one hand he follows Aristotle in
saying that we have the non-rational aspects of our beings in common with the animals. This is in effect to assert that the principle of individuation that we should hold is non-rational. On this basis, to seek happiness would be simply to allow the animals within us to control us. But Aristotle also asserted that what makes man truly man is his reason. According to Aristotle it is this which makes man virtually divine. If then man cultivates the reason within him he must repress the non-rational aspects of his being, and he must seek virtual identification with the universal reason of the universe, which is God. Thus he must lose his identity to attain his happiness.

Aquinas seeks a nice balance between pure irrationalism and pure rationalism. And to attain this balance he attaches supernatural grace to the natural situation in paradise. In this way he hopes to bring harmony between man’s seeking happiness and his seeking righteousness. But the result is like a patch-work quilt. Aquinas virtually admits that there is a basic contrast between happiness for the individual and righteousness for society. He cannot escape the non-Christian dilemma between abstract rationality and abstract individuality by the artificial attachment of grace to nature as thus falsely set forth.

**Utility As An End**

What is true with respect to the relation between righteousness and happiness is equally true with respect to the relation between righteousness and utility. Just as the history of ethics is full of the strife between those who hold that happiness is the legitimate end for man to pursue, so the history of ethics is also full of the strife between those who hold that man must strive for that which is useful to him in life. It may not be possible or wise for man to strive for happiness, it is said, but man must live, and therefore he must seek that which is useful to him in living.

It is easy to see that in the kingdom of God there can be no disharmony between that which is useful, that which is righteous, and that which makes us happy. That which is righteous is that which is the most useful to man. And this is not meant in the prosaic sense in which it is often said that honesty is the best policy. As that phrase is often used, it means that in the end it pays best to be honest. In that case usefulness is still set in opposition to righteousness. What we mean by saying that that which is righteous is most useful for man is that righteousness itself is the most useful thing to strive for if one wishes to realize the kingdom of God. And since the members of the kingdom wish to establish that kingdom they will naturally seek righteousness. In other words, the ideas of usefulness and righteousness have never been separated in the minds of the true members of the kingdom. It was only after the entrance of sin that man made for himself an ideal of usefulness other than the establishment of the kingdom of God. In the kingdom itself there can be no disharmony between righteousness and usefulness.

**The Good Will As An End**

Finally, we must briefly discuss the distinction frequently made between an ethics of ends and an ethics of the good for the sake of the good. Kant, whose name is bound with this distinction, has made a great deal of condemning all types of ethical theory which seek the good for any ulterior purpose. He says that Christian ethics, as usually presented, is an inferior type of ethics because it holds out to man the hope of rewards and the fear
of punishment. He tells us that we should seek righteousness for righteousness’ sake and not for anything that we may get out of it.

This distinction is based upon the presupposition that there is a contrast between seeking righteousness for righteousness’ sake and seeking it for some other purpose. But this contrast does not exist in the idea of the kingdom of God. No one could really strive for righteousness if he tried to strive for it with ulterior motives. He who works for righteousness for ulterior motives has, by that token, excluded himself from the kingdom of God. For the members of the kingdom there are no ulterior motives. Their motive with the realization of the kingdom itself is the glory of God. Their motive with their own self-realization is the glory of God. Their motive in seeking their own happiness is the glory of God. None of these matters can be separated. Not one of them can be antithetical to another. He that seeks righteousness seeks to realize himself, seeks the good will, seeks happiness, seeks usefulness, seeks rewards, seeks the kingdom of God, and seeks God himself.

At the conclusion of our all too poorly drawn utopia, we must stop again to call attention to the usefulness of drawing such a utopia. It does not have for us as Christians primarily the same purpose that it had for Plato when, for reasons of pedagogy, he talked about the state as the individual “writ large.” Our purpose is not merely to paint a nice picture in order to contrast to it the present terrible situation. It is useful to paint utopias from that point of view alone. Yet over and beyond this we should note that as Christians we cannot do anything but begin our discussion of the *summum bonum* with a consideration of original man. If we believe that Christianity is true, we must set up the original state of affairs as the normal state of affairs. It is by this original *summum bonum* that we must judge all other theories of the *summum bonum*. It is in the light of the original *summum bonum* too that we can better understand the *summum bonum* placed before man in the Scripture. Scripture portrays to us first the original *summum bonum*, second, how it was lost sight of and became impossible of realization, and third, how it came once more into view and is realized in Christ. We have discussed the original *summum bonum* and must now turn to the substitute offered for it after man had fallen into sin.
Chapter 7: The Non-Christian Summum Bonum

It is not our purpose to discuss the various forms in which the non-Christian *summum bonum* has appeared in the course of time. To do so would be to try to write a history of philosophical ethics, insofar as it is non-Christian. Our task is rather the more limited one of looking at the various non-Christian forms in which the *summum bonum* has been presented, from the point of view of their common opposition to the Christian *summum bonum*. If we do this it will help us to clarify our notion of the Christian *summum bonum* itself.

The contrast between the non-Christian and the Christian *summum bonum* can best be made in this connection. The characteristics which are common to all forms of the non-Christian *summum bonum* are best brought out in contrast to the absolute *summum bonum*, or the *summum bonum* ideally considered, as we have sought to discuss it in the foregoing chapter.

**Taking Existence For Granted**

The main difference between all non-Christian theories and the Christian theory of the *summum bonum* is due to the fact that all non-Christian ethics takes for granted existence, as it is now, as being normal. By that we do not mean that there are no non-Christian ethics that wish to change and improve things. Naturally all non-Christian ethics wants to improve things. Nor do we mean that according to non-Christian ethics every condition is considered equally good and equally bad. One need only to think for a moment of the high moral ideals of modern idealism, and to compare them with some forms of crass hedonism in order to see that there is a great difference between the various forms of non-Christian ethics, as far as the degree of nobility is concerned. What we mean, however, by saying that non-Christian ethics takes existence for granted as normal, is that according to it the entire picture which we have drawn in the two preceding chapters is a delusion. According to non-Christian ethics there never was and never will be a perfect world. All our insistence on the original state of affairs, in which there was an absolute goal known to man, and in which man had the full ability to reach that goal, is to our opponents, a sad delusion.

More than that, our idea of the original state of man does not only appear to them as sad delusion, but also as a piece of unpardonable arrogance. This does not appear when we put forth our view apologetically and try to make it seem as though there is really no difference between Christians and non-Christians on the question of the original state of man. When we make clear our point, however, and put forth our view of an original state of man, not merely as something which we would like to think of as true, or as something which even if we think it is true has no great significance for us, as Barth is doing in his writings, but as the standard by which systems of ethics must be judged true or false, it will soon appear that men do not look at the matter as an innocent illusion but as something that they despise. Men are glad to read the utopias that dreamers have dreamed; they are glad to include the story of Genesis 1 in their repertoire of light reading.
for leisure hours, but men rebel against being told that their ethical ideals must be judged by the ethical ideal of Adam.

The real meaning of this opposition to the original perfect ethical ideal is nothing short of hatred of the living God. If God does exist as man’s Creator, we have seen, it is impossible that evil should be inherent in the temporal universe. If God exists, man himself must have brought in sin by an act of willful transgression. Hence existence, as it now is, is not normal, but abnormal. Accordingly, to maintain that existence, as it now is, is normal, is tantamount to a denial of man’s responsibility for sin, and this in turn makes God responsible for sin, and this simply means that there is no absolute God.

Yet this rejection of God is covered up under the convenient and innocent sounding slogan that we must, of course, take experience, as it now is, as our standard of judgment. Not only that, but the arrogance involved in this seeming neutrality is denied or ignored and charged to those who do hold that God is the Creator of the universe, and therefore do hold that there was an absolutely perfect condition of affairs to begin with.

It will be seen from this that there is nothing to be gained by trying at the outset to cover over this basic difference of attitude between Christians and non-Christians with respect to this matter of an original perfection of man. It is far better for us, as Christians, to make the difference perfectly clear, but point out that our belief in the original state of affairs as an absolute standard has been given us by grace, so that there is no arrogance on our part at all. And if even this will be misinterpreted, we can only pray to God that he will make others see the light as he has been pleased to enable us to see the light.

**Results In General Of This Difference In Attitude**

The result of this difference in attitude can be observed in different ways. In general we can see it in the fact that in non-Christian ethics men will take the results that sin has brought into the universe as being permanent. Accordingly, every type of non-Christian ethical theory holds that all that we can do is to make the most of the situation. Ethics is thought of as patchwork. Not as though the matter is put this way. On the contrary, men speak of constructive programs. We are told over and over again that we should not waste time building heavens but should get to work improving this earth. All this is nothing but the natural result of the assumption that underlies all non-Christian philosophy, namely, that evil is an inherent part of the universe and is therefore just as ultimate as the good.

The result is instability. Just as all non-theistic thought builds upon the ultimately irrational and in this way affords no foundation for the experience of the finite rationality that we have, so non-Christian ethics has no more than a quicksand foundation for the structure it seeks to build. The cracks will soon appear in the wall because the foundation of human experience sinks into the vague possibilities of an ultimate temporality.

**Tender Minded And Tough Minded Ethics**

We may note, however, that though the general description just given holds of all non-Christian ethical theories, there is a great difference among them. For our purposes it will suffice to distinguish in general between two rather sharply contrasted tendencies of interpretation among non-Christian writers on ethics. The two tendencies that we find through the history of ethical theory are the idealist and the pragmatic. To distinguish
between them we may use the phraseology of William James, when he distinguished between the idealist and pragmatic type of thinking by saying that the former is tender minded and the latter is tough minded.

What did James mean by these distinctions? He meant that the idealists throughout history have been given to speculations about absolutes and about ideal conditions. Plato loved to dream of a perfect state. So too, in modern times, the Hegelian type of ethical theory has minimized the reality of evil, and has passed it over lightly as a stepping stone toward the realization of the Absolute.

It will be noted from this criticism by James that what he is opposed to most strenuously is that which we have spoken of above, namely, the setting up of an absolute ideal. Now since there is in idealistic thought some sort of remnant of this, it is against even this remnant that your typically tough minded child of the earth must direct his attack.

What James means by being tender minded is not some sort of grandfatherly good-heartedness, but a childish fear of facing stern reality. He thinks that all types of idealist thought have spent their time in blowing bubbles. We bring out this point in order to indicate that the opposition to the essentially Christian theistic position, which believes that man once was in contact with God, and was therefore perfect at the beginning of his career, has passed through a history. The opposition to our position is much more pointed and direct in modern times than it was in ancient times. It is true that there are some intermixtures of Christian and non-Christian thought. It is true that, because of these intermixtures, the opposition to Christian thought seems often to be less pointed today than formerly. Yet when one disregards these Christian elements one can see that underneath the surface the opposition on the part of non-Christian ethics is much stronger in modern times than it was in earlier times.

Still further, the distinction between idealist and pragmatist ethics also calls our attention to the necessity of careful evaluation. We cannot say that all non-Christian ethics are equally valuable because equally valueless. We must, to be sure, when we regard the matter from an ultimate point of view, when we regard the matter from the point of the value of men’s deeds before the judgment of God, hold that the highest form of non-Christian ethics leads men to eternal destruction just as well as does the lowest form. Even from this ultimate point of view, however, we must remember that some shall be beaten with many stripes and some shall be beaten with fewer stripes. It is not a matter of indifference even for eternity whether a man has been a Nero or the “good moral man” of the suburbs.

But speaking now for this life only, we greatly rejoice when men are tender minded rather than tough minded. More than that, we rejoice when the tough minded at times show some symptoms of having a tender minded spot. The most tough minded Darwinian ethicists sometimes catch themselves building utopias. Even the most tough minded is not completely tough minded in this world. God’s common grace makes that impossible. If one ceases to have any tender minded spots, one commits suicide.

**Optimists And Pessimists**

This leads us to make a general distinction between optimistic and pessimistic non-Christian ethics. The distinction corresponds roughly to that of tender minded and tough
minded. There are tender minded men who commit suicide and there are tough minded men who wax fat on the earth. The point is that due to sin all things have gone awry. When men have, by the common grace of God, retained a large element of tender mindedness, so that they sense the necessity of relating their deeds to some ideal standard, they expect that they can easily reach this standard. They are like children who see the rainbow in the sky and set out to catch it.

There have been many manifestations of this attitude in history. It is this attitude that accounts for the efforts to build utopian communities on earth. Sin is thought of as something that can easily be removed by changing man’s environment. Even Christians have often retained a remnant of this type of thinking and have sometimes sought to build a paradise on earth. The social gospel of the day is another evidence of the persistence of this superficial type of thinking. We may call this type of thought superficial, if it actually pretends to build upon a Christian foundation. But sin is such a terrible thing that it cannot in this way be eradicated. When this theory is built upon a non-Christian basis, however, we would not call it superficial. We would rather regard it as an evidence of the truth of Christianity itself that eternity is created in the heart of man, in the sense that man cannot escape thinking upon the home from which he has been driven. The human race is still like Adam and Eve in that it looks back wistfully at the tree of life from which they had been driven away. All the optimistic theories of non-Christian ethics may be compared with men who think that they can leave this earth in a balloon. It is a contradiction in terms to think that one can leave this earth by earthly means and materials. Every balloon is bound to return to earth sooner or later. So every optimistic non-Christian theory of ethics is bound to return to pessimism sooner or later.

For this reason we believe that the pessimistic theories of non-Christian ethics are more consistent than the optimistic. The pessimistic theories do not look back at the tree of life at all. Or at least when they catch themselves looking back, they at once apply a dose of pragmatic tough mindedness, and tell themselves to go on to their self-chosen destruction. And when they thus tell themselves to continue on their path, they seek to satisfy their indestructible longing for a utopia to some extent by substituting meliorism for it; James spoke of his position as meliorism. He holds that, though it is hopeless and foolish to look for an absolute perfection, in view of the fact that both God and man are subject to certain limitations, it is best to seek to improve conditions to some extent at least. He thought it was possible to do this if only God and man would cooperate in doing so. Since he was quite sure that God would cooperate, he insisted that man should lend God a hand in order to make life on earth somewhat better than it is now. It is in this way that James and others have used the melioristic camouflage in order to conceal from themselves the hopeless pessimism involved in their view. We do not mean that they have done this self-consciously and dishonestly; we only mean that sin has so blinded the hearts of men that a spirit of error dwells in their hearts and makes them think that they are speaking the thoughts of God when they are actually being deceived by the prince of darkness.

Now that we have discussed in a general way the characteristics of non-Christian ethical theory with respect to the *summum bonum* we may seek to bring out something more of these characteristics by contrasting them to the characteristics of Christian ethics as we have discussed these in the preceding chapter.
A Broken Personality

In the first place we said that Christian ethics bases its *sumnum bonum* upon the idea of the whole personality of man. In contrast to this non-Christian ethics holds that the personality of man is an accomplishment to begin with, and that the “accomplishment” has never yet been accomplished. Non-Christian ethics holds that the whole personality is an ideal to strive for, while Christianity holds that though to be sure it is now, because of sin, a far distant ideal to strive for, man was actually created as a whole personality.

This difference comes out in a striking way if one for a moment compares the ethics of Plato with the ethics of Christianity. In the ethics of Plato, and in the ethics of paganism generally, the psychology that is presupposed is dualistic. Both Plato and Aristotle hold that the rational part of man is really a part of the eternal ideal world, while the sensuous part of man is part of the sensuous world. In this way man is somehow a patchwork of pieces that will not “stick together.” We have a little piece of eternity patched onto a little piece of temporality, and the two are somehow held together loosely for a while. The result is an internal and continuous strife. The intellect is at war with the will, and the feelings are at war with both the intellect and the will. Some who sympathize with the intellect will work out intellectual theories of ethics. So, for instance, the ethics of Socrates was intellectualistic. He thought that if men only know the good they will be glad to do it. It is this sort of intellectualism that still underlies to a large extent most of our ethical theories, especially that aspect of ethical theories that has to do with the education of children. In the eighteenth century intellectualism had its heyday. It was then boldly advocated that if we only build enough schools, we could close our prison doors. We have not yet, even in our day, outgrown this one-sidedness. Sin is still all too often practically identified with ignorance.

On the other hand we have had many one-sided theories of voluntaristic ethics. Broadly speaking we may say that whereas ancient ethics was intellectualistic, modern ethics is voluntaristic. In modern times ethics tends to become an art of skillfully manipulating the drives and instincts of man in order to accomplish the greatest amount of good and prevent the greatest amount of evil. The assumption is that there is no definitely and intellectually conceived goal which man can and should set for himself, but that he should float along as best he may. In this way the irrationalism that is inherent in all non-Christian philosophy and in all non-Christian ethics is boldly accepted as an immediate working principle.

It is in contrast to this one-sided intellectualism and this one-sided voluntarism that we ought, as Christians, to make clear that we think of human personality as being a unity. We ought to emphasize that one-sidedness is the consequence of sin. Man was created in perfect harmony with himself because he was created in perfect harmony with God. Hence Christian ethics can never be one-sidedly intellectualistic or one-sidedly voluntaristic. We do not say that as Christians we are not often one-sided. As a matter of fact no one escapes being one-sided to some extent. But we confess that this one-sidedness is sin before God. And we hold that harmony between the various aspects of human personality can be obtained on no other than the Christian basis.
**Nationalism In Ethics**

As a second presupposition of Christian ethics we mentioned that Christian ethics deals with man as such, and not only with Christians. This presupposition is based upon the doctrine of creation which lies at the basis of Christianity. But all non-Christian thought denies this doctrine. Hence it can never have unity in its ethical interpretation. On what ground can anyone claim that a set of ethical teaching shall have compelling force for human beings if one does not believe the doctrine of creation? There is no other ground at all. There can be no more than a strange coincidental resemblance between the various ethical ideals of various peoples on any but the Christian basis.

Certainly it would be impossible upon a non-theistic basis to think that one nation should receive a revelation containing an ethical code that should be binding upon all men in all ages. The most that can be granted, from a non-theistic point of view, is that one people seems to have more of a genius for religion or for ethics than has another people. In this way it has often been granted that the Jews as a nation had a genius for religion and for ethics, while the Greeks had a genius for intellectual interpretation. Now there is, to be sure, a certain element of truth in this way of stating the matter. God did give different gifts to different nations. He also used that nation which he had given a particular gift for religion in order through it to reveal himself to man, but the point is that the revelation that he gave to them was intended for the race. And that it was intended for the race was because of the fact that the race is thought of as a unity created by God.

Here too it is necessary that we set the unified Christian scheme of interpretation over against the broken up schemes of non-Christian thought. It is once more the absolute Rationality of Christianity over against the absolute Irrationality of non-Christianity.

**Individualism**

In the second presupposition we tried to bring out that revealing himself to man through one nation God spoke through this one nation to all men. In the third presupposition we wished to bring out that these men, found everywhere and through all ages, must not be thought of as so many individuals, but must be thought of as a family. In contrast to this, non-Christian ethics always has been utterly individualistic.

To prove this contention we need only to point to a few illustrations. In Greek ethics the individual was often sacrificed to the state. This may at first seem to be the very reverse of individualism. Yet it is really individualism of the worst sort. For it only meant that a large number of individuals was sacrificed to a small number of individuals who happened to be in authority. The whole structure of Greek ethics was built upon the presupposition that it is unavoidable but that some must suffer at the hands of others. There was no organic conception of the nation, let alone the race.

In contrast to the ancient ethics of the Greeks, modern ethics has, as a whole, emphasized the right of the individual at the expense of society. Society is thought of as an aggregate of individuals. Consequently there is no proper sense of the necessity of authority. Authority has largely disappeared from the family. The autocracy of the father, as it often existed in the perverted individualism of old, has been replaced with a false democracy which seeks the ultimate source of authority in the multitude of men, without recognition of God.
Egoism And Altruism

This false individualism appears in the various ways in which non-Christian ethical theory has conceived of the relation of selfishness and altruism. There has been a long debate between ethical writers on the question whether men should seek themselves, that is, their own happiness and good, as the supreme end, or whether men should seek the happiness and good of others.

The common assumption of all these writers was that there is a natural warfare between the individual and society. The assumption was, as in the case of the Greek ethics, that one individual cannot develop himself except at the expense of other individuals. It was taken for granted that this universe is inherently a give and take proposition. This is in a sense true. We do not deny that since sin has entered the world all the relations between men have become so perverted, and the circumstances have become so abnormal, that in practice the advantage of one often results in the disadvantage of the others. But this is not the point. We hold this situation to be an abnormal situation. In Christianity this abnormality has, in principle, been removed. The church is a body, an organism; the growth and advantage of one member must invariably benefit all members. But non-Christian ethics thinks that this is at best a dream that is of little practical significance.

There have, to be sure, been ethical theories on the part of non-Christians which have seriously spoken of the benefit of one being the benefit of all. But this can in the nature of the case be nothing more than a sweet dream to them. That this is so can be seen clearly if only we remember that according to all non-Christian ethics there is no relation at all between moral and physical evil. There is thought to be a physical evil that is independent of man which befalls man irrespective of his moral life. There is a sense in which this is true. We too believe that those on whom the tower of Siloam fell were no greater sinners than others. But on the other hand we do believe that the fall of man has brought physical evil in the world. And because we believe this we can also believe that a good moral man, who suffers physical evil, is not therefore necessarily at a final disadvantage in comparison with him who, though he suffers no physical evil, is morally corrupt. In other words, we have, as Christians, a longer range, the range of everlasting life, from which we can view the “unevenness” in the present world. Non-Christians, on the other hand, have only the range of the present world and the present life of man to use as a standard. From this point of view it is impossible to view things otherwise than as absolutely uneven. Accordingly, all non-Christians must, in accordance with their assumptions, maintain that the ethical life is necessarily individualistic. They may in a superficial way think with the friends of Job that ten pounds of virtue will be rewarded with ten pounds of good, but as soon as they learn to think more profoundly, or as soon as they themselves experience something of the evil that Job experienced, they are bound to see that things remain uneven as far as this world is concerned. This world must be a warfare of every one against every one if non-Christian thought be true. That men do not altogether regard life in this way, that men are still able and willing to think of a theory of life which is not wholly a matter of warfare is due not to any goodness of themselves, but is due to God’s common grace. Someone has said that not only has paganism failed to produce one good man, but it has also failed to produce a picture of a good man. This is
profoundly true. And it is true of all non-Christian thought. It does not have the material with which to picture a perfect man.

**Aristotle’s Mean**

A perfect example of this failure of non-Christian thought is that of the doctrine of the mean of Aristotle. The best man that Aristotle could think of was one who should walk on the middle of the road between the extremes to which his desires would naturally drive him. Aristotle took for granted that a man will naturally be either a miser or a spendthrift. Accordingly the virtuous man is the middle-of-the-roader. Again we agree that there is, in a superficial sense, much truth in this contention of Aristotle. Sin has made men go to extremes. And a life of moderation is certainly to be desired. But the point we are now concerned to make is that the doctrine of the mean of Aristotle is basically a denial of the idea of the possibility of a perfect man. If Christianity is true, virtue did not originally consist in keeping a balance between two evils. There were no evils to begin with. Man did not appear upon the scene with the desire to be either a spendthrift or a miser. He was created not merely with a perfect balance but without the need of a balance, since there were no evils between which he had to be balanced.

Then too the Christian is not one who has struck a better balance between various evil tendencies than non-Christians have. If that were so it would be impossible to distinguish the Christian from the “good moral man” who may not have a speck of Christianity in him. The Christian is one who in the depth of his being leads the perfect life. This perfect life has been implanted in him by the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit. This perfect life is based upon the righteousness of Christ. We are not now going to speak of this at length. We only wish to point out the contrast between it and the balanced moral life that grows upon a non-Christian root. The Christian’s perfect life is perfect in principle only, not in degree. Hence he too must battle against his evil instincts that remain within him against his will. Hence, too, his actual moral life will often very closely resemble in externals the actual moral life of a man who is not a Christian but Who enjoys a generous portion of God’s common grace by which he may seek to do what Aristotle wants man to do, that is, live a life of moderation. It is even possible that the moral life of the Christian will appear less valuable than the moral life of the non-Christian. But even this, however much it is to be deplored, does not in the least militate against the validity or the importance of the distinction between the principle of the Christian life which is that of perfection in Christ and the principle of the non-Christian life, which is that of balance between evils.

If we realize that it is really this same principle of the mean that controls the relation between the individual and society we can clearly see that at best the *summum bonum* of non-Christian ethics can be an effort to strike somewhat of a balance between various opposing evils. The relation of the individual to his neighbors is then symbolized by the parable of the prodigal son. As long as he was useful to his “friends” they were glad to have him. As soon as he was useless to them, because his substance had disappeared, he was no longer their friend. There is no conception of a true organism of the human race found outside Christianity. From the most extreme form of ancient autocracy to the most extreme form of modern socialism, and from the regicide of Caesar’s day to the live-and-
It should be noted again that on this point as elsewhere, Thomas Aquinas occupies a middle position between Christianity and Aristotle. He accepts Aristotle’s doctrine of virtue as the mean between two evil tendencies. To this he adds his doctrine of supernatural grace as a balance-wheel that kept man from yielding to evil even in paradise. Thus the whole of ethical endeavor becomes a matter of metaphysical tight-ropewalking.

**The Idealist Theory Of Self-Realization**

There is one form of this give and take theory of ethics that we must take note of particularly. It is the theory of idealist philosophy. It has been charged against Idealism over and over again that it has done scant justice to the individual. The human individual, it was said, was too easily taken up into the Absolute. In this Idealism resembled Eastern Mysticism. It has been especially in more recent times that this opposition to Idealism has grown strong. We cannot review this debate in detail. We only recall the opposition to the absolutism of F. H. Bradley and B. Bosanquet on the part of Pringle-Pattison and others. A debate was held in the Aristotelian Society on the question whether the individual has a substantive or an adjectival existence. In order to meet the various criticisms launched against the idealist school, Bosanquet and other idealists have given particular attention to this question. We wish to note only what Bosanquet has said with respect to this matter. Bosanquet points out that if we are ever to have a solution of the One and Many problem it must be sought in the idealist way, that is, by emphasizing the priority of the absolute or the whole to the individual. Man’s freedom is to be found in his interest in the whole. Not till the individual loses his own interest does he feel the “nisus toward the whole.” “The unit makes no insistence on its finite or isolable character. It looks, as in religion, from itself and not to itself, anti asks nothing better than to be lost in the whole which is at the same time its own best.”

It is therefore for the individual’s own interest to be lost in the whole. There is, to be sure, also an individual that is to be realized in the whole, but this latter individual has entirely renounced the former individual which was bent upon its own interest. The new self which is interested in the whole, becomes an aspect of the whole. In spite of all of Bosanquet’s efforts to the contrary, he cannot, on his assumed foundation, find anything but an individual who is either wholly independent of the whole, or an individual who is reduced to an aspect of the whole. It is again an either-or proposition, a give and take theory of ethics. A proper conception of organism has nowhere appeared in non-Christian ethical theory.

It is this criticism of Bosanquet’s view that enables us to contrast the idealist concept of self-realization to that of the Christian position. Self-realization has become the slogan of modern idealist ethics. Hence it is of the utmost importance to point out that the self-realization ideal of Christianity is at bottom the opposite of the self-realization ideal of the idealist ethics. This is especially necessary in view of the fact that this idealist realization program comes to us right within the fold of the Christian church by way of Sunday school literature, as well as in other ways. Character development, as taught quite

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commonly today, is only thinly disguised self-realization such as is found in idealist philosophy. The difference between a truly Christian theory of self-development and the idealist theory of self-development can best be observed if we see that the idealist notion is based upon the non-Christian conception of the self that is to be realized. That self is not thought of as a creature of God, but is thought of as an aspect of rationality somehow here in the midst of a universe among other specks of rationality also somehow here. And that universe in which these selves live is somehow hostile to these selves that must develop themselves, and the selves themselves, inasmuch as they are somehow derived from the principles of this evil universe, are also to an extent evil. Hence the basic principle of the relation between selves, at least at the beginning of history, is that of warfare. And the ideal that they must place before themselves is that of getting along together without killing each other. It is as a certain churchman recently expressed it when he said that man would soon have to learn to be good or he would perish. We can see a good reason for such a point of view if invention carries on till one man can, by the atomic bomb, destroy thousands in no time at all, a few individuals could destroy all the rest. The idea is still that one can really live in no other way than at the expense of others. It is this general non-Christian soil out of which the idealist flower of self-realization springs. There is no other alternative, as far as theories of reality are concerned, than that between Christianity which regards man as a creature of God, and non-Christian thought which regards man as a product of impersonal forces in a universe that is somehow, accidentally, here. It follows that the only way in which we can account for the lofty character of idealist ethics is by saying that the gift of God’s common grace has in a particular manner restrained what would be the ordinary operation of sin, when it allowed men to conceive a relatively speaking very high conception of self-realization. For the idealist, too, speaks of man’s realizing himself by self-sacrifice. He too speaks of being wholly unselfish, wholly honest, wholly sincere, and wholly pure. We rejoice that men still conceive of such high ideals as they do. But we are certain that the ideals they conceive of are not high enough. The trouble is not only that they cannot reach the ideals they set for themselves. The trouble goes further back than that. Apart from Christ men have never even drawn a picture of a morally perfect man. At best they take for granted that man is in an evil universe for which he is not responsible. At best they will still find excuses for man’s failures.

**Ethics A Struggle Of A Temporal-Eternal Being**

We come now to the fourth presupposition of Christian ethics mentioned earlier, namely, that we deal with mankind’s seeking to realize the kingdom of God in history. To this we may add the fifth presupposition that this history in which man is to realize the kingdom of God is genuinely revelatory of the plan and purpose of God. We have already discussed this point when we brought out how A. E. Taylor simply takes for granted that the ethical struggle of man is nothing but an attempt on his part to outgrow his own temporality. Ethics accordingly is not a matter of seeking to realize the kingdom of God by man, but it is a matter of seeking metaphysical adjustment on the part of both God and man to one another. The tuned string is a symbol of all non-Christian thought in general, and is also a symbol of non-Christian ethics.
We have said enough, we trust, to bring out the chief points of contrast by which one can distinguish the Christian from the non-Christian *summum bonum*. We have indicated that all the contrasts between various schools of non-Christian ethics, such as those between intellectualistic and voluntaristic, between national and international, between individual and social, between selfish and altruistic, between happiness and goodness, between usefulness and virtue are all due to the assumed correlative of God and man. This assumed correlative of God and man, this assumed denial of the creation doctrine, this assumed ultimacy of evil allows for no ethical ideal other than that of a give and take, of a “claims and counterclaims” between individuals who must live together and who yet must live at the expense of one another. It is marvelous that out of such a soil the lofty ethics of idealism in all its forms has sprung. It can only be the common grace of God that accounts for it. All forms of non-Christian ethics rest on the assumption that man has within himself the principle by which he can truly know himself, set the proper ideal for himself, and that he has the spiritual power to make progress in working his way toward the realization of that ideal. We may call this the principle of autonomous inwardness. In the second part of this syllabus we shall deal with this subject.
Chapter 8: The Biblical Summum Bonum In General

We turn now to a consideration of the biblical *summum bonum*. But here we face at once the differences between the Old and the New Testament.

We believe that we can conveniently sum up the differences between Old and New Testament ethics, in opposition to all other ethical theories, by mentioning four characteristics. First, the whole Scripture says that the ethical ideal is as absolute as we have spoken of it when discussing the ideal *summum bonum*. Secondly, the kingdom of God, as the ethical *summum bonum* of man, is presented in the whole Scripture as a gift of God. Thirdly, a part of the work in reaching the *summum bonum* is taken up with the negative task of destroying the works of the evil one. Fourthly, because the works of the evil one continue till the end of time, the ideal or absolute *summum bonum* will never be reached on earth. Hence biblical ethics is always an ethics of hope for what lies beyond history. We shall look at each of these characteristics in turn.

**The Absolute Ideal Maintained**

According to all non-Christian ethics it is foolish to speculate on the original existence of a perfect man. It is still more foolish in the eyes of the world to hold that it is man’s business to be absolutely perfect. It would surely be wholly unreasonable to demand that man must be absolutely perfect, if man has not originally been perfect. This demand of absolute perfection which is clearly taught in the requirements of absolute obedience to the law of God, internally as well as externally, as we are told, e.g., in Deuteronomy 6.5, “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might,” sets off Old Testament ethics, as well as New Testament ethics, from all other ethics with an impassable gulf.

Both Old and New Testament ethics thinks of man as created in the image of God with the ability to do the will of God perfectly. This conception of man is involved in the notion of an absolute ideal. The very fact that nowhere but in the Old and New Testaments is found any such idea as the original perfection of man, in turn proves that man was given an absolute ideal.

In addition to the plain statements of the law that man must be absolutely perfect, the absoluteness of the moral ideal stands out clearly in the promises and the threats of the Scriptures. Both the Old and the New Testament promise is to him who is perfect that he will live in complete happiness. The Old Testament couches this promise in more temporal terms than does the New Testament, but this does not alter the fact that both Testaments portray the future of the obedient servants of God as one of absolute bliss.

For the Old Testament we may note this in the promise with respect to Canaan. It is to be a land flowing with milk and honey. If the children of Abraham were obedient to God, they would live in a land of plenty. That this was never actually realized was due to the sins of Israel, but does not detract from the fact that the promise itself was given so absolutely as no promise is given in any non-biblical ethical literature.

On the other hand the threats for disobedience are in the Old Testament most severe. The death penalty was enacted for what seem to us to be the most trivial transgressions of
the moral law. Moreover, the death penalty was enacted for transgressions of the ceremonial laws, for which we often scarcely find any justification. All this may be to an extent explained on the ground that in this early age of redemption God did not reveal himself as fully as he did later, and to an extent adjusted himself to the customs that had developed among men as the result of sin. But this does not explain the whole matter. It at most explains to some extent the manner in which disobedience was punished, that is, the externalism of the whole affair, but it does not explain why the death penalty should be so frequently and so insistently applied upon seemingly small infringement of the ceremonial law. That can be adequately explained only if we realize that God wished to inculcate the truth that he is a God of absolute holiness and expects of his people absolute holiness. It is God’s covenant wrath that comes to expression in the threats contained in the Old Testament.

As for the New Testament, it is clear that the reward for obedience is that of eternal life in the presence of God. There is no colorless talk about the immortality of the soul in some unknown realm with or without God, but there is the definite assurance that those who die in the Lord shall be with the Lord.

On the other hand, it is equally clear that in the New Testament too the threats of punishment are absolute. There is no talk of a colorless and semi-dark realm somewhere in the underworld. There is instead a clear-cut assurance that those who have not been obedient to God will go to the place where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched. There may be differences of interpretation about the exact nature of the place of eternal woe, but there can be no debate about the fact that the woe is eternal, and that it is complete. Here God’s covenant wrath comes to its final climactic expression.

Another thing that should not escape our notice is that in both the Old and the New Testaments the rewards and the punishments are couched in personal rather than in impersonal terms. If one looks at the utopias of non-biblical literature one finds that the main feature is that of bliss for which it is immaterial whether or not it be enjoyed in the presence of God. In the Scripture, on the other hand, it is God himself who makes the bliss what it is. At the end of his description of the beautiful city the prophet Ezekiel tells us, “And the name of the city is, The Lord is there.” It is this that constitutes the glory of the city. This is only in accordance with the nature of the covenant promise. The whole substance of the covenant promise was God himself. Abraham knew no greater joy than to have Jehovah promise to him that he would be his God and the God of his seed. And what is true with respect to the Old Testament is equally true with respect to the New Testament. If one looks at the picture of the future glory drawn in the book of Revelation in the twenty-first chapter, one notices the same emphasis that is found in Ezekiel. After a description of the picture of the city foursquare, the apostle tells us that in the midst of the city we may find the tabernacle of God. God will be the God of his people fully without any intermediaries and without any interruptions. It is that which makes heaven to be heaven.

Moreover, the promises and threats are universal in their scope. This appears in the first place in the fact that all nations are to share in the blessings of God when they are obedient to God. At the very beginning of the formal covenant relationship between God and his people, God promises Abraham that in him shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. The race is contemplated as a unity. It is for the sake of the race as a whole and not merely for itself, that Israel as a nation is set apart to be God’s covenant people. Then
as to the New Testament, the command is given the disciples to go forth and to disciple all nations. But more important than this is the picture of the future life in which there will be those of all nations and kindreds and tribes of the world.

There is another aspect to this universalism that is frequently overlooked. In both the Old and the New Testament the reward for the obedient includes the perfection of the whole nature ‘round about man, as well as the perfection of man himself. We need only to think for a moment of the glowing pictures of the Messianic kingdom drawn by the prophets, in which all the animals shall be at peace with one another and with man, to realize that nothing short of universal perfection of the whole created universe is contemplated. The same thing appears again at the end of the revelational process. The picture drawn in the book of Revelation is that of paradise regained. Whatever will be in the new heaven and the new earth, it is certain that absolute harmony will prevail between man and the whole of his environment.

This universalism with respect to a perfect nature really brings up the problem of the results of man’s disobedience. It was on account of man’s disobedience that nature was cursed. Natural evil is everywhere but in Scripture taken to be independent of moral evil. In Scripture the sin of man is definitely set forth as the cause of all physical evil. The whole world groaneth and travaileth in pain because of the sin of man. It is therefore to be expected that when the sin of man is removed the “regeneration of all things” will follow.

It was to inculcate this difference between the Bible point of view of natural evil and the point of view of non-theistic ethics that the Old Testament ordinances with respect to impurity, and especially with respect to death, were given. If natural evil had no connection with moral evil, there would be no justification in holding a person morally responsible for physical impurity as is the case in the Old Testament ordinances.

We may note one of these Old Testament ordinances that brings out this point clearly, namely, the ordinance with respect to the burial of the dead. A priest might not touch the body of anyone but his nearest relatives. The high priest, who was supposed to symbolize the theocratic purity more fully than anyone else, might not even touch the body of his father or mother. There would be no justification for this if there were no moral significance attached to the whole affair. Is not death a natural something? Does it not come in the course of time to all men and beasts? And must not the dead be put aside? All non-biblical thought has looked upon death as a natural phenomenon. There have been particular instances in which particular deaths were regarded as due to the wrath of the gods, and this may be taken as a remnant of the true, original view, but as a whole death has been looked upon as having nothing to do with the moral evil of man. Certainly modern thought has tried to free itself entirely from what it would deem a foolish superstition, that death is a result of sin. So for instance, Professor A. A. Bowman, in a pamphlet, The Absurdity of Christianity, does not find this absurdity in anything that Christianity might have to say with respect to the physical universe, but exclusively in what it has to say with respect to the possibilities of the moral life. He tells us that the meaning of Jesus when he said that he came to bring life cannot have been that he wanted to save us in any sense from the death of the grave, but must have been a fullness of moral life while we are on earth. So fully has it been taken for granted by modern thought as a whole, and by modern ethics in particular, that death is a natural phenomenon which
has nothing to do with the sin of man, that it is no longer considered a point worthy of debate.

In opposition to this, both the Old and the New Testament are outspoken on the point that all natural evil is the result of the sin of man. Moreover, they are equally outspoken on the assurance that by the work of redemption not only moral evil but also natural evil will be removed. The Old Testament ordinance with respect to the disease of leprosy and the burial of the dead taught the Israelites that death has come into the world by the wilful disobedience of man. Natural evil is not inherent in the originally constituted state of affairs. If it were, man could not be held responsible for it. Similarly in the New Testament it is not only the soul that shall be freed from sin, but the body shall also be resurrected and glorified, being made conformable to the glorious body of the Redeemer.

Here again the Roman Catholic occupies a mediating position. He virtually admits that physical evil is a metaphysical ultimate. According to him it required grace to keep the evil tendency of nature in check even before man had sinned.

Such then is the biblical *summum bonum*. It is absolute. Think of the challenge this places before those that seek to realize it. It sets their work in the configuration of absolute certainty. Nothing is so paralyzing to moral endeavor as doubt with respect to the usefulness of it all. It is in biblical ethics alone that men are given a *summum bonum* that has its certainty of realization in God himself, and that therefore gives to men the assurance that their work will not be in vain. They can be steadfast and immovable and always abounding in the work of the Lord.

Such then is the biblical *summum bonum*. It is absolute. It puts before man a more comprehensive program than he can find anywhere else. His work is put in the configuration of an all-embracing plan of God. He can be a co-worker with God. His work is not for a passing day. His work is done as it were in the dawn of eternity. The fruits of his labors shall follow him. If he has given a cup of cold water to a disciple for the sake of the master, he will in no wise lose his reward. What a great encouragement then for him to increase in the spontaneity, the stability and the momentum of his will to will the will of God! There is a challenge in the biblical *summum bonum* such as is found nowhere else.

### The Summum Bonum As A Gift

The second point to be discussed under the general heading of the biblical *summum bonum* as a whole is that the whole kingdom of God is a gift of free grace to man and that therefore the *summum bonum* is a free gift to man.

The very absoluteness of the *summum bonum* would have no meaning unless it were that the whole kingdom of God is in the Scriptures presented as a gift of the free grace of God to sinful man. Since man became a sinner it is clear that he could not begin to live up to the perfect ideal. He could not even make the first step in the direction toward realizing an absolute ideal. The sinner is not contemplated in Scripture as somewhat weakened by sin, but as dead in trespasses and sins. We cannot speak of this fully here. We must remark, however, that man could not know the *summum bonum* after he became a sinner. The *summum bonum* had to be revealed to him. And once more the fact that nowhere but in Scripture is there as much as a picture of a perfect *summum bonum*, corroborates the necessity for the revelation to the sinner of what he should do if he was to be pleasing to
God. In the second place, man not only became blind through sin, but he became totally unwilling to do the good. Hence his will had to be renewed. He had to be given not only the picture of the true ideal for him, but also the ability to strive for the true ideal.

That the New Testament looks upon the kingdom of God as a gift to man appears convincingly from the words of Jesus with respect to it found in the Gospels. Vos has worked this out beautifully in his little book, Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church. The kingdom of God is not realized by self-righteousness but by the righteousness of God, which must be given unto men. It is naturally in Paul’s theology that this idea comes to fullest expression. Paul constantly speaks in absolute terms when he addresses his churches. They are spoken to as absolutely holy and as absolutely righteous. John tells us that those who are born from above cannot sin. It is plain that the Apostles do not mean that the saints are already perfect in degree while on earth. The only meaning that can be given to their words is that our perfection is the perfection of Christ in us. That is, the perfection that the Apostles speak of is a substitutionary perfection, and a substitutionary perfection is nothing but a gift of God to sinners. This substitutionary perfection is genuinely ours and will blossom forth in all its glory in the life hereafter.

But it is no less true of the Old Testament than of the New Testament that it regard the kingdom of God as a gift to sinners. The whole of the covenant of God with Israel is a free gift. The Lord reiterates from time to time that he has chosen Israel not because they were better than the others, or because they were greater in number than others. Then too the realization of the covenant promises is constantly accomplished through the acts of God’s grace. It is the miraculous power of God that leads Israel through the Red Sea, that causes the sun to stand still, that drives out the Canaanite and that retains the Israelites in the land of promise, in spite of their sins. One need only to look at the prophecy of Hosea to see that the Lord takes his people to himself again and again by acts of his forgiving grace.

All the activity in the kingdom of God is based upon the free grace of God. It will be necessary to emphasize this point over and over. Modernism seeks to present the matter as though the ethical ideal is not absolute. It thinks of the absolute ideal merely as a “limiting concept.” It thinks that man can, of his own accord, set out for the realization of the “absolute ideal.” Modernism speaks a great deal of the kingdom as the ethical ideal of man. But its conception of the kingdom is not that of the Scriptures. It is not that of the Scriptures because the ethical ideal of the modernist kingdom is not absolute. Modernism has limited the range of the summum bonum to the moral life. It does not dare to accept the picture of the perfection of nature as well as the perfection of morality. Modernism is imbued with non-theistic ethics in its kingdom ideal. In the second place, modernism has denied that the kingdom is the gift of God’s free grace. It has put the kingdom of God before man as something that he must realize by his own ability apart from the grace of God.

Moreover, because modernism has abused the entire conception of the kingdom and has substituted for it a semi-pagan notion of a kingdom to be realized by man with some help of Christ, there are orthodox theologians who prefer not to speak of the kingdom of God as the ethical summum bonum of man. So for instance Dr. W. Geesink tells us that the kingdom of God must not be spoken of as man’s summum bonum inasmuch as God
himself is man’s highest good. Now, as we have seen, this is true if we mean that in the most ultimate sense God is the end of the whole creation. In this respect God is the end of man both in religion and in ethics. But we have also seen that ethics deals more directly than does religion with what God has given man to do on this earth. Dr. Geesink himself makes a similar distinction when he says that this highest good is reached by man religiously in adoration and ethically by doing God’s will on earth with respect to our fellow man. It is this doing the will of God on earth that we speak of as the ethical summum bonum for man. Hence there is no conflict between saying that God is man’s supra-temporal or most ultimate summum bonum, while the kingdom of God is man’s more immediate summum bonum.

A further point that we must consider here is that which Dr. Geesink speaks of when he says that since the kingdom of God is a gift it cannot be thought of as something for the realization of which we must strive, as our summum bonum. He says that the mediating theologians have tried to escape the simple Bible teaching that the kingdom of God is a gift by saying that though it is a gift it is also an ideal for which to strive. The Germans spoke of this by saying that the kingdom is, to be sure, a Gabe, but also an Aufgabe. Against this claim Geesink says that the kingdom of God is nothing but a gift, and can therefore not be thought of as something to be realized by us.

Geesink here attempts to steer clear of Hegelian idealism. It is very easy for us to think of the kingdom of God as the dialectical process of overcoming the evil by the good in the way that Hegel conceived of it. If we do this we have reduced evil to a correlative of the good. This prepares the soil for modernism or is itself modernism. But it is equally true that there is a sense in which the kingdom of God is an Aufgabe as well as a Gabe. In theological terms we speak of this when we say, after Paul, that though it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do, yet we are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. Is there a conflict between them? Not at all. We can speak of the kingdom of God both as a Gabe and as an Aufgabe in a truly Christian as well as a Hegelian sense. We have learned to trust in the righteousness of Christ, instead of in our own righteousness. But the good works done upon the basis of Christ’s righteousness are nevertheless our good works. There is no sphere of exercise for these good works except in the realization of the kingdom of God. It is of this that Geesink himself speaks when he says that we must, as creatures of God and as redeemed, seek God as our summum bonum in doing the will of God for us in relation to our fellow creatures.

We may note in passing that if we are to say that because the kingdom of God is a gift it cannot be made into our summum bonum, the same difficulty would appear if we speak of God as man’s summum bonum. God’s communion is itself a free gift of God to man once man has become a sinner. Yet we do not say that because God’s communion is a free gift of his sovereign grace to us, therefore the seeking of the glory of God cannot be to us an object for which we ought to strive in gratitude for the gift that we have received. Even the striving itself is a gift.

The importance of this subject warrants our dwelling on it still further. We must trace this thing back to its metaphysical foundation. Back of the idealist ethics against which

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2 Idem. 2, p. 22.
3 Idem., 2, p. 23.
Geesink is militating, lies the idealist metaphysics. This idealist metaphysics thinks of the relation of God to the temporal universe as a whole, and to man in particular, as a matter of identity or of cooperation. In other words, idealist metaphysics, as well as all other antitheistic metaphysics, cannot believe in the possibility and the actuality of analogical action. But in contrast to this it is of the very heart of theistic metaphysics to say that all human action is analogical action. Every act of a temporal being is based upon the creating and sustaining power of God. Even when man was in paradise his own life was a gift and the universe was a gift, and yet because of this very fact its development could also be a thing to strive after. Moral responsibility is impossible upon any other basis than that of the theistic idea of analogical action. So then if we apply this concept, this exclusively Christian theistic concept of analogical action, to the question of the kingdom of God in Scriptures, we can once more hold without qualification that the kingdom is a Gabe and also our Aufgabe.

One detail must still be noted here. Dr. Geesink points out that when Jesus tells men to strive to enter into the kingdom, to seek first of all the kingdom, he does not mean that men can seek to realize the kingdom. This is true. Christ tells men there to seek the free gift of God’s grace. But we should note that this does not militate against the position we have just outlined which holds that, once we have entered into the kingdom, by a free gift of God’s grace, and that once we are given the ability to strive for that which is good in the sight of God, the only area in which our God gives ability to do his will is in the seeking of the realization of the kingdom of God.

The Reformed concept of analogical action is the equivalent of the Reformed concept of analogical knowledge. Both of them are what they are because of their final reference point in the self-contained ontological Trinity and his comprehensive plan with respect to the whole course of events in the universe.

Over against these stand the Roman Catholic concepts of analogical knowledge and analogical action. The Roman Catholic concept of analogy, both with respect to knowledge and action, is formed by the union of the Aristotelian form-matter scheme and the Christian doctrine of God. The final reference point for Rome’s theory of knowledge and action is not exclusively found in God. It is therefore not covenantal in character. It is not the relation between the Sovereign God and his creature that comes to expression in the Roman notion of analogy. It is rather the idea of a contract between one very great and one very small sovereign individual. There is no final dependence of man upon God. Accordingly there is a common relation of God and man as individuals to a principle that is correlative to both. Man’s relations to his environment do not finally end exclusively in God. His thought and his actions are therefore not truly analogical of God’s thoughts and God’s actions.

The Task Of Destroying The Works Of The Evil One

We turn now to the third characteristic of biblical ethics spoken of above, namely, that it is only in biblical ethics that the destruction of evil within man and round about man, moral and physical, is set as a part of the ethical ideal of man.

It goes without saying that if evil is what all non-theistic ethics says it is, namely, an unfortunate circumstance in which the universe somehow exists, it cannot be duty for
man to seek to destroy it. It can at most be a wise thing for himself to seek to get as far as possible away from this evil.

On the other hand, if man was created perfect and placed in a perfect universe so that sin is an insult on the part of man against the living God, with the result that all evil, natural as well as moral, violates the holiness of God, it must be a part of the task of man, once he has been redeemed, to seek to destroy that evil in all its forms, and wherever found. The destruction of all evil everywhere is the negative but unavoidable task of every member of the kingdom of God. Wherever the believer sees evil, he sees insult to God, to his God who has graciously saved him from evil. This does not mean that there is no gradation in evil. It does not mean that man must everywhere use the same method in seeking to destroy the evil which he sees. There is undoubtedly gradation. The natural evil is the result of man’s moral deflection. Accordingly the believer will not seek in all sorts of foolish ways to destroy the natural evil without relating it to moral evil. On the contrary, the believer will seek to eradicate the root of evil first of all in the heart of man.

And even so he will not fight indiscriminately. It is his task first of all to overcome evil in himself. We cannot speak of this in detail at this point. We speak of it here only as an aspect of man’s summum bonum.

It is important to note that both the Old and the New Testaments do as a matter of fact regard the destruction of all evil as a part of the task of man. It is equally important to note that as a matter of fact Scripture throughout considers it man’s first task to overcome evil in himself.

That the Old Testament considers it a task of the people of God to destroy evil is so obvious that it is often made the basis of unfavorable criticism of its ethics. It is said that it is an evidence of the rudeness and non-Christian spirit of Old Testament ethics that it requires of the people of God that they shall destroy their enemies. Christian apologists all too often practically admit this criticism by giving no better defense of it than that we must figure with the general characteristics of the times.

What shall we say with respect to this? We may note first that it is, to be sure, perfectly legitimate and necessary to advance the characteristics of the times as an explanation for Old Testament ethics. Even so, it should be remembered when we bring in the characteristics of times as an explanation for Old Testament ethics, that we do this in order to bring out the greatness of the condescending grace of God by which he was willing to seek out men at the very low depths of morality to which they had brought themselves, in order gradually to lead them out. It does not mean that the absoluteness of the standard has been lowered when we read of God’s allowing certain things on account of the hardness of men’s hearts. Nor do we allow that the standard has really changed with the coming of the New Testament. It is only the mode or manner of bringing about the realization of the goal that has been changed. In the Old Testament times this goal had to be reached in an externalistic fashion, while in New Testament times this goal is reached in more spiritual or internalistic ways. The goal was the same in both instances.

More important than this is to note the fact that the commands of complete extermination of the enemies of the people of God marks off the Old Testament ethics as being essentially one with New Testament ethics rather than the contrary. Instead of apologizing for this aspect of Old Testament ethics we should glory in it. It is the best proof of the genuinely theistic character of the Old Testament that one could desire. If God is what the Christian theist says he is, sin must be absolutely destroyed, and it is
naturally to be expected that God would order his people to destroy evil. It is equally natural that this should be done in an externalistic way in the Old Testament times when the whole of the divine revelation to man was given in an externalistic way.

It is at all times a part of the task of the people of God to destroy evil. Once we see this we do not, for instance, meanly apologize for the imprecatory psalms but glory in them. We rejoice that God is setting before man, even after he has become utterly unworthy of it through his sin, the ideal of a perfect earth in which only righteousness shall dwell, and in which there shall be nothing whatsoever of sin and evil.

**C. S. Lewis On The Imprecatory Psalms**

A view quite different from the view set forth in this syllabus is that found in the book of C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*. Lewis has no eye for the fact that the Old and the New Testaments together present a unified view of the relation of God to man, and for the fact that this view is squarely opposed to that of every form of ethics based upon human experience as metaphysically autonomous and ethically normal. Lewis says: “There were in the eighteenth century terrible theologians who held that ‘God did not command certain things because they are right, but certain things are right because God commanded them.’ To make the position perfectly clear, one of them even said that though God has, as it happens, commanded us to love Him and one another, He might equally well have commanded us to hate Him and one another, and hatred would then have been right. It was apparently a mere toss-up which He decided on. Such a view of course makes God a mere arbitrary tyrant. It would be better and less irreligious to believe in no God and to have no ethics than to have such an ethics and such a theology as this.”

In putting the matter this way Lewis makes a caricature of the Christian view and confuses the issue. Whatever some of the “terrible theologians” may have said, simple orthodox theology has always stood by the teaching that truth is true because God says it is true, and right is right because God says it is right. But in asserting this, orthodox theology assumes or asserts that what God says about truth and righteousness is based upon his absolute holiness and righteousness.

On the other hand, when orthodox thinking rejects the notion that the truth is truth in itself and the right is right in itself independent of God’s assertion with respect to them, it merely rejects the idea of human autonomy.

It was Socrates the pagan philosopher who insisted that he wanted himself to be the ultimate judge of the nature of piety, and that he did not care what God said about it.

Lewis is quite right in stating the issue between Christianity and non-Christianity in the terms he uses. He is, however, quite mistaken when, as an evangelical Christian, he chooses the side of paganism against Christianity.

To be sure, it is because he is committed to an Arminian view of free will that Lewis chooses for the idea of the autonomy of the human moral consciousness as the source and standard of ethical behavior. He thinks that “the doctrine of Total Depravity—when the consequence is drawn that, since we are totally depraved, our idea of good is worth

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simply nothing—may thus turn Christianity into a form of devil-worship.” In doing so Lewis appears not to realize in taking the side of Socrates, the idea of the self-sufficient moral consciousness, he has virtually renounced the right to appeal to either the God or the Christ of Scripture for either help or light. He must, after this “when the consequence is drawn” hold with Kant that the goal, the standard and the ultimate motive power for ethics are to be found in man as self-sufficient. He may after that, following Kant and such men as Søren Kierkegaard and Barth, project a God who comes down to man, and thus speak of incarnation, but this is of no help. Lewis finds “second meanings” in the psalms, even in what he thinks of as their morally reprehensible features. But the one thing he cannot see is that the psalms, including those that contain awful predications, derive their significance and light from the substitutionary death of Christ. What the psalmists do is to think of themselves as those who are “in Christ.” Christ would come to destroy all the works of darkness. As those who are redeemed by Christ they must have the mind of Christ. They must love what Christ loves and hate what Christ hates. In the book of Revelation the souls of the saints cry out for the vengeance of the Lord upon all those who seek to work havoc with the work of Christ as he purifies the spirits of men from all love of evil.

As noted above, this is not to justify personal vengeance. It is the only cure against the idea of personal vengeance. Throughout the Psalms, including those containing imprecations, the believer has learned to make his thought subservient to the thought of Christ.

One would think he reads a modern humanist rather than an evangelical Christian when he hears Lewis speak of the “devilish” character of the psalmist’s sentiments as, e.g., expressed in Psalm 109. How shall we deal with these “contemptible Psalms?” Shall we leave them alone? We can scarcely do that. The “bad parts will not ‘come away clean.’” Somehow they must have been written for our learning. Throughout its history the church seems to have thought so. Moreover, “Our Lord’s mind and language were clearly steeped in the Psalter.”

What then must we do? “The hatred is there, festering, gloat- ing, undisguised—and also we should be wicked if we in any way condoned it …” We cannot “yield for one moment to the idea that, because it comes in the Bible, all this vindictive hatred must somehow be good and pious.”

In the rest of the book Lewis reinterprets the Psalms to make them acceptable for one who believes that the evolving ethical consciousness of man is, after the fashion of Kant, sufficient to itself, and at the same time to keep his evangelical convictions about salvation by grace from disappearing in the process. The result is confusing indeed. Certainly his approach to the Psalms does not challenge the unbeliever to forsake his sin of human pride and to be saved from the wrath of God to come. With the best of intentions to interest men in the gospel of Christ, he tones down the gospel so drastically that one dreads to think of what would happen if the consequences were drawn.

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6 C. S. Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms, p. 20.
7 Ibid., p. 22.
8 Ibid.
We must also note that just as certain as it is that the Old Testament requires of the people of God that they shall destroy evil, so certain is it also that they should begin that program of the destruction of evil within themselves. It was within the theocracy itself that God’s holiness was to be manifested. The least bit of infringement of the holiness of God was punished quickly and severely. The least bit of impurity in the theocracy was intolerable in the sight of God. The Jewish lepers had to be driven out of the camp of the Israelites and had to dwell in awful separation, symbolizing the great loathing of God for the impurity of sin. It was not till the Israelites were pure in the sight of God that he could really use them as a scourge for the nations. God was willing even to use the heathen, who were not his people, and to whom he had not given his covenant, to scourge Israel, in order that his own people might become pure. It was not till Habakkuk, the prophet, saw this great truth that he could really understand how it was possible that God should allow his own people to suffer so grievously at the hands of the enemies of the Lord.

Further, what is true of Israel as a nation is true in the New Testament of individuals. And what is true of the Old Testament in an externalistic sense is true of the New Testament in an internalistic sense.

The individual believer has a comprehensive task. His is the task of exterminating evil from the whole universe. He must begin this program in himself. As a king reinstated it is his first battle to fight sin within his own heart. This will remain his first battle till his dying day. This does not mean, however, that he must not also seek to destroy evil in his fellow Christians and in his fellow men while he is engaged in destroying evil within himself. If he had to wait till he was perfect himself to seek to destroy evil within the hearts and lives of others, he would have to wait till after this life, when there will be no more evil to be destroyed. It is true that we all live in glass houses and therefore should never assume a proud attitude. It is true that we all sin again and again and that it will be necessary for us to warn our brother of his sin at one time while it will be necessary for the brother to warn us of our sin at another time. But all this does not absolve us from the sacred duty as Christians to warn one another of our sins.

We must go one step further. It is our duty not only to seek to destroy evil in ourselves and in our fellow Christians, but it is our further duty to seek to destroy evil in all our fellow men. It may be, humanly speaking, hopeless in some instances that we should succeed in bringing them to Christ. This does not absolve us, however, from seeking to restrain their sins to some extent for this life. We must be active first of all in the field of special grace, but we also have a task to perform with respect to the destruction of evil in the field of common grace.

Still further we must note that our task with respect to the destruction of evil is not done if we have sought to fight sin itself everywhere we see it. We have the further obligation to destroy the consequences of sin in this world as far as we can. We must do good to all men, especially to those of the household of faith. To help relieve something of the sufferings of the creatures of God is our privilege and our task.

A particular point is that of the Christian’s attitude toward the abolition of war. Some would hold that since the Bible tells us that there will be wars till the end of time, it would be flying in the face of providence if we should try to outlaw war. But there is a difference between a commandment of God and a statement of what will come to pass. God commands us to be perfect but tells us that none of us will ever be perfect in this life.
So it is our plain task to do what we can, in legitimate ways, to lessen the number of wars and to make them less gruesome.

A word needs to be said also about seeking in other ways to ameliorate the results of sin. It is not as common as it used to be to find Christians who think it wrong to call a doctor when they are afflicted with disease. Yet one does not always know whether this change of attitude is due to a deeper spiritual insight or to a more careless attitude. It may be either, in any given instance. It may be that we hold that Christianity really forbids us to seek a doctor in times of sickness, but that we do not take our Christianity seriously enough to live up to it in this respect. On the other hand it may also be that we have learned to see more deeply into the nature of Christianity and have come to see that it does not forbid us to call a doctor but rather requires us to do so in case of disease.

Disease is, in general, the result of sin. God has graciously mitigated the results of sin by placing in creation itself the healing powers that reduce the pains of man and prolong his life. It would be disobedience to God and failure to make proper use of his gifts if we neglected to call a doctor in time of need.

Such then is the third aspect of the *summmum bonum*. We have an absolute ethical ideal to offer man. This absolute ideal is a gift of God. And this gives us assurance that our labors shall not be in vain. This gives us courage to start with the program of the eradication of evil from God’s universe. We cannot carry on from the place where God first placed men. A great deal of our time will have to be taken up with the destruction of evil. We may not even seem to see much progress in ourselves or round about us, during our lifetime. We shall have to build with the trowel in one hand and the sword in the other. It may seem to us to be a hopeless task of sweeping the ocean dry. Yet we know that this is exactly what our ethical ideal would be if we were not Christians. We know that for non-Christians their ethical ideal can never be realized either for themselves or for society. They do not even know the true ethical ideal. And as to our own efforts, we know that though much of our time may have to be taken up with pumping out the water of sin, we are nevertheless laying the foundation of our bridge on solid rock, and we are making progress toward our goal. Our victory is certain. The devil and all his servants will be put out of the habitable universe of God. There will be a new heaven and a new earth on which righteousness will dwell.

### An Ethics Of Hope

Finally, we must note the fourth characteristic of biblical ethics, namely, that it is an ethics of hope. If there has been a time in the church when there was a one-sided other-worldliness in its theology and in its ethics, it remains true that in both its theology and in its ethics the church should be other-worldly. To say this is simply to recognize that sin has played havoc with the universe as it is and that it is God’s plan that after the judgment, and not till then, will sin be wholly removed from this world. To be other-worldly is therefore not to have no eye for the things of this world, but it is to think more of this world than anyone who is not a Christian could think of it. It is to live in the daily assurance that this universe can and will be renovated completely in God’s own good time. It is to look for the new heaven and the new earth.

It should be noted at once that biblical ethics being such as we have described it in the preceding paragraphs, namely, in speaking of the kingdom of God as an absolute
summum bonum, in speaking of the kingdom of God as a gift of God, and in speaking of the kingdom of God as to be realized upon the destruction of the evil one and all his work, it could not be otherwise than an ethics of hope. The summum bonum is absolute. It was, as we saw when we were considering the summum bonum ideally, to be realized in the course of history by the activity of the whole human race. Even as such it would to that extent be an ethics of hope. Man had life and would hope to get life more abundantly. There is no conflict between possessing and striving for the kingdom. Then sin came into history. It, so to speak, retarded the realization of the kingdom of God. A great share of the energy that should go to the direct realization of that kingdom had to be expended indirectly in the destruction of sin. How slowly the procession of the Messianic king leading on his kingdom, in the olden days, moves. How slowly even the procession of the ascended Lord, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, as he leads the soldiers of the cross, moves. But no matter if it does go slowly. And no matter if you are the first one to fall in the strife. Your reward is not lost. It is safely placed with the builder of the celestial city. Abraham looked for the city that hath foundations. Among the vistas of the earth he saw heaven. Job saw that his Redeemer lived in heaven. He knew that justice would be done hereafter. Much clearer did Paul see that Christ was able to keep that which he had entrusted unto him against the final day. It was gradually in the course of the special revelation of God to his people that they began to see more clearly that in this life justice will not be fully done. But finally even the entrance of sin will not merely retard, but also advance the coming of the final kingdom.

It is of importance to note that both the Old and the New Testaments present an ethics of hope. It is quite often stated with respect to the ethics of the Old Testament that it is an ethics of hope, while it is not made plain that this is equally true with respect to the ethics of the New Testament. It is true that there is a difference between the ethics of the Old and the ethics of the New Testament with respect to this matter of hope. We may perhaps say that the ethics of the Old Testament is twice over an ethics of hope while the ethics of the New Testament is only once an ethics of hope. We mean by this that the Old Testament ethics looked forward to a fulfillment in the New Testament times, while together with the ethics of the New Testament times it looked forward, even though not with the clear self-consciousness, to the final fulfillment after this life. But it should be clearly noted that the fulfillment in the New Testament times, toward which the Old Testament believer looked, is no more than a fulfillment in principle. The kingdom of God is a present reality. We have entered into it. But it is also that for the realization of which we daily strive. Dr. Vos has made this two-fold aspect of the kingdom abundantly clear on the basis of the teaching of Jesus. It will not do to teach with modernism that the eschatological aspect of Jesus’ teaching of the kingdom is not an important aspect. It is closely and inextricably interwoven with the aspect that pertains to the present. We cannot obtain a complete picture of Jesus’ conception of the kingdom if we ignore either of these aspects. And it is not too much to say that the final or eschatological aspect is the end toward which the other is working. It is the regeneration of all things that Jesus contemplates as the objective of his redemptive program on earth. It is this that makes it impossible on the one hand to interpret the ethics of the New Testament as being merely an interim ethics. Jesus gives us the picture of a task to perform for the ages. But it is equally impossible to interpret Jesus’ ethics as being for this world only. He went about doing good to the poor and needy, to be sure. He told us that in helping the poor we are
serving him. To that extent the vision of Sir Launfal is true, that when he gave the leper a morsel of his own coarse loaf, he was fulfilling the spirit of Christ. But he was certainly not fulfilling the spirit of Christ—and it is this which modernism forgets—if he did this without reference to the Christ who gave himself as the substitute for men in order to save them for eternity. Only they are his true disciples, who have been saved by him from the wrath to come. And only then have we truly served him in our fellow men, if we ourselves have with them been saved from the wrath to come. It is no doubt Christ’s will that we should serve all those that are in need. This does not imply, however, that we are serving him equally if we serve those who are not his own and if we serve those who are his own.

Such then is the ethical ideal of the Scriptures. It presents to us an absolute ideal such as no other ethical literature presents. This ethical ideal is a gift of God to man, and the power to set out upon the way to that ethical ideal is also a gift of God to man. It is this that assures us that the ideal will be reached without a doubt. Then in the third place, this ethical ideal, just because it is absolute, demands that all evil be destroyed. Hence, both in the Old Testament and in the New, it is a part of the task of the people of God to destroy evil. Finally, because this ethical ideal is an absolute ideal and demands the complete destruction of evil, its full realization lies in the life hereafter, biblical ethics is an ethics of hope.

That this ethical ideal of Scripture is unique ought to be abundantly plain from this description. There is no other ethical ideal that is even remotely similar to it. All other ideals visualize a relative end. None of them think of the ideal as a gift to man. None of them demand the absolute destruction of evil. None of them look to the hereafter for the full realization of their ideal. The Old Testament is in all these respects just as unique as is the New Testament. They are in perfect agreement on these points. Together they are in perfect disagreement with all other ethical ideals.
Chapter 9: The Old Testament Summum Bonum

With the background of the preceding discussion we can now take up the particular characteristics of the Old Testament *summum bonum*. It goes without saying that the Old Testament is nothing but a particular form of the redemptive *summum bonum* in general.

But why should there be various forms of the one redemptive *summum bonum*? The reason for this is given in the fact that redemption itself is an historical process. God has created man as a race that was to appear gradually in the course of history.

In the first place, we may say that just because the kingdom of God as man’s ethical *summum bonum* lies in the future, as far as its complete realization is concerned, man needs to have placed before him more immediate or subsidiary objectives.

In the second place, it is to be expected that these immediate objectives will be given by God to man in accordance with the state of development to which the kingdom of God has reached among men.

In the third place, it is to be expected that in the earlier stages of revelation men will more readily identify the immediate with the ultimate objective than they will at the later stage of revelation.

**The Child**

In the first place then, we must note that it would be natural for man to set immediate objectives for himself under the direction of God just because the realization of the kingdom of God was to be an historical process. These more immediate objectives may be spoken of as earlier. We may compare the whole process with the normal growth of a child. It may be a child’s immediate duty to obey the voice of the parent in some trivial detail. But the obedience of the child on this point prepares it for higher tasks. It is just a question of relative maturity. This point should be kept in mind when one looks at the Old Testament ethics. All too often men point to the lower ethical ideal of the Old Testament as evidence of a naturalistic evolutionary process. To them the orthodox conception of things is identical with a mechanical view of reality. They forget that the most orthodox church not only can but must, on the basis of its own principle, allow for development. But it is to be noted that when one allows for this sort of development one is not catering to the evolutionary idea of development. Back of the development we allow stands the creation of a perfect, albeit not yet fully developed, character. It is not by striving at the tethers of self-preservation and by striving at other sorts of tethers that man has finally grown into a moral being. Back of the development of the Old Testament ethics stands the story of the creation of man in paradise.

On the other hand, there has sometimes been some excuse for the interpretation that liberal men have given of the orthodox position. Sometimes orthodox men have had no eye for the truly biblical conception of development. They have been greatly worried sometimes by the externalism of Old Testament ethics, not realizing that externalism is naturally to be expected in a process of historical development. Even we as Christians may speak of primitive man, if only we make clear that we do not mean by that term what the evolutionist means by it. If we call Adam a primitive man we should always
remember that this primitive man was created as a character. Adam was the father of the whole race, and the race as a race would have to go through a process of development. At each stage man would have to learn to apply the ethical principles implanted in him by God to every newly arising ethical situation. It would only be gradually that man would begin to see clearly the most ultimate ethical ideals. The more immediate ethical ideals would not be substitutes for the ultimate ethical ideal; they would simply be stepping stones by which man would reach the ultimate ethical ideal.

What we do actually find then in the Old Testament corresponds to what we expect to find. We actually find that there is a gradual development in the clarity with which the final or ultimate ethical ideal is seen. There is a gradual development in the realization that the ethical ideal is absolutely comprehensive and that its final accomplishment lies in the far distant future. We shall speak of that more fully when we discuss the further problem of evil getting into this process of development. For the present we wish only to call attention to the fact of development itself.

Further, there is in the periods of development of the immediate ethical ideals a sort of fitness for every stage. There is a far greater externalism in the earlier stages of revelation than there is in its later stages. That the prophets have a more internalistic ethics than was given to the Israelites at an earlier stage is often used as evidence of the evolutionary development of Old Testament ethics. Yet it does not prove anything of the sort. It is simply what we should expect. On the other hand it is not true that there is no internalism in the earlier stages at all. We have already quoted Deuteronomy 6 to show that the Israelite was to love God with all his heart and with all his mind. It is a matter of degree. Then too it is evident that in the course of redemptive revelation the later stages present a much faster development than the earlier. In the first stages it seems as though there is very little development. Then suddenly rapid strides of advance are made. The final reason for this is ultimately in the free disposition of God. Yet we can see in it certain laws of progress. We can see a process something akin to the accumulation of snow on a rolling snowball. The capacity for taking in more snow increases greatly as the actual quantity increases. So also it is but natural to expect that once the facts of the life and death of Christ have taken place the church will make rapid strides in its capacity for catching hold of the ultimate ideal and making every immediate ideal subordinate to it.

In the earlier stages of a child’s growth a penny for the present means more than a million twenty years later. When he has come to maturity, however, a human being will gladly forego privileges in the present if he can thereby guarantee the future. Similarly with the stages of the ethical ideal. God treats his children in an infinitely wise way. He sets before them at the early stages of the revelation of himself immediate objectives, without intimating clearly that they are but stepping stones to a higher and even to an ultimate ideal. This is a pedagogical measure only.

If it were not a pedagogical measure only there would be a fiat contradiction in Old Testament ethics. The ethical ideal of the Old Testament ethics is not any less absolute than the ethical ideal of the New Testament. Cursed is every one that does not do all the works of the law. Cursed is every one who does not do all the works of the law with his whole heart. That is an Old Testament requirement. Yet we see that God does actually permit of practices that correspond to lower ideals. We need only mention the matter of polygyny. Jesus makes perfectly plain that this permission was a pedagogical measure on
the part of God. From the beginning things were not so, he says, and things are not to be so in the future.

**The Sick Child**

With this we are ready to consider a further complication that sets in when we consider Old Testament ethics, namely, that the whole process of historical development through which the race would naturally have had to go has been modified in the form of its manifestation through the entrance of sin. If we may venture on the analogy of childhood once more we may say that the process of redemptive revelation may be compared with a convalescing child. The child must grow and it must at the same time fight disease. Sometimes its growth may be stunted altogether while all its energies are taken up with the warding off of disease. At other times there may be a wholly abnormal growth due to the fact that the patient does not get up and around. Such a child will often not know its own true interest. It may have to be operated on in the most critical situations. All manner of things must be done that would not be done in the case of a healthy child, in order to preserve its life and to assure its final growth. Certain things may even be allowed this child that would not be allowed a healthy child, in order that the child may recover health as well as attain maturity.

It is very difficult to distinguish between that which would have been necessary even if sin had not come in, and what is necessary only because of the results of sin. Yet it is necessary to remember these two points: (a) that the race would have had to go through a process of development even apart from sin, and (b) that when sin did enter it was naturally to be expected that this would complicate the process and make it look like anything but a normal one. We shall have occasion to refer to this more fully below.

**The Theocracy**

With these general considerations in mind we may now look directly at the ethical *summum bonum* of the Old Testament. That ethical *summum bonum* was the theocracy. It was by seeking with all its power the realization of the theocracy that Israel was to make its unique contribution to the development of the general human *summum bonum*, namely, the kingdom of God.

The theocracy answers to all four of the requirements of the redemptive ethical ideal that we have spoken of in the preceding chapter.

**The Absolute Ideal Of The Theocracy**

In the first place, it was an absolute ideal. God was gradually bringing man to the realization that he himself was the absolute ruler of men. The very nature of sin was that it set aside the word of God as man’s final authority. Man had to learn through a slow process that God is King of kings and Lord of lords. God was to be the direct ruler of Israel. In the first part of Israel’s national existence God even forbade them to have any earthly king at all. They had to learn that they were not like other nations. Then when God did allow them to have a king, he gave Israel to understand that their king was not a
king like other kings, but a king always under God. The prophetic office would always stand next to the kingly office in order that God could directly make his will known to the king.

Still further, Israel was throughout its history strictly forbidden to use political expedience as a guiding principle of state. The kings themselves had to learn this lesson first of all. And if they deflected from this principle most easily, because the pride of their hearts would lead them to assume a more independent course, then there would be the prophets to call them back or to provide another king who would do the will of Jehovah. No matter how critical the situation seemed to be, no matter how wise and expedient an alliance with some strong neighboring power might seem to be, the word of God through his prophets was the only thing that was to count. And that was true no less of the internal affairs of the kingdom than of its foreign policies. Israel was to be an absolutely God-directed people.

What was true for the nation as a whole was true for the individuals that comprised the nation. It is true that not as much attention is given to the individual as to the nation in the Old Testament. Yet it would be wholly impossible for the nation to be a true theocracy if the individuals that comprised the nation did not take the word of God as the guide for their lives. We shall not speak of this at length here. We only note that in the course of Old Testament history there have been many individuals to whom God came with a special test whether they would choose to guide themselves by his word alone. Of these individuals Abraham stands out as a supreme example. Abraham had to learn to practice the absolute obedience of faith. This appears especially at the very beginning of his contact with the living God. He had to be “blind” as to the future. When the call of God came to him to leave Ur of the Chaldees, all appearances were against the wisdom of his leaving. He simply had to take the word of God for it. Then when he was in Canaan he had to learn this lesson over and over again. The supreme example of this is the test God placed before him when he asked Abraham to offer his only son Isaac. Here again appearances were all against the wisdom of doing such a thing. In the first place it would seem to be a gruesome thing to do. It would break his father’s heart to do such a thing. In the second place, it would be hard for Abraham to believe that the true God would require such a sacrifice of him. In the third place, it was impossible for Abraham to see how the promises of God to him should be realized if he should slay Isaac. It was through Isaac that he was to receive the numerous offspring promised him. So God seemed to be not only cruel but also self-contradictory. Yet Abraham was placed before this test in order to see whether he would set aside all his previous interpretations about nature and history, and even about God himself, in order simply to obey the voice of God, trusting that God would cause history to come out as was best for Abraham, and would take care of the “contradictions” too. How marvelously Abraham stood the test. Hebrews tells of the victory. Abraham trusted that God was able to raise Isaac from the dead, if necessary. That took care of the history and the promises. And God did not actually want Abraham to offer Isaac, but stayed his hand at the critical moment. That took care of the “contradictions.” Surely there can be no doubt about the absoluteness of the ethical ideal of the Old Testament. It was a nation of Abrahams that God desired to form for himself.
Severities In Connection With The Absolute Will

At this point it should be noted that the very severity of the measures employed over and over again by God, both in the case of training individuals and in the case of training the nation as a whole, finds its explanation in the absoluteness of the ethical ideal. It is difficult for us to imagine that God should ever have given such a test as he gave to Abraham. And it would be out of accord with the whole principle of revelation to think that God would give such a test to anyone in the New Testament times. We do as a matter of fact find that God has not given any such test as that in the later stages of revelation. But in the early stage of revelation, we can see, if we really think into the nature of sin and the absoluteness of the ethical ideal, it was necessary that God should give such a test. If we add to this that Abraham was to be the father of the faithful, that his example of faith was to serve as a household word for centuries to come, we can understand that a test of absolute obedience was necessary.

And what God did with Abraham as an individual he did over and over again with the nation as a whole. We may call attention especially to the time when Jehovah threatened to destroy the whole nation after the sin with the golden calf. Was it such a wonder that Israel should do what it did in view of the heathen practices in the midst of which it had grown up? Could not God deal with them a little more gently than he did? No, he could not! It was an absolute ideal that he was placing before them. Again Moses could not see how the promises should be fulfilled. Moses saw “contradictions” in God who had promised one thing and now was going to carry out another thing. It was not till Moses was willing to give himself over unto death if only his people might live, that God revealed himself as not really intending to destroy the people.

Furthermore, if the severities of the Old Testament but establish the absoluteness of its ethical ideal, its concessions do not compromise it. In order to understand the nature of these concessions we must call to mind, the distinction we have drawn between the ultimate and the more immediate goal that God has set before his people. The theocracy itself is only a stepping stone to a higher theocracy. Even if it had been fully realized, according to the ordinances of God given for it, it would have had, in the whole history of redemption, only a temporary significance. By that we do not mean an unimportant significance. We mean the significance that childhood has for maturity.

The Concessions

Furthermore, if the severities of the Old Testament but establish the absoluteness of its ethical ideal, its concessions do not compromise it. In order to understand the nature of these concessions we must call to mind, the distinction we have drawn between the ultimate and the more immediate goal that God has set before his people. The theocracy itself is only a stepping stone to a higher theocracy. Even if it had been fully realized, according to the ordinances of God given for it, it would have had, in the whole history of redemption, only a temporary significance. By that we do not mean an unimportant significance. We mean the significance that childhood has for maturity.

It is this same principle that we shall have to apply if we consider what are more generally spoken of as concessions of God to lower ethical ideals. We cannot discuss these points in detail. We may refer to the excellent discussion of the details given in the Notes on Old Testament Ethics by William Brenton Greene. He defends Old Testament ethics against the charge that it presents God as being sometimes “partial, hateful, revengeful, and otherwise morally unworthy” and that he sanctions immoral actions on the part of man. The case of polygyny being tolerated in the Old Testament is the classic illustration of the supposed low type of Old Testament ethics. Yet, as Dr. Greene points out, Jesus himself interprets this as a pedagogical measure on the part of God in order to lead Israel on to the absolute ideal. It was for the hardness of man’s heart, and for the blindness of man’s eyes that God was willing to come down so low as to tolerate for a
time that which is ideally out of accord with the absolute standard, so long as it was a
stepping stone toward the absolute ideal. God frequently set the absoluteness of the ideal
before men very vigorously. And that might lead us to ask why he did not do this
consistently and at once set up the absolute ideal along the whole front of the ethical life.
If God expects Abraham to be so absolutely submissive as to be willing to sacrifice his
only son, why does he not also demand absolutely monogamous marriage on the part of
Abraham? The answer to this, we believe, must be found in the analogy of the
convalescent child. The convalescent child needs strong medicine in order to live. It may
need many varieties of strong medicine. But if these were all administered at once the
child would die. So too if God had maintained the absolute standard at once along the
whole front of the ethical life, we can see that he would not have attained his purpose. It
was the all-wise physician who was healing his patient slowly, and giving him just the
medicine that he could bear, and no more.

This pedagogical and this medical principle of redemptive ethics should not be
interpreted as being a concession to the notion that man’s ability of living up to God’s
commands is God’s standard by which he gives his demands. If we speak of a
pedagogical principle alone we are easily led to think falsely. We are then easily led to
say that we do not expect as much of a child as we expect of a full-grown man. But the
childhood analogy holds only in part. The human race began with Adam as a full-grown
man wholly responsible for his deeds. He was given one wife; monogamous marriage
was a creation ordinance of God which was obliterated in the minds of man for no other
reason than that of sin. Hence we must add the idea of a medicinal principle to that of a
pedagogical principle. And even this is open to misinterpretation. A child that is sick is
not sick because of any special sins of its own. Yet the race is sick because of its own
sins, and for no other reason. It is therefore only partially true to say that the lower
demands of Old Testament ethics are due to the fact that God adjusts his demands to the
times. That God makes concessions to low ethical practice is not in the least an admission
that he has not the right to demand the fulfillment of the absolute ethical ideal.

Grace In The Old Testament

The very absoluteness of the ideal was calculated to teach Israel that it had to be a gift
of God if it was to be reached at all. The law was all-inclusive and exhaustive in its
demands. In trying to fulfill it the Israelites would experience their inability to fulfill it.
This very fact that God uses this seemingly roundabout way of inculcating the idea of
free grace into the hearts of his people instead of saying to them simply, as Paul says to
the New Testament believers, that they must be saved by grace, indicates that Israel could
learn the idea of free grace in no other way than by a spiritually agonizing process of
seeking to save themselves by the fulfillment of the law and failing in its effort.

With respect to the teaching of the free grace of God we may note briefly what
happened both in the case of individuals and in the case of the nation as a whole.

As to individuals, Jehovah sought to inculcate the conception of free grace especially
at the beginning of the theocracy. He made plain to Abraham that he was taken out of Ur
of the Chaldees not because of any inherent goodness of his own but simply on account
of God’s free choice of him. It was made plain to Abraham that the promise of a
numerous offspring was not given for any other reason than the free grace of God. Then
in the case of Isaac, it is important to note that his very birth was a miracle. Sarah was past age when Isaac was born. This was to teach Abraham that he was not only dependent upon the free grace of God as far as the promise itself was concerned but also for the means by which that promise was to be fulfilled. Abraham learned this lesson gradually. He had taken Hagar to wife in order through her to obtain the promises. Then God appeared to him and said, “I am El Shaddai,” by which he meant that he was the God who could take the natural means and make them subservient to the realization of his promises. Abraham had to learn to rely on God rather than take things into his own hands. Similarly with the “sacrifice” of Isaac. It was God’s purpose to teach Abraham that he was able to raise Isaac from the dead. This story of the “sacrifice” of Isaac, as we have seen, was calculated to bring out that the ethical ideal was absolute. It was also and at the same time calculated to teach Abraham that the absolute ideal would be reached by no other way than by the grace of God.

As to the story of Jacob’s life, we observe that it more than anything else up to this time was calculated to teach that it is God’s electing grace alone that brings in the kingdom. In Isaac it was particularly shown that the means by which the kingdom was to be established was to be miraculous; in Jacob it was particularly shown that the recipients of the kingdom are in themselves utterly unworthy. The story makes plain that Jacob had no advantages over Esau in any sense. They were born of the same mother. This had not been the case with Isaac and Ishmael. Jacob and Esau were not only born of the same mother, but were twins. Yet Esau is the first-born, and the fights of the first-born were very great. In addition to this, Jacob was not as noble a character as was Esau. He did not have enough faith in God to believe that in God’s own time and in God’s own way the promise to him would be fulfilled. He took matters into his own hands. The Lord wanted to teach that even with such people as Jacob the Lord was willing to establish his kingdom. Paul points to this in Romans when he indicates that God’s electing love appeared most clearly at this point.

It is this same electing love that appears again when God makes plain to Israel as a nation over and over again that he has not chosen them as a nation because they were greater in number or better than other nations. They were inferior to other nations as Jacob was inferior to Esau. Then too, they made themselves totally unworthy over and over again. At various times the Lord even threatened to destroy their very existence. Moses’ intercessory prayer was calculated to teach Israel that their very existence could be tolerated only upon the ground of Jehovah’s mediatorial work. Back of this mediatorial work was the great name of Jehovah himself. It is because he wants to preserve his own great name that he will answer the mediatorial prayers of Moses.

Meanwhile, Jehovah was making it clear that just as the nation itself owed its origin and its continued existence to acts of God’s grace, so too it owed its origin and its continued progress toward its goal to the miracle-working power of God. The nation was born in miracle and it was preserved by miracle. Israel could never have loosened the strangle-hold of Egypt without the miracles of God. They were planted in Canaan by miracle. They were preserved in Canaan by miracle. At every national crisis it was miracle and nothing else that saved them.

The nation is born in miracle and preserved by miracle. Yet it is also true that Jehovah threatened to destroy the nation because of the sin of the worship of the golden calf. Then too there was throughout the history of Israel a very strict insistence on the
external observance of the various detailed laws of the theocracy. It seems as though salvation itself depended upon this external observance more than upon the faith in the gracious power of God. The law itself was given after the promise. It was meant to be a part of the covenant of grace. Yet it is also true that the law is presented as though one should seek by obedience to it, apart from grace, to enter into the promises. If any man did not live up to the requirements of the law he was stoned to death without mercy.

All this would seem to be contradictory. Yet it is not contradictory. It only shows that God was teaching the doctrine of free grace gradually, just as he was teaching the doctrine of an absolute ideal gradually. Jehovah was inserting just as much instruction as his people could stand and no more. All this involved a wearisome process on the part of Israel. Just as a patient nigh unto death lives in the fear of death even while actually on the way to recovery, so Israel lived under the dispensation of condemnation. It seemed to them on the one hand that Jehovah expected of them ethical as well as forensic perfection, immediate as well as future perfection, if they were to enter upon the promises, while on the other hand it seemed to them as though their own deeds had nothing to do with the matter since they were sometimes forbidden to do anything at all in the way of seeking to realize the promises. All this Paul brings to expression when he says, speaking of the privileges of the new dispensation, “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba Father,” (Rom 8:15) or again, “For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory” (2 Cor 3:9).

**Gradual Destruction Of Evil**

We now turn briefly to see that what holds true with respect to the bringing in of the absolute ethical idea and the bringing in of the conception of free grace also applies with respect to the principle of the destruction of evil.

We can be brief on this point inasmuch as we have already used material that might be discussed under this head in order to illustrate God’s method of bringing in his absolute ideal. We have already referred to the fact that on the one hand Abraham was required to live up to an absolute standard of obedience and on the other hand was allowed to have two wives. We now look at this same fact from the point of view of the destruction of evil. Jesus gives us his interpretation of this by saying that divorce was allowed in the Old Testament times under certain regulations for the hardness of men’s hearts’ sake. This interpretation of Jesus gives us the key to the whole problem of the seemingly lower ethical standards of the Old Testament. It shows that God has not at all lowered his standard but that he is temporarily bringing the absolute standard down to the level of the people in order to insert the redemptive principle gradually. In Matthew 5.21–48 Jesus expounds this principle with respect to several of the Old Testament ordinances. In each case he shows that he is not bringing in anything different from the Old Testament but that he is only carrying through the program of the Old Testament to its logical conclusion. The requirement of the law was complete perfection. Jesus says that he has not come to destroy the law on this score but rather to establish it. He ends this section by saying, “Be ye therefore perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.” Certainly then all evil must be destroyed.
Yet in the Old Testament the nationalism and the externalism of the age prevented Israel from seeing the full implication of this requirement. As to the nationalism we may say that on the one hand it was involved in the promise to Abraham from the beginning that nationalism would be a passing stage, since Abraham was to become a blessing to the world. On the other hand it seemed as though the whole promise was to be wrapped up in the national existence of Israel. And this seems to be a contradiction. But it is no contradiction, since God was bringing the absolute ideal close to the consciousness of the people by identifying it with the proximate ideal. Then as to externalism we have the same sort of seeming contradiction. On the one hand the law requires that men shall love the Lord their God with all their hearts. The ideal of absolute internal perfection is set before the people without compromise. On the other hand there is so much emphasis upon the external fulfillment of the law that it seems as though God will overlook a good deal of internal evil if only the requirements of the law are met externally. This “contradiction” too is resolved if we note that God was gradually seeking to inculcate the absolute ideal of both internal and external perfection.

**Old Testament Hope**

Finally we must observe that what is true of the absolute ideal, of the free grace of God, and of the destruction of evil, is also true with respect to the idea that the absolute ideal is a matter of hope.

In illustration of this we may turn again to Abraham. Abraham must learn that the fulfillment of the ideal lies in the future. It was not for himself but for posterity that he had to leave Ur of the Chaldees. And more than that we learn from Hebrews that Abraham was taught to look further than earthly things, though the promises as given spoke only of earthly things. He looked for a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. That was the hope of Abraham’s faith and in it he became an example for all the faithful. That hope was exercised throughout his life. He who received the promise that he should inherit the land as far as he could see in all directions did not own a foot of ground in which to bury his wife. He who had the promise that his seed should be as the stars of the heaven and as the sand by the seashore did not have a son until the old age of himself and his wife. On the other hand, the fact that the promises to Abraham were couched in terms of earthly things alone shows that God was bringing the absolute ideal of the far distant future of the new heavens and the new earth closer to Abraham by identifying it with the earthly Canaan. This far distant earthly future ideal was also brought closer to Abraham in the fact that Abraham was a wealthy man. God increased his possessions. He was, moreover, a man of power with whom his neighbors had to figure in their plans.

It would be instructive to look at the history of Job from this same point of view. We can only make a few remarks with respect to it. The story of Job illustrates that in the kingdom of God, righteousness, holiness and blessedness belong together. When Job has maintained his righteousness and holiness in the face of great temptation, God makes him rich again. That is the teaching of the New Testament as well. Yet it will not be till in the new heavens and the new earth, when paradise lost has become paradise regained, that this will be fully true. Between the time of paradise lost and paradise regained the balance will not always be maintained. More than that, it may even be said that it seems as though
it is often true that those who are righteous are not as prosperous as those who are not righteous. At any rate there is great unevenness throughout the course of history. And this unevenness itself was calculated to make men look to the future. But it was more difficult for men of the old dispensation to look to the absolute future of the new heavens and the new earth than for men in the new dispensation. Therefore God graciously brought the future closer to them by identifying it with a close future on this earth. God promised a land that would flow with milk and honey. And to the patriarchs he demonstrated this principle that righteousness and holiness and blessedness belong together by actually giving them great wealth. So Job was wealthy at first and Job was once more a wealthy man when he had stood the test. That test itself consisted in God’s searching his heart whether he would retain his righteousness and holiness when his “blessedness” was taken from him. In other words, the real test was whether Job was satisfied to look to the future for his blessedness while retaining his righteousness and holiness in the present. But gradually the vision of the future dawned upon him and then he gladly submitted to the unevenness of the present. And when he did submit to the unevenness of the present, God removed that unevenness. And it is this that distinguishes the Old from the New dispensation. In the New Testament God expects his people to live more fully into the absolute future than in the Old Testament. He expects of them that they will be able to sustain the unevenness of the present to the day of their death, since they have a clearer revelation of the new heavens and the new earth. In the Old Testament, on the contrary, God condescends to give an external manifestation of the principle that righteousness, holiness and blessedness belong together.

We can see this principle operate on a national scale in the fact that the Israelites were promised length of life and health as well as a land flowing with milk and honey if only they would be obedient to Jehovah. In this way they would be externally distinguished from their neighbors not only in their righteousness and holiness, but also in their blessedness.

Thus the Old Testament *sumnum bonum* stands before us in its broad outlines. It is the redemptive *sumnum bonum* in its earliest and therefore lowest form of realization. As a seriously sick patient may lie for weeks at the brink of death, so that we cannot see whether progress is being made, so also it is very gradually that we see (a) the absoluteness of the ethical ideal; (b) the notion that it must be a gift of God’s grace; (c) the principle of the complete destruction of evil; and (d) the hope for the future, develop in the consciousness of the people of God. And as in the case of the patient who has once overcome those first stages shows signs of rapid improvement, so also we may note that when the first slow and bitter stage of the insertion of the redemptive ideal is over, things manifest a sudden change in every respect. And it is to that change that we must now turn as we consider the New Testament *sumnum bonum*. 
Chapter 10: The New Testament Summum Bonum

The difference between the Old and the New Testament ethical ideal is that the New Testament presents the requirements of the redemptive ethical ideal more clearly than does the Old Testament. In fact we depend largely upon the New Testament in order to see what the Old Testament ethical ideal was.

The New Testament Absolute Ideal

In the first place, we may note that since the New Testament believer has a clearer insight into the principles of ethics than the Old Testament believer had, he can more clearly see the true relations of all things. He stands, as it were, upon a mountain peak, while the Old Testament believer had his vision obstructed by surrounding mountains. It follows that the absoluteness of the moral ideal of man stands before him more clearly than it did before the Old Testament believer.

This greater clarity of vision with respect to the absoluteness of the ethical ideal applies, first of all, intensively. The New Testament believer has a far greater consciousness of sin than the Old Testament believer had. It is true that there were individuals in the Old Testament times who realized that God required truth in the inward parts, but, speaking generally, there is a far greater internalism in the new day than there was in the old. The New Testament believer sees clearly that external obedience will not suffice. He seeks to overcome the position of a servant with that of a son.

As a true son of God, the New Testament believer turns back to the story of creation. He sees the vision of what God had in mind for man. He seeks therefore to increase in the spontaneity of his reaction to the will of God for himself and for the world. He sees more clearly than ever before that God wants man to reflect his moral glory. It is that which Jesus’ words meant to him: “Be ye therefore perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.” He seeks also to increase in the stability with which he keeps this ideal of God for man before himself. He sees clearly that stability within him rests upon the finished work of Christ. He knows that the posse peccari of Adam has been changed with him, in principle, through the substitutionary work of Christ, to the non posse peccari. He knows that which is born from above cannot sin (1 Jn 3:9). He knows that he is righteous and holy in the sight of God since God regards him not in himself but in Christ. It is this certainty with respect to the objective foundation of his perfect relationship to God that furnishes the subjective strength to go on with a steadfast hope and step. Nor is he disheartened by the fact that he has not yet reached perfection in degree. The Old Testament believer could not clearly distinguish between the perfection which he has through the work of Christ, and the perfection which God seemed to require of him directly. The New Testament believer sees clearly that his perfection is substitutionary. And it is this that enables him also to see that he must distinguish between forensic and ethical perfection. That is, the believer is perfect in principle, in Christ, but not in degree while he is in this world. And having clear insight in these distinctions, he is not trying in any sense to gain salvation by the works of the law. He realizes that the foundation of his salvation has been laid by Christ, and that all his works could not add one bit to this
foundation. He realizes that the motive for the doing of good works is none other than gratitude for salvation received as a gift of the grace of God. It is that which gives the greater stability to his ethical program than anything else could give.

A still further point that should be noticed with respect to the greater internality of the New Testament ideal is that the New Testament believer sees more clearly than the Old Testament believer did that there must be one unified controlling principle back of all his ethical striving. We have noted that in the case of Abraham God required of him absolute surrender at one point, namely, at the point of his willingness to sacrifice his only son; while at another point, namely, the matter of bigamy, God seemed to be very lenient. The reason for this was not that God was lowering the absoluteness of the ethical ideal, but that he was bringing the absolute ideal as close to man as it had to be brought for man to understand the first principles of it. But now in the new dispensation the believer sees clearly that he who has broken one commandment of the law has broken the whole law. “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (Jas 2:10). Again we emphasize that this was known in the Old Testament too. There too it was made plain that everyone who does not all that is written in the book of the law is accursed of God. Yet this fact did not come clearly to the minds of the Old Testament believers, as the very fact that God made concessions with respect to divorce proves.

The Example Of Christ

In this connection we must discuss briefly what we should mean when we say that Christ is our example or our ethical ideal. There is much false teaching on this subject in the Church at present.

Modernism has taken the idea of Christ as an example out of its Christian theistic setting and has caused it to float on the shoreless ocean of non-theistic thought. Men assume that the idea of a perfect Christ fits in with the evolutionary scheme of reality. One of the most common sayings of modernism is that origin does not determine validity. By that is meant that though man has sprung from a non-moral and a non-rational background, we need not look backward to this origin, but may expect great things from man in spite of his origin. So also it is assumed to be quite reasonable to assume that the person of Jesus could have come out of the evolutionary process. Or, if men do not argue that it is possible, they will say that it is a fact, whether logically possible or not. We have the fact of evolution, and we also have the fact of Jesus’ personality. But all this is amazingly naive. The evolutionary idea is part of the whole non-theistic philosophy, and, as such, holds that evil is as basic as the good. Hence, there is no reason to believe that perfection has ever been actual, or even that it may be possible. On the other hand, if we say that for evolution anything is possible, since it believes that rationality itself and morality itself somehow have sprung into existence from the non-rational and the non-moral, this is true, but this also is to admit that the whole of morality is a matter of chance and therefore has no significance.

The first point, then, that we must see clearly, is that if the idea of the example of Jesus is to mean anything for us it has to be on the basis of our belief in the creation story. If the perfect man Jesus is to be of any service to us, the constitution of the universe must be such that perfection is a concept that has cosmic significance. It is because man once was perfect that the words of Jesus: “Be ye therefore perfect as your
Father in heaven is perfect” can have meaning for him. Without that background Jesus would have been speaking “ins Blaue hinein.” There would be no moral responsibility at all, and no sense in any one moral being addressing other moral beings on moral subjects unless this were a moral universe, and there can be no moral universe except upon a theistic basis.

In the second place, the example of Jesus presupposes the fall of man. This is naturally implied in the first point. Without creation one cannot have the fall, and if one believes in creation, one must also believe in the fall. If man was created perfect, the fall is the only explanation for the fact of evil. So Christ holds up his own perfect example to us because it is our business to be perfect and because we are ourselves solely responsible for our present evil estate. This gives the note of absolute authority to the example of Jesus. Jesus’ example is not merely good advice, as modernism holds that it is. The judgment stands back of the example of Jesus. Those who are not willing to be like him will be condemned by him. And even those who say that they are willing to be like him but are not like him will be condemned by him.

In the third place, the example of Jesus presupposes his substitutionary atonement. As the fall of man is implied in the creation story, so the substitutionary atonement is once more implied in the idea of the fall of man. Sin is, because of the original perfection of man, such an awful thing and, renders man so completely hopeless that he cannot take the first step on the way to his own recovery. Hence, we have seen, the kingdom of God as man’s sumnum bonum must not only be placed before man as his absolute idea, but must also be presented as the gift of God’s grace to him. Now Jesus does not place himself as an example before man as though man could just begin to follow him of his own accord and in his own strength. Nor is it as though Jesus allows that men can follow him for a good way in their own strength, while for the absolute ideal that he sets before them he is willing to help them with his grace. Jesus nowhere allows that men can take even the first step in the direction of following him unless they have been saved from their sins by his redemptive work. He that came into the world to save sinners from the wrath to come, how could he offer himself as an example to man except on a basis of his finished work on Calvary? Modernism has with its superficial Sunday school literature run roughshod over all of these three points.

When modernism runs roughshod over these three points it is clear that its conception of following Jesus should be set over against the Christian conception of following Jesus in all the literature that we put out, especially for the Sunday schools. It is a culpable neglect on the part of the orthodox churches if they permit the modernists to write Sunday school literature that is used in the instruction of the children of believers.

Still further, we should note that these points, creation, the fall, and the substitutionary atonement, imply certain limitations on the idea of Jesus as our example even if we do not wish to take it in the modernistic sense. The imitation of Jesus literature has not always been free from a pantheistic tint. People have easily misunderstood Jesus’ words about his identity with the Father and his absolute communion with the Father to imply that they too as human beings must imitate Jesus in seeking complete identification with and union with the Father. In this sort of imitation of Jesus the bounds between the Creator and the creature have all too often been neglected. Jesus never meant to wipe out the boundary between the Creator and the creature. All his work presupposed the creation story. Hence he could not mean that we should seek fellowship with the Father by way of
essential union with him. He always means that our following him in his love for God must be a finite imitation of that which is infinite. Our whole moral life must be a finite replica of the eternal glory of God. As creatures we are to be like God because we were created in his image. But the fact that we were created in his image and therefore should be like him may never make us forget that we were created in his image, so that we can never and should never strive to be identical with him.

Moreover, what holds with respect to the difference between the Creator and the creature when we are told by Jesus that we must be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect holds also with respect to his setting himself as an example for us directly. Here the danger of pantheism is even greater than at the former point. Here Christian mysticism has often run into non-Christian mysticism. It will readily be admitted by some that we cannot imitate God by being just like him in every respect since he is eternal and we are temporal, but it will not so readily be admitted that Christ too is eternal and that we are temporal, so that our imitation of him must always keep in mind this limitation. Has not Christ appeared on earth? And is he not much nearer to us than is God? There is an element of truth in this. Christ has assumed our human nature so that the imitation of Christ comes closer to us than the imitation of God. Yet even so Christ ever was and ever remains the second person in the blessed Trinity. Hence our imitation of his person must always keep in mind that he is our Creator and that we are his creatures. Hence our imitation of him should never involve an attempt to be one with him in essential union. Our mystical union with Christ must always be and must always remain an ethical union of one divine person and one human person. Our imitation of Christ must always be an imitation of God.

The misunderstanding with respect to this point has come about to a large extent by the modernist idea of a Christ-like God. As this phrase is generally used, it presupposes that God was, in his being, far away from man till Christ brought him near to us. Or in other words, the supposition is that the idea of God is in itself an abstract idea, while Christ has made that idea concrete to us by “revealing the Father” to us through his own appearance in the midst of us. Here too we find that there is an element of truth. There is a sense in which the idea of God was far from man till Christ came. There is a sense in which the idea of God was abstract to man till Christ came. But in what sense this is true we cannot clearly see till we have first looked at the other side of this matter. That other side is that, originally, God was very near to man. God walked and talked with man in the garden. That does not mean that God was actually man, but it does mean that God was immediately present to man’s consciousness. It is true that the implication of the God-consciousness would become increasingly clear to man as time went on, so that, when time went on through the devious path of sin and redemption, the incarnation, and what followed in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, became the outstanding means of bringing God close to man. This implies also, however, that the abstractness of the God-concept, and the faraway-ness of God, is due to an ethical and not to a metaphysical alienation, is due primarily to sin and not to creation. Hence we do not tell the story properly if we present the matter as though God is naturally far distant from man but that Christ has brought him near to us. We do not tell the story well if we present the matter as though the human race has really for the first time seen the face of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and is therefore for the first time able to live the God-like life. Man was once able to live the God-like life, without Christ. Man once did live the God-like life
without Christ. The incarnation would not have been necessary to reveal the Father to man unless man had sinned against the Father and had thus ethically estranged himself from the Father. On the other hand, it is true that the fulness of the kingdom of God as the summum bonum of man could not appear at the outset of history. It would have to appear gradually. Hence when, because of sin, the incarnation became necessary, it is true that the fulness of the summum bonum of man came to clearer expression in the person of Christ than it had ever come to expression before. Christianity is always to be regarded as restorative and as supplementary.

If these matters with respect to the person of Christ in the economy of redemption be held in mind, it will also appear what the place of Christ is in the summum bonum of man. We have seen that the whole of the created universe, and particularly mankind, was to be a finite replica of the kingdom of God. Hence we said that man’s ethical ideal is the realization of the kingdom of God. Sin came into the world and would have broken the process by which the realization of the kingdom of God was being effected. Then Christ came in order to enable man to realize the kingdom of God once more. He reiterated the absolute ideal. He gave men the kingdom again as a gift of grace through his sacrifice. He became their King to lead them on to the destruction of evil in the universe. He went before them to prepare the kingdom in the world to come.

Keeping this place of Christ with respect to the kingdom of God in mind, we can see, in large features at least, just what place the idea of the imitation of the life of Christ should take in our notion of the summum bonum. That imitation must always remember that Christ is the Mediator.

If we remember that Christ is God, we shall never transgress on the boundary line between the Creator and the creature. We do not, like modernism, drag his example down to the level of that of one human person following another human person. We realize that as a divine person he has assumed a human nature. In this human nature he had a perfect soul and a perfect body. In this perfect soul and perfect body, Jesus gave to us a perfect finite replica of the moral glory of God. Hence we have, in the human nature of Christ, an expression of God’s ideal for us, which helps us to realize directly what that ideal is. In that human nature we have something definite as to what God wants us to be in our individual and in our social life. Yet it should be remembered that this does not imply that the whole of Christian ethics is simply a matter of asking, “What would Jesus have me do?” There is a sense in which this common question may be asked and asked wrongly. The right way of asking this question is to ask what the direct example or the implication of the example of Christ, based as it is upon his own substitutionary work, would be for the ethical situation for which we seek enlightenment. We emphasize this matter of implication since, in the nature of the case, the direct example of Jesus did not cover all our ethical situation. There are many social relations into which we enter into which he could not enter. Moreover, Christ did not come at the end of time. We have seen that the kingdom of God was to be realized not by individuals only, but by the race as a whole through the whole course of history. Hence we cannot merely look back to Jesus. We have to look back to Jesus in order, with him, to look forward to our future ethical task. This enables us also to see that Jesus himself helps us to look to the creation story in order from it to learn what God wanted man to be and what he wanted the whole kingdom of God to be. Jesus’ example gives us anew and more fully than ever a vision of the kingdom of God as it is set before man at creation.
In the second place, when we ask the question as to what the example of Jesus means to us, we must remember that his place in the kingdom of God is primarily that of Mediator. As the second person of the Trinity he is, of course, the One who has, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, set before man the kingdom as man’s *summus bonum*. Then as Mediator he has come into the world, assuming a human nature, in order in it to suffer the penalty for our destroying instead of building the kingdom, and in order to give us power to begin building the kingdom anew. Thus his example is always a secondary matter. It is something that follows upon his mediatorial work, but would be meaningless without it. Hence, too, in many things that he did as Mediator, we cannot and should not try to follow him. There is much misunderstanding on this point. Nothing is so common in modernist pulpits as to have Jesus put on a par with or at the lead of a group of human individuals who have, each in his own age and in his own way, but all according to the same principle of self-sacrifice, given his life for his fellow men. This juxtaposition of Jesus with martyrs and heroes in general rests upon the denial of his mediatorial work. It goes without saying that no human being can imitate the mediatorial work of Christ. It would be a gross sin for us to try to imitate the mediatorial work of Christ. It would be to deny the uniqueness of that work. It would result in the failure to reap the benefit of that work, and therefore in the failure of every effort we make to help our fellow man. We should therefore carefully distinguish between various kinds of self-sacrifice. There is first, the sacrificial work that is done by non-Christians on the basis of common grace. So, for instance, non-Christians may give their lives for their country in a righteous cause and be worthy of honor for it. In distinction from this sacrificial work in which non-Christians engage is the sacrifice required of Christians because they belong to Christ. Because they belong to Christ, Christians must sacrifice freely for all men, even for those who are not of the household of faith. Christ says that we must take his cross upon us. It is this that the martyrs of the Church have done in an outstanding manner. And this suffering for the cause of Christ must, in a sense, be done in imitation of Christ. We must portray something of the patience of Christ when we suffer for his name. Yet the suffering of Christ is absolutely unique. It was not, first of all, the example of Christ’s suffering that enabled the martyrs to suffer in the way they did. It was primarily the substitutionary character of Christ’s suffering that enabled the martyrs to suffer as they did. It was because he faced the hosts of darkness alone that they could face the darkness of death with songs on their lips. None of the martyrs thought that they could duplicate the sufferings of Jesus. It was, to be sure, the example of Christ that they followed, but always the unique example of Christ. And what holds with respect to the martyrs’ following the unique example of Christ holds for the whole question of following the example of Christ: we should follow the example of Christ, but never forget that it is a unique example.

We see then that the absolute ethical *summus bonum* stands before men more clearly in the New Testament than it does in the Old. And the example of Christ has helped to place the ideal more vividly before man than it had ever been placed before him till Jesus’ day. Christ emphasized the greater spontaneity and stability and momentum required of the New Testament believer as he seeks to realize the kingdom of God.
We can now be more brief with respect to the three remaining characteristics of the New Testament. The same principles that apply to the matter of the absoluteness of the *summum bonum* also apply to these other matters. It is all a matter of clearer revelation of the principles that were already made manifest in the Old Testament.

With respect to the fact that the kingdom is a gift of God’s grace, this is easily shown. It is patent on the face of it that the entire New Testament is full of the doctrine of the free grace of God. It is true that within the New Testament there is development of the idea of grace. It was not as clear in the first part of Jesus’ teaching with respect to the kingdom of heaven that it was to be a gift of grace as it was in the teaching of Paul.

Speaking of the righteousness of the kingdom spoken of by Christ in the sermon on the mount, Dr. Vos says, “It would be historically unwarranted to read into those utterances the whole doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ. It was impossible for Jesus to develop this doctrine with any degree of explicitness, because it was to be based upon His own atoning death, which still lay in the future!”¹ Or, again, he says: “Our Lord’s doctrine is the bud in which the two conceptions of a righteousness imputed and a righteousness embodied in the sanctified life of the believer still lie enclosed together. Still it should not be overlooked that, in more than one respect, Jesus prepared the way for Paul by enunciating principles to which the latter’s teaching could attach itself. He emphasized that in the pursuit of righteousness, the satisfaction of God should be man’s supreme concern. This, carried out to its ultimate consequences with reference to sinful man, could not but lead to the conception of a righteousness provided by God himself in the perfect life and atoning death of Christ.”² The true righteousness was to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees. It was to be attained by disciples only, by those who had been accepted by the Father.

This doctrine of free grace found its full expression in the epistles of Paul. Hence there can be no difference at bottom between the ethics of Paul and the ethics of Jesus. In Paul we have a full expression of that which was present in the teaching of Jesus.

For a long time the Pauline ethical ideal was obscured in the history of the Church. With the Reformation, when the Pauline theology was really discovered, Pauline ethics was also discovered. As the chief point in the soteriology of the Reformers was that man is saved by grace and not by the works of the law, so the ethics of the Reformation pointed out that man’s good works are in no sense to be accomplished in order to attain salvation. The believer must perform good works in order to express his gratitude to God for salvation received in Christ. And since it is in the Reformed churches that the doctrine of the free grace of God has been most faithfully preached, it has naturally also been in the Reformed churches that the ethical life has flourished most. There has been a far more faithful preaching of the law of God first of all as the source of our knowledge of sin and then as a norm for our gratitude to God in the Reformed churches than in any other churches.

¹ Geerhardus Vos: *Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church.*
Then, too, it should not be overlooked that it has been only in the Reformed churches that the motto of “Pro Rege,” that is, of the kingship of Christ in every sphere of life, has been carried out to any extent at all. Other churches which have seen something of the idea of free grace have engaged almost exclusively in individual soul saving. Unfortunately, practically all the churches that are evangelical at all at the present time have fallen into this anti-biblical individualism. Add to this that most churches have largely forgotten the doctrines of free grace, and it becomes apparent that the ethical ideal is far from being realized today. Modernism has returned to the righteousness of the Pharisees. It wants to gain heaven by good works. It seeks to live by the golden rule without the foundation of the righteousness of Christ.

But wherever and whenever the gospel of the free grace of God has free sway, it will be seen that the absoluteness of the ethical ideal is to some extent approached.

Wherever the gospel of the free grace of God is preached, men will have the true internalism we have spoken of. Only those who have seen the deep internal wickedness of their hearts accept the grace of God, and the grace of God begins by cleansing the heart, and afterward, the hands.

Wherever the grace of God is preached, man will show the true universalism spoken of. Those who hold to the grace of God see that there is no respect of persons with God.

Wherever the grace of God is preached, men will show the true spontaneity of seeking the kingdom of God. True spontaneity can come only where there is true joy. And true joy comes from a sense of complete forgiveness and acceptance with God. Those who have truly experienced the grace of God can say “Abba, Father.” It becomes the joy of their heart to do the will of the Father which is in heaven. David felt something of this when he said, “Oh how love I thy law.” But even then he could not love the law or the will of God as much as a New Testament believer can. Moreover, what was the experience of an individual here and there in the Old dispensation became the experience of the congregation of believers in the New Testament day. The prayer of Moses, “Oh, that all God’s people were prophets,” has been answered. Paul speaks of this when he rejoices that we all with unveiled face may behold the glory of our Redeemer. Wherever the grace of God is preached, men will show the true stability required of the members of the kingdom. They will naturally rely on nothing else while they know that with God all things are possible.

The New Testament Destruction Of Evil

It goes without saying that the absolute ideal could never be reached as long as there was any evil left in the universe. Yet it is very common to hear men say that in the New Testament the idea of negation has passed away. In the first place, it is said that the idea of ethics having anything to do with externals has been done away with in the New Testament. We are no longer considered morally impure when we are physically impure. Then, too, it is not a part of the New Testament teaching, as it was of the Old Testament teaching, that redemption has anything to do with the external world. When Jesus said that he came to bring life, he could not mean that he came to save us from physical death, but that he came to give us moral power. In the second place, it is said that in the New Testament ideal of love there is no limit and therefore no room for exclusion. We must love all men of whatever nationality and whatever standing, however much they hate us.
With respect to this interpretation of New Testament ethics, we may say first that it is
difficult to see how anyone can hold to such views and still teach that the New Testament
contemplates a perfect ideal. Granted that all men will, in the future, accept this Christian
ideal, what of those who have died and have not accepted this ideal? It will never be
possible to have a new heaven and a new earth on which righteousness shall dwell if all
the unrighteous ones come to life by the resurrection from the dead. Hence those that
claim the ideal of perfection for the New Testament and yet maintain that it does not
teach the destruction of evil, will have to deny the resurrection. But the resurrection is
plainly taught in the New Testament. Besides, those who hold such views would
themselves be teaching the destruction of evil, since many who do not accept the
Christian ideal would not be raised from the dead. That is, they would have to teach
annihilation, to say the least. The only alternative to this is to teach universalism. If the
New Testament ideal of a perfect universe is to be carried out, and there is to be love
inclusive of all, it means that all men who have died must eventually be saved, whether it
be by a second chance, or directly. This doctrine, too, is foreign to the New Testament.
As the tree falls, so shall it lie. We see, then, that the only thing that remains for those
who deny that the New Testament teaches the complete destruction of evil is to deny also
that the New Testament teaches the absolute ethical ideal. And it is this that is actually
done by modernism. It does this by denying that Christianity has anything to do with
physical evil. It does this by the adoption of the evolutionary view of the origin of man,
which is based upon the non-theistic notion that evil is as fundamental as the good.

The New Testament is consistent with itself in teaching both the absolute ideal and
the destruction of evil, and is also consistent with the Old Testament in that it carries
forth the teaching of the Old Testament in both these respects.

We have already seen that Jesus stressed the internality of the ideal of perfection. If
we look at this from the point of view we are now considering, it means that no evil
thoughts, desires, or ambitions are tolerated. The apostles followed out this teaching of
Jesus. They tell us that all things are open and naked before him with whom we have to
do. This teaching culminated in the book of Revelation, where the One who judges is
presented as the One whose eyes are as flames of fire. Hence, too, those who were to
enter the kingdom of which Jesus spoke were to have a righteousness that exceeded the
righteousness of the Pharisees.

In the second place, it made clear that the kingdom is not only to be more intensively
purified, but is also to be extended much more widely than formerly. The gospel of the
kingdom is to be preached to all nations. In this way, many of those who are now haters
of the kingdom will become lovers of the kingdom. All men are our neighbors whom we
must win for the kingdom. But it is just at this point that misunderstanding of the New
Testament ethical ideal creeps in. It is argued that since the New Testament tells us to
love all men, since it is so absolute in its demands of complete love that we must even
forgive our enemies, therefore it cannot be that it should also teach destruction of evil.
The fact of the matter is that the New Testament plainly teaches both. In order to see this,
we do well to begin with the conception of eternal punishment. Jesus taught this more
specifically than it had ever been taught before, perhaps nowhere so clearly as in
Matthew 25.46, “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous
into life eternal.”
There will be an eternal separation therefore of those who are members of the kingdom from those who are not members of the kingdom. And the reason for the separation is that some have loved the King, and others have not loved the King or the kingdom. Jesus says that all those who have not desired to have him as their King over them will in the judgment day be cast out into outer darkness. It is out of the question that we should interpret the New Testament command of universal love in such a way as to include the devil and his host. We have already noted in an earlier chapter that it is not a mark of piety to love those whom God hates with an exclusive hatred. God hates those whom he casts into perdition. It is only because of their hatred of him that he casts them out of his presence.

But then comes the more difficult part, that is, with respect to those who are still on earth. With respect to them it is true that God knows who really love him and who do not really love him. It is therefore also true that God loves those who love him and hates those who hate him even while they are on the earth. It will not do to say with respect to all men on earth that God hates only the sin but not the sinner. God hates the sinner. And it is on this basis that those who reveal themselves as haters of God in this world must not be tolerated as members of the Church of God. Here we enter the field of religion but it also has ethical significance. We must oppose with all our hearts and with all our minds the ethical program that those who deny Christ have made for themselves. That ethical program is, at bottom, the flat denial of our ethical program. If they succeed with theirs we cannot succeed with ours. All compromise is therefore strictly forbidden by our King. Even compromise that we engage in, as we say, in order to win others for the kingdom, is strictly forbidden by Christ. We should throw out the life line but may not allow ourselves to drown along with those whom we wish to save. Yet nothing is more common than to see kingdom members engage in ethical programs in conjunction with those who have a different ideal, with the avowed purpose of saving them.

But is it not true that God himself blesses all his creatures and that he gives a call to salvation to many who oppose him, and of whom he knows that they will never accept his offer? This is true. And this is our foundation in religion for following God’s example and offering the gospel to all men and pleading with men that they may accept the gospel. As God says that he offers entrance into his kingdom to whosoever will come, so we must make no limitations on our concern to take the gospel to all men. If God is able to hate those who are not his and yet offer them, while they are in this world, the gospel of salvation, we who do not know in advance whether someone may not still be converted, should surely seek to follow God’s example and seek by our love to him to win him for Christ. It is this policy that has been followed in the case of church discipline when the Church was more faithful to its Lord than it is now. The Church has not hesitated to excommunicate from its membership those who by their profession or by their life showed that they did not love God. At the same time, the Church has sought to labor with them still, in order to make them see the error of their way. It is this that should also be our guide in ethics. On the one hand, we should never allow ourselves to be blinded to the fact that someone who says he does not love our King or who shows that he does not love our King is at variance with our ethical ideal. For this reason we cannot at all cooperate with such a person. Yet we must continue to try to win such a one for our kingdom ideal. An analogy from the nature of war may serve to illustrate this point. As long as someone carries the flag of our opponents, we must seek to shoot him. Yet we
would like nothing better than to have our opponents come to our side by a recognition of our flag. But this can never be accomplished unless they swear off allegiance to their former flag.

Our conclusion can be no other, therefore, than that the destruction of evil is the condition for the realization of the perfect ideal of the kingdom. Hence it is that regeneration is the condition for entrance to the kingdom. He that is not born again cannot see the kingdom. Hence, too, conversion must be as much the subjective basis for the ethical activity of the Christian as the substitutionary death of Christ must be the objective basis. From this it may be seen how far the Church has in our time strayed from the true path. It advertises cooperation in all sorts of ethical activities without placing before men the need of their conversion. The Church asks men to join it in its philanthropic work without asking that they be converted first. It should be made perfectly plain that the philanthropic work of the Church is not based upon the same principle on which the philanthropic work of welfare agencies is built. The Church is built upon special grace, and the work of welfare agencies is built upon general or common grace. The Church must do good to all men, but most of all to those of the household of faith. The Church has ultimately a motive for its work different from that of welfare agencies. It is true that in ethics we do not deal with the Church directly. Yet it is also true that the same principle that guides a Christian in his religious life should also guide him in his ethical life. He must realize that he should give his cup of cold water to all men for the sake of Christ.

The second aspect of the extension of the idea of the destruction of evil has to do with the evil that is in the physical universe. We have seen that during the Old Testament time God brought the ideal of the absolute destruction of evil home to Israel by promising them release from the ravages of disease to a large extent, as well as delay of death, by promising them old age if they would walk in the way of the Lord. Here too it seems as though the New Testament teaches the opposite of this. Does not Jesus say that the tower of Siloam did not fall upon certain individuals because they were greater sinners than others? And is not a part of the New Testament outlook in general that we realize that a man may be righteous while not prosperous, and prosperous while not righteous?

With respect to this, we should note that we have found it to be true in general that Jesus goes back to things as they were in the creation ordinance. So it is here, also. Jesus does not for a moment do away with the creation ordinance that a perfect soul, a perfect body, and a perfect world go together. On the contrary, he established that relationship anew. He healed the souls of men. He drove out demons, he gave sight to the blind and stilled the sea. How then account for his teaching with respect to the tower of Siloam? The two are not contradictory. They can easily be harmonized if we keep in mind that Christ has given to his New Testament children the vision of the future.

**The New Testament Summum Bonum and The Future**

Thus we see that the question with respect to the destruction of evil of itself leads us to remark on the fourth aspect of the redemptive *summum bonum*, that is, that its realization lies in the future.

We have already adverted to Job when first discussing this question of the future. To a large extent the difficulty that Job had was that he was not able to see things at long
range. He knew that righteousness, holiness and blessedness belong together. On this point he was right, but the difficulty was that he could not see that they could be temporarily separated from each other. In order for Job to see the absolute ideal at all, he had to see it in a form that came very close to him. Then, when his blessedness was taken away from him, he only slowly began to see that there was a future in which matters would be rectified. So Asaph in Psalm 73 also struggled with the problem of how it was possible that the unrighteous should flourish in this world. That seemed to him to be flatly opposed to the promises of God. We can easily see why the problem should have been particularly acute for the Old Testament saints if we recall that God had promised them external prosperity if they were obedient to Jehovah. It is true that often they were not obedient and thus could not claim the promise of Jehovah. Yet it is also true that in comparison with the nations round about them they knew themselves to be God’s righteous people.

In the New Testament all this is to a large extent cleared up. In the first place, it is made clear that righteousness, holiness, and blessedness do belong together. Dr. Vos makes this abundantly clear in his work on Biblical Theology, and in his book, Concerning the Kingdom of God and The Church. He speaks of righteousness, conversion, and blessedness. We have spoken of righteousness when discussing the New Testament *summum bonum* as a gift of God’s grace. We have spoken of conversion when discussing the New Testament *summum bonum* and the destruction of evil. Now we must take up the matter of blessedness.

Dr. Vos makes plain that there is a two-fold aspect to Jesus’ teaching of the kingdom. Righteousness and conversion have to do with the present aspect of the kingdom, and blessedness primarily with the future aspect of the kingdom. Apart from the fact that those who are in the kingdom are now blessed, in the sense that they know themselves to be heirs of God, their actual and complete blessedness lies in the future. They cannot be completely blessed till all of sin and all of the results of sin are done away. Hence they cannot be perfectly blessed till their own souls are perfectly and permanently cleansed from the last remnant of sin. They cannot be perfectly blessed till their bodies are free from the last evil consequence of sin, that is, death. They cannot be fully blessed till all of nature be recast with glory resplendent. In short, they cannot be fully blessed till “the regeneration of all things.” Now it is because the New Testament believer has a clear insight into this future character of the final realization of the kingdom that he can see how God should allow in this world a temporary separation of righteousness and conversion from blessedness. In principle they belong together and always are together. In actual realization the one may be far ahead of the other. God did not need to give to the New Testament believers a sample of their actual togetherness as he gave to some of the Old Testament believers in order to make them see that they do actually belong together. God wants his New Testament believers to live on such a high level of spirituality for righteousness’ sake, for the sake of Christ, if necessary, all the while keeping their eyes fixed upon him who shall make all things work together for good for them that love him. It was because Abraham looked for the city that hath foundations whose builder and maker is God that he was able to live in patience without the fulfillment of the promises for many years. So it is because we have the vision of the future glorious coming of the kingdom that we can rejoice in the midst of tribulation, in the midst of adversity, individually and collectively.
Here we may briefly touch upon the ethical significance of the second coming of Christ. That coming will be catastrophic. That coming will be a free act of the Son of God. How then is it related to the ethical ideal that we have so far spoken of? Or is it perhaps not related to this ethical ideal at all?

Throughout the New Testament, the second coming is described as being the climax of the course of history. It is not till after certain things have taken place in the course of history that the Christ can come again. He himself tells us that. And this at once tells us a great deal as to what the relation of the second coming of Christ is to our ethical ideal. It tells us that we may never interpret the words of Jesus to the effect that we must wait for his coming to mean that we must sit idly by and be indifferent to the realization of the ideal on earth. There is a sense in which we must wait for the kingdom. It is certain that we can do nothing about its coming insofar as it is primarily a direct divine act. But it is equally certain that Christ himself has set an organic relation between that second and final coming of himself and our ethical activity on this earth. The fact that he tells us to pray, “Even so, Lord, come” in answer to his promise, “Surely I come quickly” proves that. The temptation is very great for the believers in these times when the Church is in apostasy, and its conquest of the world for Christ seems to be losing out, that they shall spend a great deal of their time in passive waiting instead of in active service. Another danger that lurks at a time of apostasy is that the few faithful ones give up the comprehensive ideal of the kingdom and limit themselves to the saving of individual souls. On the other hand there is a danger that we should think that since Christ has set before us the absolutely comprehensive ethical ideal of perfection for the whole universe, we can actually accomplish that ideal without or prior to his catastrophic return. If we begin to think that, the further danger is that we should think also that it can be obtained without the grace of God. We are not here concerned about the millennial doctrine as such. We only wish to point out that Christians should not forget that the second coming is organically related to our ethical program, and that this ethical program is all-inclusive. We must therefore work with all our might for its realization in every sphere of ethical activity. We may never allow ourselves to feel that the Lord is coming soon anyway, so that it is of no use to put too much energy into this or that sort of work. On the other hand, we should constantly realize that even with all our efforts the kingdom will never be fully realized on earth. If we keep these things in mind, if we work while it is day, he will suddenly come and say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

So then we see the *summum bonum* in the course of its history. At the end, as at the beginning, we see an absolute ideal. We see the human race as kings under the supreme King seeking increase in the spontaneity, stability and momentum in its seeking to realize the ethical program given it by God to do. We see such a historically constructed kingdom actually adding to the glory of God who is above history.

In the second place, we see sin come in. Then the kingdom must become a kingdom of grace if it was to be at all realized. Hence, to the mystery of how it is possible that the historical should be able to glorify the eternal comes the mystery of how, out of the sinful, the glory of God may be advanced. Yet we see that though the kingdom must be a gift, it may and must also be a task.

In the third place, now that sin has come into the world, a part of the task of the realization of the kingdom is taken up with the destruction of evil. Hence the paradox of
Christian ethics seems to become still more baffling. Some are graciously made children of the kingdom and others are not. Yet in this time-process the separation is not complete. Hence there seems to be a conflict for the Christian. He must seek the absolute destruction of evil, yet he must seek to bring salvation to the evil ones. The resolution of this difficulty, too, is found where the resolution of the two former difficulties was found. In fact, all three difficulties are but aspects of the one difficulty which we have already met at the outset, that is, How can the temporal add anything to the eternal? The various qualifications of evil and good do not add to the complication of the problem. If it can have meaning that the temporal should add to the glory of the eternal, it can also have meaning that a sinful temporal should add glory to the eternal. In both cases, the solution is found in the conception of the complete self-consciousness of God which we have found to be the epistemological and metaphysical foundation of Christian ethics. Hence it is possible to have something that is relative without being correlative. The temporal universe is relative without making God correlative to itself. Evil is relative without making God correlative to it. Hence also God can give a general offer of salvation without making his plan of redemption come to nought.

In the fourth place, the kingdom is a kingdom of hope. And that seems to add still more to the paradox of ethics. Ethics would seem to be something certainly for the present since it involves the activity of man here and now. Yet this also finds its explanation in the character of God, and in the fact of his creation of the temporal world. The meaning of history could not, in the nature of the case, come out in all its fulness till the completion of history. And then when sin entered and the kingdom had to be made a gift of the grace of God, the future realization of the kingdom would have to be, in a still deeper sense, the work of God alone, while also the work of man.
Chapter 11: The Standard Of Man In Paradise

We are looking at the whole ethical program of man under the idea of the kingdom of God. We have discussed the ethical sumnum bonum of man as being the realized program of God for man. It follows that we must think of the standard of ethics as the revealed will of God for man. It was God who set the ethical ideal for man; it is God also who gives to man the standard according to which he is to live in order to reach that ethical ideal.

At the outset we must note carefully what the relation is between the ethical ideal and the ethical standard. We have before indicated that the ideal is often spoken of as the good, while the standard is spoken of as duty, and the subjective principle by which man controls himself, as virtue. But in many cases writers on ethics do not make any clear distinction between these three. The reason for this is that some men say that it is man’s highest good to do his duty, or they say that it is man’s highest good to be virtuous. Now we are concerned here only with the relation of the good to duty. On this relation we may remark that, from a Christian-theistic point of view, it is necessary to distinguish between them, as it is necessary to distinguish between both of them and virtue. The reason for this is that the whole end and purpose of history lies, according to Christian theism, not in history itself, but beyond history, in the God of history. This God of history has set the kingdom of God as the climax of history. It is, to be sure, necessary for each individual in the kingdom to have an immediate end in mind for his own life. Yet the main thing that he should be concerned about is the final realization of the kingdom of God as a whole. This realization lies in the future. It is therefore impossible for him to see the end from the beginning. He does, to be sure, see the end from the beginning in a general way. Just as a sailor may know that the end of his journey lies three thousand miles west, so man knows in general that God wants to accomplish a certain end with the whole of history. But just as such a sailor needs a compass to guide him in his daily effort to make headway toward the end, so also man needs a standard that guides him day by day. This compass or standard of man’s ethical striving is the revealed will of God to him.

The Moral Consciousness Of Man

The first question that comes up with respect to this compass is as to where it is located. The common answer to this question is that it is located in the moral consciousness of man. That is, it may not be true that each individual man has within his moral consciousness a compass that will guide him correctly, but the race as a whole in its common consciousness has, we are told, a safe guide for its course of action.

But it will be seen that a still more fundamental question faces us at once if we say that the common consciousness of man is a safe compass for the race. The common consciousness of man is not nearly so common as its name would seem to indicate. Aside from the differences that obtain between nation and nation at the present time or at any other time, it is notorious that at different ages the “common consciousness” has changed its verdict about the actions of man. So then we have to ask why this is. Either of two explanations must be given to this phenomenon. It may be that the race is slowly seeking its way through history by the trial and error method. It may be that, as Columbus tried to
reach the Indies by going west instead of east as the common consciousness of sailors up
to his time had instructed them to do, so the common consciousness of modern times is
seeking the same end as the common consciousness of earlier times, but with better
knowledge of the method to be followed. Even so the common consciousness of today
may not know whether it is going to reach the Indies or not. It may have to reverse its
course of action in the future, as its predecessors have had to modify their course of
action in the past. So we see that we are back at the beginning, that is, we are back to the
place where we must look again at our metaphysical and epistemological presuppositions.

It will be seen at once that it is the non-theistic conception of the nature of reality that
makes men take such a view of the standard of ethics as we have just outlined. On the
non-theistic basis, the whole of history is adrift. No one knows to what it is drifting,

hence no one knows the end, the *summum bonum* for man. In short, there is no *summum
bonum* that is absolute on this basis. Hence there also can be no standard that is absolute.

But from the Christian-theistic point of view God has definitely set the end for man.
The end is therefore known to God. Hence, if we look at the pronouncements of the
“common consciousness” of man through the ages and see its contradictions amid its
seeming continuity, we know that something is wrong. We know that it cannot be, as
such, a trustworthy standard for man. Something must have happened to it, since we
know that an absolute God could not have created it with its present imperfection. In
short, we know that the present common consciousness only corroborates the idea of the
fall of man.

Accordingly, we shall be compelled to get back of this fall of man and see what was
the original state of affairs. It may be that after we have done so we may be able to attach
a certain amount of value to the common consciousness of man as it exists today, but it is
certain that it can never be our starting point when we discuss the standard of ethics.

Our reason for bringing in this point here is that it is all too common, even on the part
of thoroughly orthodox writers, to make too uncritical a use of the common
consciousness of man. So, for instance, in Charles Hodge’s *Systematic Theology* there is
a constant appeal to the common consciousness of man without any clear-cut definition
or description of that common consciousness from the Christian-theistic point of view.
We need only to reflect for a moment to realize that this common consciousness of man
is a very flimsy foundation upon which to base any arguments if the question pertains to
more than superficial matters. It may be said, for instance, that the common
consciousness of man condemns murder. True enough. Yet the more basic question
remains as to why it does. One does not find an answer from the common consciousness
of man on this point because, when an answer is sought to this question, the common
consciousness of man is no longer common, but divided. The consciousness of the
Christian condemns murder, in the last analysis, because murder breaks down the
kingdom of God and is therefore violation of the revealed will of God. The consciousness
of the non-Christian condemns murder for some reason that lies within the universe itself.
It may be that he considers it impudent for the individual or the race; it may be that he
finds it out of harmony with the constitution of things and therefore unaesthetic, or
illogical; it may be for any one or more of several other stated reasons, but these reasons
will never reach up to the will of God. Hence it follows that, for more than the most
superficial questions, there is no such thing as a common consciousness of man. Hence it
follows, too, that we must certainly not make the common consciousness of man a starting point for our main argument in the matter of a standard of ethics.

Yet it is on this foundation that all too often the whole structure of Christian ethics has been built. All too often it has been presented as though there is, first of all, that which Christianity has in common with all non-Christian ethics, and then there are special requirements that pertain to Christianity alone. The first may be spoken of as the first story of a house. So Roman Catholicism argues as though Christianity took the four cardinal virtues of Greek ethics as a first story, and merely added to it the three virtues of love, hope, and faith as a second story. But this is not true. The structure of Christian ethics is something that is different from all other systems of ethics. The first story of Christian ethics is built of different material from that of which non-Christian ethics is built, as well as is the second story. And it is to the difference of the first story that we must turn first.

This difference appears best if we note that the Christian ethics is the only ethics that is genuinely theistic. We are not now concerned to work out this point in detail. We have already spoken of it before. We only wish to make the point clear as far as the standard of ethics is concerned.

This difference is clear as far as the standard of ethics is concerned if only we keep in mind that, according to Christian ethics, the moral consciousness of man has never functioned apart from God, while according to all non-Christian ethics, the moral consciousness has always functioned apart from God. We do not mean that, according to the express statements of all non-Christian ethical writers, the moral consciousness of man has always functioned without God. Idealists would, of course, maintain that they make the moral consciousness to depend on God. We mean only that all non-Christians, whether idealists or pragmatists, have another God than we have, and since we cannot own their God as God at all, our statement must hold that only Christians think of the moral consciousness of man as functioning in relationship with God.

We mention this point here in connection with the story of paradise, because it is sometimes said that the only difference between idealist and Christian ethics is that the one figures with the fall of man and the other does not. This difference would be great enough, and really involves everything else. Yet we can point out more directly that, even if we ignore the fall for the moment, the difference between idealism and theism remains. The difference is here, exactly, that the idealist, as well as every other type of non-Christian ethics, thinks of the moral consciousness of man as operating independently of God. We cannot stop to develop this point. We may illustrate it with the attitude displayed in Plato’s dialogues. In the Euthyphro, a thing is not holy because God desires it, but God desires it because it is holy. In the Republic, Books 2 and 3, it is said that God could not be as certain myth represents him as being. That is, the principle of goodness is established by the moral consciousness of man first and afterward God is judged in accordance with this principle. The moral principles according to which God is judged are, to be sure, thought of by Plato as existing beyond man himself, even as being eternal. Yet the point is whether they are thought of as existing independently of God, and on this point the words of Professor Bowman sum up the whole matter when speaking of the Greeks he says that the personality of the gods was subordinated to the conception of the universe as a system of timeless moral principles. And what holds for Plato holds for all the modern idealists. Invariably one finds them surrounding the individual moral
consciousness with a comprehensive universe of impersonal principle. Idealism knows of no personality that is absolute.

**External And Internal Standards**

In opposition to this we ought to be clear that at the foundation of the Christian conception of this standard of ethics lies the conception of man’s original moral consciousness as having been created by God, and therefore as never having for a moment operated in independence of God.

Hence, it also follows that we can put the contrast between Christian and non-Christian conceptions of the standard of ethics by saying that, according to Christian ethics, the standard of men’s moral activity is the revealed will of God, while, according to all other conceptions, man’s own independent moral consciousness is the standard. The point is that, before man had fallen into sin, God was revealing his will to man through the moral consciousness of man without the danger of mistake. As far as the question of revelation is concerned, it makes no difference at all whether the revelation be given internally or externally. When Adam, before his fall, guided his actions by the moral consciousness implanted in him by God he was guided by the revelation of God as much as when Moses received the code written by the finger of God on Mount Horeb. The real contrast between the conception of those who believe and those who disbelieve the Scripture is not that the former hold to an externalistic and the latter to an internalistic standard of ethics. The real difference is that the former believe in God as the source of the standard, while the latter believe in man or the universe at large as the source of the standard of ethics.

On the other hand, it should be remembered that even in paradise before the fall, man did not live by the internal standard of his consciousness alone. God spoke to man by giving to him commands that did not emanate from his moral consciousness. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the command not to eat of it were not given to man directly by his moral consciousness. What his moral consciousness did do with respect to this was to answer that it was his business to obey this command, since it was the command of the same God who spoke directly through itself. Hence we should again emphasize that the externality or the internality of the revelation of God to man is a matter of quite secondary importance for the Christian-theistic position. It is just a question of fact whether God did actually give to man external as well as internal revelation, and his reason for doing so if he did. We know that from the very beginning God gave to man external as well as internal information as to his duty. Before the fall, the reason for this was that the scope of God’s moral purpose for man was not apparent to man by virtue of the activity of his moral consciousness as such. The moral consciousness of man needed for its own supplementation the supernatural, external revelation of God to man. After the fall, there was the additional reason that the moral consciousness was itself no longer to be trusted, since its verdict was vitiated by sin. But of that we shall have to speak later. For the present we wish merely to emphasize that Christian theism, because of its transcendent God, implies external as well as internal revelation, while non-theistic thought, because of its denial of the transcendence of God can, in the nature of the case, allow for no external standard at all. Non-Christian thought
must, by virtue of its presuppositions, maintain that all external revelations are based upon delusion.

In opposition to Idealism, we must emphasize ever anew that without God-consciousness man’s self-consciousness is an irrelevant particular. Without the conception of an absolute God the moral consciousness of man could not act. W. R. Sorley tells us that “The very notion of conscious activity contains the idea of bringing about something which does not exist. It involves a purpose or end.” We maintain that if it were not for its God-consciousness the human consciousness could bring about nothing. It could not even exist. The finite moral consciousness as a determinate something, and therefore as a standard that can determine a course of action, would not exist except for God. And the converse of this is that since the moral consciousness of man cannot exist without God, the moral consciousness of man is always accessible to God by external as well as direct internal revelation.

It should further be remembered that the difference between an external and an internal revelation is one of very limited application. As man lived originally in paradise, the whole of the created universe was naturally a revelation of God to man. Hence it was not only in the specially given commands that God came to man, but also in the whole of external nature. Thus the expression of the will of God for man’s moral activity pertains to a large extent to external matters; hence, the external situation would always be one of the determining factors in his ethical action. The only alternative to this position is to go the whole way with naturalistic thought and to deny that this created universe has anything to do with God. If the laws of the created universe are still to be thought of as laws of God, then man meets with an external revelation of God even if he never looks into the Bible. And this external revelation of God in nature speaks with the imperative voice. All of God’s revelation involves and is an expression of God’s requirements for man. In his handling of this revelational material man is obliged to glorify God. Those who reject the Bible simply on the ground that it claims to be an external revelation of God to man ought also to deny theism.

**Externality And Rationality**

The idea of an externally given law of God to man is often flouted on the ground that we cannot harmonize it with the rationality of our own nature. We have already had occasion to observe that Newman Smyth, for instance, makes much of the fact that the Scripture itself appeals, in the last analysis, to the moral consciousness of man in order to justify its rationality. That was his argument for making the moral consciousness of man the final authority in the decision of moral problems. We are not now interested in the relation of the consciousness of man to the Scriptures directly; we are interested in noting that such an attitude springs from a deep hostility to the transcendent God of Scripture. Those who oppose what they call the “externalism of Scripture” can be depended upon also to oppose the “externalism” of the transcendence of God. On this point again idealism opposes Christianity. So Sorley says that the end of ethical conduct cannot be determined from practice unless it be shown that the practice is rational. But how can the practice be shown to be rational? Can this be determined from the course of history as such? It cannot. History is not self-explanatory. The rationality of the temporal in general, and the history of the moral consciousness in particular, must be found in the
transcendent God. The rationale of man’s moral action must be found in something beyond man himself.

If this conclusion be correct, there cannot possibly be any inherent contrast between externality and rationality. The very asking of the question with respect to such a contrast betrays an anti-theistic bias. In the nature of the case the external must always be prior to the internal. Even when man could do the right in a large area of his life, without any reference to an external standard in the form of anything mediated through other human beings or through any created means, God would still be external to man before he came with his revelation into the penetratia of man’s consciousness. Now this priority of the transcendence of God above man to the immanence of God in man is the source of all our rationality. Perfect obedience to God is the most reasonable thing for man.

The Categorical Imperative

Similar to the objection against external law on the ground that it is irrational, is the objection that an external law often conflicts with our instincts of right and wrong. So Smyth asks whether any externally promulgated command could convince us that right is wrong and wrong is right. Here the point of their actual or possible contradiction is broached.

A second objection in this connection pertains to the question of starting point. Should we start in our ethical judgment from any externally given law, or must we always start from our inherent intuitions of right and wrong? In other words, can ethics at the outset do without metaphysics? Borden P. Bowne tells us with respect to this: “Ethics begins independently but must finally be affected by our metaphysics.” Or again, “So in ethics (as in epistemology) we begin with trust in our ethical consciousness; but in the totality of our theorizing we may reach conclusions incompatible with that primal trust.”

A third point is whether we should now allow our ethical intuitions to control us altogether without any regard to our metaphysics. Kant has maintained this in his famous doctrine of the categorical imperative. We are to obey our sense of right and wrong without the least bit of regard to the question of whether the universe is favorable to our actions or not. Under the influence of the Kantian position, Bowne thinks that we can separate between duty and the good, altogether. “To discover these (justice, truthfulness) we need enter upon no speculation about the chief good. They stand in their own right, and their obligation is intuitively discerned.”

With respect to these questions it is well that we should return to our fundamental position in this whole matter, that is, that God-consciousness is basic to man’s self-consciousness. Hence, the moral principles upon which man would hit in his intuitive life would not be some abstract principles that exist apart from God, but are principles implanted by God in the nature of man. If everything is normal, there can therefore be no contradiction between moral principles intuited and moral principles revealed. The intuited moral principles were originally revealed moral principles as much as commandments given on tablets of stone. If there is disharmony between them, it is certain that the “intuited” moral principles are wrong, and the externally revealed moral principles are right. This is not because the externally revealed moral principles are temporally prior to the intuited moral principles. The opposite is in many instances the case. A great part of the externally promulgated law was given only after man’s intuitive
perception did not function correctly. The reason for the priority of the external principles lies in the transcendence of God. The only reason why there could be any conflict between external law and intuited principle would be if man had himself revolted from the transcendent God and tried to intuit his moral principles from some other source. Hence, these moral intuitions must be wrong unless they are in accord with whatever of externally revealed law there may be at any time.

From this it also follows that it is impossible to do without metaphysics at any time, either in the beginning, as Bowne speaks of it, or altogether, as Kant speaks of it. Hence, too, there is no meaning in saying that the intuited moral principles stand in their own right. They may stand in their own right in relation to other things in the created universe. As to their relation to God who has himself created moral man, it cannot be otherwise than that they are subject to him.

In view of these considerations, we may say that those who speak much of eternal principles of right and justice may be just as far from the truly theistic position as those who openly avow pragmatism. There are no eternal principles except those rooted in the very being and revelation of God in Christ. All non-Christian ethics are temporalistic or naturalistic ethics having no rationality and no imperative.

Authority

The Roman Catholic concept of authority is, as may be expected, a hybrid between Christianity and Aristotelianism. The standard for right and wrong in the case of the cardinal virtues is said to be found in reason. In this, Aquinas argues, Aristotle was right. But Aristotle did not realize that reason has been weakened by the fall. Hence it is the business of Christians to add the standard of the Christian Faith to that of reason when judging of ethical questions.

In this construction of the ethical standard man is never confronted with the God of the Bible. Even man in paradise is not confronted with God as the one who as his creator and governor, everywhere speaks with the imperative voice. It is therefore to be expected that Romanism will make an easy compromise with various forms of the non-Christian ethical standard. Itself partly autonomous, it has nothing with which to challenge the autonomy of Aristotle, of Kant, or of Dewey.

It is sad to say that a position such as that of C. S. Lewis is very similar to that of Rome. The “objective” authority which Lewis would substitute for the subjectivisms of pragmatic standards in ethics is not truly that of the God of Scripture. To seek an objective authority that various forms of paganism and Christianity have in common is to seek what does not exist. It is at the same time—and that is worse—virtually to level down the authority of the Creator and Judge to that of impersonal law. And impersonal law is an abstraction. The virtual result is a return to the autonomy of the individual man who interprets impersonal law for himself.

We have purposely brought up the question of the externality of the revelation of God to man at this stage rather than at the stage where it seems to come most in the foreground, namely, in the discussion of the Old Testament legal code, because we wish to bring out that the real difference between Christian and non-Christian ethics goes much deeper than is often supposed. For the same reason, we wish now to say a word about the authority of the revealed standard of ethics. It will be considered extravagant to
say that men will not regard anything as authoritative that has not emanated from themselves. It is important to note, though, that it has been Kant who has given the idea of autonomy its modern form, and who has most effectively spread this idea that it was after all involved in the very bedrock of all non-theistic ethics. The ethics of Plato and Aristotle are autonomous, as well as the ethics of Kant. There is no alternative but that of theonomy and autonomy. It was vain to attempt to flee from God and flee to a universe in order to seek eternal law there. Much has been written about eternal and immutable morality independent of the arbitrary will of anyone, human or divine. The external must was to give way for the internal recognition of laws that exist in themselves. The Greek idealists thought of moral principles in this way. The Cambridge Platonists in a later day followed the ancient Greeks in making the tuned string the symbol of true morality. Men were to live in aesthetic harmony with the eternal laws of the universe. Still others have conceived of ethics after the analogy of logic rather than after the analogy of aesthetics. So Wollaston thought that to steal was wrong “because it is to deny that a thing stolen is what it is, the property of another.” Modernism has sought to combine all these non-Christian motifs. Some years ago, Harry Emerson Fosdick appealed to young men to live a beautiful life if not what is conventionally called a good life. He thought he was getting deeply into things when he appealed to something that sets men in harmony with the music of the spheres.

Over against this whole tendency of modern ethics and all non-Christians ethics, we ought to make it clear to men that we hold all authority to have disappeared in the realm of ethics unless one places the transcendent God of Scripture back of all ethical law. There is, at most, ethical advice, but no ethical coercion, if Christian theism be abandoned. All the efforts to get away from naturalism and utilitarianism are in vain unless one returns to the theistic position. Preachers complain again and again that respect for authority has disappeared in this modern day. The complaint is based upon truth. But it should be remembered that we have no right to complain with respect to the matter unless we do all we can to remedy the situation. The only way in which we can hope even in the least degree to remedy the situation is by starting from the bottom up. We must instruct the children in a truly Christian theistic conception of authority such as we have been discussing. We dabble too much in half-way measures. We make many lame excuses about the necessity of an external revelation of the law of God. We plead the low estate of morals among heathen, etc., to show that there was a good reason for God to reveal himself externally. All this is true, but it is much more important and basic to bring out that even before the entrance of sin, before there was any question of a low state of morals, God’s revelation was man’s absolute authority, and the verbally expressed will of God was the last court of appeal, whether that will was externally or internally made known to man. Man cannot, in the nature of the case, breathe one good moral breath except for the authority of God.

**Moral Sanctions**

A word must be added about the matter of moral sanctions. It is well known that Kant has severely criticized Christianity’s conception of moral sanctions. He said that we intuit what is right and should obey the fight, no matter what the consequences. We should not be good because we do not wish to go to hell or because we wish to go to heaven. This
problem is immediately related to the question of the externality or the internality of the law. Kant claims, and many after him claim, that if we have an internal conception of the moral standard instead of an external one, we shall live on a much higher plane. Much as a child has to be coaxed into being good by rewards or punishments, while a full grown man does the right because it is right, so many hold that Christianity’s conception of eternal weal or woe is indicative of a lower and earlier underdeveloped stage of ethical speculation.

It is plain that if we may believe the Genesis account, God, at the beginning of history, began by offering to man a reward and by threatening punishment. The whole of Scripture is in perfect accord on this matter, from the earliest part to the latest part of the history of revelation. But we are now more directly concerned to point out that this Scripture principle is nothing but what we would expect if we were to try to work out a consistent theistic scheme of interpretation. In the first place, the kingdom of God could not be envisaged in all its length and breadth without a special revelation with respect to it. Accordingly, God gave to man something of a vision into the remote consequences of his every ethical deed. Moreover, the rewards and the punishments were a part of the ethical program itself. It would simply be impossible for man to intuit ethical conceptions of right and wrong without seeing them in relation to rewards and punishments, because these rewards and punishments had been made a part of the created ethical situation by God. Hence the attempt to intuit ethical laws without rewards and punishments is only another evidence of the persistent effort on the part of man to get God out of the picture. Still further, the reason why ethical laws were a part of the created ethical situation is that the whole created ethical situation was meant to be a finite replica of the infinite glory of God. If we separate the idea of rewards and punishment from doing good or evil, it would mean that a man who did good might be rewarded with evil. And this would be contrary to the moral glory of God. Suppose that, instead of sinning, man had been obedient in paradise. In that case, man would certainly have to be thought of as being established in the good and as suffering no evil, or there would be evil that is as basic as the good. Such evil could destroy the ultimacy of the good in God.

It should be noted, however, that this point of view precludes the possibility that man should do something good for the sake of reward apart from God. The scorn poured upon the Christian motives as being selfish is altogether beside the point. If Adam and Eve had been obedient to God they would have been obedient because they loved God first of all, and not first of all because they wanted to get some reward. They knew right well that their whole joy consisted in their being in the presence of God. The tree of life was but a symbol of that presence. Paradise would be nothing in itself unless God were there. It is only because in the course of a perverse historical development man has begun to depersonalize his utopias that he could ever raise such an objection as Kant raised.

We see then that at every point, and especially at the very beginning of the questions that must be raised in connection with the standard of ethics, we have to start from a foundation that is thoroughly Christian-theistic. If we see this clearly it will save us much trouble afterward. We do not then have to resort to all manner of questionable expedients in defending the doctrine of a specially and externally promulgated law of God as the standard for the ethical life of man. We have destroyed the foundation of the edifice of our opponents.
At the same time we have sought to build a foundation on which we can best understand for ourselves the later developments of the promulgated law of God to man. We cannot understand the law of God and the revealed will of God for man’s ethical life in general unless we have first clearly grasped the matters that we have discussed in this chapter, and especially the point that the moral consciousness of man must rely for its functioning upon the more basic God-consciousness.

Having now discussed the standard of ethics as it was in paradise, we should naturally have to take up a chapter on the non-Christian standard, then one on the redemptive standard in general before beginning with the problem of the Old Testament. Since there is not time to do this, we have included in the previous chapter, in which we spoke of the standard in paradise, the main points on which the non-Christian standard is to be compared with the Christian standard, and will in this chapter discuss in a few words the general characteristics of the redemptive standard in general in order to devote the rest of the time directly to the question of the Old Testament and the New Testament standard. Moreover, since to a large extent the same principles must govern us in the study of a standard of ethics as have guided us in the study of the sumnum bonum, we can more easily be brief now than we could then.

We have emphasized the point that the whole redemptive program is a plan by which God is carrying out his plan which Satan was trying to break. Hence God carried through his absolute ideal by revealing it anew to man and by giving him ability through Christ with which to carry it out. Similarly we may say with respect to the standard of ethics that God carries forth his absolute standard in the face of the effort on the part of Satan to lower that standard. Hence we have once more the following points to bear in mind. The redemptive standard is always the absolute standard. It is always presented as a gift of God's grace. It always demands the complete destruction of evil. Finally, it makes men look into the future for the realization of its own full demands. We need not discuss these points in detail right here.

In addition to remembering that it is these four points that we meet again, we should note the method by which God accomplishes his carrying through of the absolute standard. That method involves what we may call the principle of mediacy. By this we mean that after the entrance of sin the moral consciousness of man did no longer itself in its own immediate deliverances make known to man the absolute standard of life. By sin the consciousness of man has cut itself loose from God ethically. We say “ethically” because it goes without saying that man could not cut himself loose from God metaphysically. Then, after cutting himself loose from God ethically, man continued to depend upon the immediate deliverance of his moral consciousness for his moral guidance. And we may say that this is the basic difference between Christian ethics and non-Christian ethics as far as the standard is concerned, that all non-Christian ethics believe in an immediate, while all Christian ethics believe in a mediate, standard.

We have spoken of mediacy and immediacy rather than external and internal, because it does not quite cover the case to say that after the entrance of sin it became necessary for God to reveal himself externally, while before the fall he could speak to man internally. It is true that the two contrasts are almost synonymous in practice. The whole thing practically amounts to this, that Christian ethics believes, while non-Christian ethics does not believe, that we must have our ethical standard in the Scriptures. Yet it is also true that even before the fall God gave some commandments to man externally. But this was not due to any inherent disqualification on the part of the moral consciousness of man to be the immediate agency of God in making known his will to man. It was due to
the fact that it was not within the scope of the finite consciousness to know the will of God for the future. And man’s whole ethical activity was related to the future. Hence the moral consciousness of man was never meant to function by itself. It was in the nature of the case correlative to supernatural positive revelation. But with the fall of man the Finite moral consciousness has declared its independence from God. The fall itself was the setting aside of God as the absolute standard and goal for all of man’s activities. In the fall, man put the word of God and the word of Satan in the balance, and found the word of Satan more trustworthy than the word of God. In doing so, he himself had to assume the role of judge between the two by attempting to stand above the two. In other words, he had to consider himself independent of God in the making of his moral pronouncements.

It was this sinful state of affairs that made necessary the giving of the mediate redemptive standard by God. The moral consciousness, or, if we will, we may say conscience, always tried to act independently of God. Hence, though God still speaks to the sinner through his conscience, the sinner always seeks to suppress this voice of God. He needs therefore to submit his conscience to the supernatural revelation of God, and this revelation needs, since the entrance of sin, to be redemptive. Hence, all that we can say with respect to conscience is that it still serves by God’s common grace as a relative standard. The perverted moral consciousness of man has not been able to rid itself so completely of all remembrance of God, reminded as it is by the very works of nature of its own derivation, that it would dare to go the full length of all that is involved in its rejection of God. If we wish to call this the voice of God speaking through the conscience, it is well, if only it be remembered that we cannot mean what is usually meant by that phrase. What is usually meant by that phrase is that man has in conscience a sufficient guide for his life. At any rate, people hold that even if conscience is not sufficient for those who are able to get in contact with Scripture, it is sufficient for those who have not been given the light of special revelation. It is often said that everyone will be judged by the light that he has had. This is true, but it should be remembered that, according to Scripture, everyone has had the light, the true light, when represented in Adam. Romans 5.12 is specific on this: “Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men for that all have sinned.” Then when men had cast themselves into darkness, none of them deserved any light at all. Hence, they are all under judgment, irrespective of what God sees fit to do afterward. When God sees fit to give to some the light of the gospel and to give to others no more than his common grace by which their conscience acts, the former will be judged more heavily if they neglect that great and gracious light than the latter, who, though they once have sinned against the light in Adam have not for the second time sinned against such a great light as the others have.

**The Denial Of Redemptive Mediacy**

We cannot discuss at length the many ways in which the principle of redemptive mediacy spoken of above is denied or ignored, but we can indicate one or two instances by way of example.

In the first place it is clear that all naturalistic ethics which frankly accept the evolution doctrine do not at all believe that man needs anything but the immediate
deliverances of his consciousness to guide him in his ethical conduct. According to evolutionary ethics, conscience itself has gradually come out of the non-moral; what former generations regarded as postulates, we have gradually grown to regard as axioms.

It is more important to note that all idealist ethics, though opposed to the naturalist ethics of materialism, pragmatism, etc., is equally opposed to the principle of redemptive mediacy. We mention here the case of James Martineau, though he is not usually classed as an idealist. He would ordinarily be classed as a theist, and this makes it all the more important to note his attitude, since it shows that those “theists” whose epistemology is Kantian in principle cannot do justice to the Christian point of view. One cannot more definitely bring out the contrast between a truly Christian position and a naturalistic position than by showing that they differ radically on the point of the work of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit be thought of as coming directly into the heart of the person without reference to the substitutionary work of Christ, such a position has denied the principle of redemptive mediacy. And it is exactly this that Martineau tells us the Holy Spirit does. Without any regard to the work of Christ, he tells us: “Thus in the ultimate penetralia of the conscience, the Living Spirit of God Himself is met, it may be unconsciously, it may be consciously.” Here, exactly, lies the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian conception of conscience. According to the Christian position, God did once come to man in the penetralia of his conscience directly and fully, but since sin has entered into man’s heart, God cannot dwell there with his Spirit till man’s sin has been atoned for on the cross of Calvary. On the other hand, all types of non-Christian ethics ignore all that and speak of God’s revealing himself in the moral consciousness of man as though nothing had happened, as though the moral consciousness of man had not itself driven God out of its sanctuary.

A particularly vicious way in which the principle of redemptive mediacy is denied appears when men avowedly write works on Christian ethics and not merely on general ethics, and still do not really bring Christianity into the picture. So, for instance, Newman Smyth speaks constantly of pagan ethics as but a little lower on the ladder of general ethical progress than biblical ethics. Or, rather, he speaks of a general legal epoch “which historically was sharply defined in Judaism and Stoicism.” Smyth ignores completely the difference between the specially revealed will of God as it appears in the law to Israel and the “natural law” in which the Stoics believed. Again the denial of the principle of redemptive mediacy appears in Smyth when he regards it as a general indication of a lower type of morality if men think of their conscience as condemning them before God. Paul’s experience of retributive conscience as related in the seventh chapter of Romans is to him an indication that Paul was dwelling at that time on a pre-Christian level of ethical experience. Here Smyth openly denies that the moral consciousness has broken away from God through the fall. According to the Christian position, it is characteristic of all those who recognize their sin that they will abhor themselves and trust in the merits of their Redeemer for acceptance with God. Still further, the same denial of redemptive mediacy appears in a contrast that Smyth makes between law and God. He says that according to the Old Testament as interpreted by Rabbinism, God and law were separated, and the main concern of men was with the law and not with God. Now it is true that Rabbinism did misinterpret the Old Testament in this way, but the point is that, according to Smyth, every conception of a forensic relationship between God and man involves a low conception of God. The “legal epoch” is, to him, pre-Christian. “The time
for such essentially Calvinistic conception of the sovereignty of the law of God is just before Christ.” All this indicates only that a man like Smyth, while writing on Christian ethics, has thrown overboard the foundation of Christian ethics, that is, the principle of redemptive mediacy.

We see then that it is quite possible and quite common, even for those who make much of the Bible and profess to be writing specifically Christian ethics, to assume that God speaks immediately through the consciousness of man. Even those who claim an objective standard by seeking eternal laws in the universe, or by directing the moral consciousness to the Bible as the finest of religious and ethical literature, have in reality maintained the principle of mediacy.

The Roman Catholic and Arminian conception of the natural man as more or less autonomous involves a compromise with pagan immediacy.

Mediacy And Interpretation

The principle of redemptive mediacy is frequently said to be unintelligible, since in every case an external or mediate standard has to be interpreted by the moral consciousness itself. We need not dwell on this point since we have discussed it in the chapter on the epistemological presuppositions of Christian ethics. We saw there the objection made by A. E. Taylor. All we need now to do is to apply what was said there to the specific problem in hand. The main point is that Christian ethics is based upon the ideal of an absolute God, and on the creation of man in the image of the Absolute. With these presuppositions it is not possible to maintain that subjective interpretation lowers or annihilates the absoluteness of the will of God transmitted. With these presuppositions man’s activity is at the very outset reinterpretative. Even in paradise man’s activity was interpretative. When the principle of redemptive mediation became necessary on account of sin, man’s thought needed not be any more interpretative than it already was. No change took place on that score at all. It was the same God speaking to man before and after the fall of man. Both times it was the transcendent God speaking to man. In both cases, therefore, God was “outside” of man when he spoke to man. The only difference was that after sin’s entrance this same God spoke to man redemptively while before the fall he spoke to man non-redemptively. Then, too, it should be remembered that after the fall, God, though speaking to man by redemptive mediacy, sends his Spirit by which men will accept the redemptive mediate speaking of God. This Spirit, with his activity, terminates immediately upon the consciousness of man as he did in paradise, so that in this sense we may say that God speaks immediately to man both before and after the fall. Yet he does not speak to all men this way. Hence we cannot say that in general God speaks immediately to man. Moreover, even to those to whom he thus speaks immediately, he never speaks in independence of the objective, redemptive mediate revelation that he has given. In short, he does not speak immediately in the sense of giving revelational content to individuals, apart from the Bible.

We see then that there is no valid objection to the principle of redemptive mediacy from the facts of common grace, from the necessity of interpretation, or from the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers. With respect to the first, we hold that the conscience of man, when not regenerated, is no more than a relative standard. With regard to the second, we hold that interpretation always should be reinterpretation, and it...
is for the purpose of keeping it so that the principle of redemptive mediacy is introduced. By sin man refused to be any longer a reinterpreter, but attempted to become an original interpreter, and it is this false independence that the principle of redemptive mediacy is given to overcome. This holds too with regard to the work of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of believers. The Holy Spirit seeks to have us submit our consciousness to a standard outside itself. Hence its work too is in the interest of establishing the principle of redemptive mediacy and not that of immediacy. It is only those who deny the necessity of the regenerative work of the Spirit who deny mediacy.

**The Principle Of Redemptive Mediacy In Scriptures**

What we now need to do is to inquire in what way the principle of redemptively mediate revelation of the standard of ethics appeared in the time of the Old Testament. In answer to this question we naturally tend to think at once of the decalogue. We often speak of God’s revealing himself in the Old Testament through the law and in the New Testament through the gospel. There is much truth in this contrast, but as it stands it is misleading. In the first place it is misleading because God did not make his standard of life known to man by the law only in the Old Testament. In the second place, the law in the Old Testament cannot be contrasted to grace in any absolute way, because it is itself a part of the covenant of grace. We should be clear on both points if we wish to see the relation of things correctly.

In the first place, it is clear that God not only spoke to the patriarchs but to Adam immediately after the fall, long before he gave the law in the form of the decalogue. It is of great benefit to note the difference between God’s speaking to Adam before the fall and God’s speaking to Adam after the fall. Before the fall God spoke to Adam both directly and internally, and indirectly and externally. It might appear as though there is no difference at all between the way in which God spoke to Adam after the fall and the way in which he spoke to Adam before the fall. The difference, however, is very great. God spoke redemptively to Adam after the fall, and non-redemptively before the fall. After the fall, God spoke to man only upon the basis of his own promise of redemption. The *protoevangelium* is evidence of this. God could not speak to man except upon the basis of the covenant of grace. The covenant of grace was given in order to reestablish the covenant of works. It was only by the promise of the Redeemer that God could continue to make his will known to man. The natural consequence of sin would be that God would leave man to his own devices and let him experience the dire consequences of the effort by which he tried to set aside the absolute standard of God. We see then in the protevangelium first, that God plans to carry on the realization of his absolute ideal for man by giving him anew the revelation of the absoluteness of his will which man himself cannot fulfill and which must therefore be fulfilled by the “seed of the woman.” A relative goodness cannot stand before God, and man could not even be relatively good in himself. Secondly, this absolute standard is to be given to the race anew, and is at once given to the race anew as a gift of the grace of God. It is utterly impossible that any man should ever be able to live the perfect life once sin has got into the universe. It is therefore utterly impossible that God should ever offer man eternal life through keeping the law in his own strength. God may say to man that he must be perfect. He may say to man that he must keep the law perfectly. He may in the earlier stages of revelation, when
the notion of the free grace was only beginning to dawn upon the consciousness of God’s people, inculcate this doctrine of free grace slowly by first showing them their own inability to keep the law when he tells them that they must do it. In a similar way, God tested the faith of Abraham when he asked of him to offer his own son. All this does not in the least detract from the principle that the law itself, as later given to Israel, was a means by which God wanted to lead men to the recognition of the necessity of the grace of God. When Paul says that we are under grace and not under the law, he only contrasts our greater apprehension of the grace of God to the lesser apprehension of the grace of God in the Old Testament times, but does not in the least deny that the law itself was a taskmaster to Christ. The third point already made clear from the protevangelium is that the standard of perfection can be realized only if evil is destroyed. We have here the whole matter in comprehensive compass. It is Satan himself, the source of all the evil, whose head shall be demolished. And this in turn establishes the absoluteness of the standard since it was just before this that man had made good and evil relative by putting the voice of the devil at least as high as and even higher than the voice of God. God now condemns the alliance of man with Satan. He condemns relativistic ethics and reestablishes the absoluteness of the good and the independence of the good. Finally, this protevangelium, by establishing the absolute control of the good over evil, at once points to the future for the realization of the absolute sumnum bonum through complete obedience on the part of man to the absolute standard of God.

We see then that the principle of redemptive mediacy is carried out along the whole front of the ethical principle. And this is true of the whole of the time that preceded the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai. It was quite possible that God should use the memory of paradise as a means by which to inculcate the idea of absolute standard anew. When Adam and Eve had just left paradise, they knew right well that the sumnum bonum was that which God had placed before them. They also knew right well that God’s revealed will was meant to be for them the standard of their ethical life. It was only after the race had demonstrated that this memory, together with the promise of God of the Messiah, was not sufficient to bring men back from the relative standard to the absolute standard, that God revealed the absolute standard in the form of a detailed and externally promulgated law. Even so, he did not do this till after he had formally established his covenant of grace with the father of the whole of the people of God, in order to make it abundantly plain that the law was a part of the covenant of grace. Paul refers to this in Galatians 2.17 when he says: “And this I say that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.” He tells us that if the law could have given life, “verily righteousness should have been by the law” and the whole idea of the gospel of grace would drop to the ground.

Accordingly, when we come to the law itself as given on Sinai, we must still remember that it was not the comprehensive expression of the will of God. The ten commandments are only a principle summary of the expressed will of God to man. It must always serve a twofold use. In the first place it must lead men to Christ. It must be a taskmaster to Christ by showing us the impossibility of living up to its absolute demands. We are to love the Lord our God with all our hearts and with all our minds, while by nature we are prone to hate God and our neighbor. Now, since this is the substance of the whole law, since the whole law can be summed up in the commandment of perfect love,
and obedience to God, it can and must be preached through all ages as the source of the knowledge of sin. Again it must be preached as such, not in the sense as though our knowledge of sin cannot be brought about otherwise than by the detailed preaching of the ten commandments. The law must always be regarded as the summary of the expressed will of God. Hence, this summary must always be interpreted in the light of the fullest revelation of the will of God that we have in the New Testament. In other words, we are still preaching the law of God if we hold up to men the demands of Jesus in the sermon on the mount. Jesus has never asked anything higher than that men should love God with all their hearts, and their fellow man as themselves. He could ask nothing higher than the law asked. When we speak of the necessity of preaching the law in our day so that men may acquire a knowledge of sin, we mean that we should hold before men the whole will of God as expressed summarily in the ten commandments and as illustrated and explained in many ways by the deeds and words of Christ, as well as the prophets and apostles.

In the second place, as the whole expressed will of God must be preached in order to bring men to a consciousness of sin, so also this same whole will of God, of which the decalogue is only a summary, must be preached as a rule of life by which men may regulate their life of gratitude. And since the decalogue is a convenient summary of the whole expressed will of God, it can most profitably be used as a basis of preaching on the ethical standard of the Christian life. Particular mention should be made of this fact since many orthodox ministers seem to think that when they go back to the law, they go back to something with which the Christian has nothing to do. Christ said that he came to establish the law. He himself said what had been said before, that if a man should really live up to its demands, he should certainly inherit eternal life. Hence, he himself came to bring nothing higher, and could bring no higher standard.

The New Testament Standard

We may bring out this point by discussing briefly the section of Scripture found in Matthew 5.21–48. It is to this section particularly that appeal is made to prove that the New Testament standard of ethics is really a quite different standard from the Old Testament standard.

With respect to this, we note that the presumption would be wholly against this. The Old and the New Testaments present not two Gods, but one God. The Old and the New Testaments base all their teaching with respect to redemption upon the background of the creation story. Hence they both hold that God did originally demand of man absolute perfection. For this reason, we have seen, there is on this score no difference at all between the Old and the New Testaments. We would have the picture of a changeable God if we had to believe that he set essentially different standards at different times. In the second place, if we should say that in the Old Testament the law was given to man as a way of life, it would mean that there would be no teaching about Christ and salvation by grace in the Old Testament. Yet we know that the Old Testament is full of teaching with respect to Christ. The law itself was given in close conjuncture with the sacrifices that pointed to the Messiah.

In the second place, we note that in the introduction to this section Christ says specifically that he came to fulfill the law, (Mt 5:17) even to a jot and a tittle (Mt 5:18).
And this statement applies not only to the prophecies about himself, but about the least of the commandments.

In the third place, the archaioi, the Sopherim, cannot refer to Moses. Jesus plainly does not set his teaching over against the teaching of Moses, but against those who had received the teaching of Moses and had perverted it. What Jesus spoke against was said by those who claimed association with Moses, but who twisted the meaning of Moses’ words, and it was said to their descendants, who carried the program of perversion farther.

In the fourth place, we note what has happened. The Old Testament quotations given are: (a) sometimes limited to the letter when they should have been taken according to the spirit; (b) sometimes given with unwarranted additions; (c) sometimes given with false antithesis; (d) sometimes they lift the Old dispensation into a principle. All this is in each instance done in the interest of toning down the rigid demands of the law, which incidentally shows again that the demands of the law, as such, were absolute. We may briefly note the various instances in which this is done.

Verse 21. Here they give the quotation from Exodus 20.13, “Thou shalt not kill,” and add to it, “and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment.” This addition was inserted in order to teach that anyone who had not actually slain someone was not guilty. Jesus here makes plain that the internal attitude of the heart makes a man guilty as well as the external deed.

Verse 27. Here the quotation given is verbally correct: “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” The Jews had limited the meaning of this commandment. They limited the meaning of the words till it meant no more than unfaithfulness on the part of a married woman. Jesus brings out again the internality, and the complete comprehensiveness of the principle.

Verse 31. Here the Old Testament quotation is, “Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement,” to which Deuteronomy 24.1 adds, “because he hath found some unseemly thing in her.” This latter phrase the Sopherim omitted. By omitting this part, they made a general rule out of a particular case that was unique, in order to give latitude to everybody with a pretext. Here Jesus brings back the original purity of the law by limiting the fight of divorce to those who could claim fornication as a reason. Jesus points out that the liberty with respect to divorce was a dispensational something, since from the beginning it was not so. Hence even the liberty that is actually found in the Old Testament should no longer be tolerated in the New Testament, Jesus says. He goes back to the original state of affairs. And this shows again that, according to Jesus, man was originally given an absolute command.

Verse 33. Here the Sopherim said: “Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thy oaths.” Leviticus 19.12 says: “And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God. I am the Lord.” The meaning of Leviticus, according to the Sopherim, was that as long as you did not swear falsely directly by Jehovah, you needed not to worry so much about swearing falsely by other things. If you had made an oath to Jehovah, you should keep it, while if you had made an oath to your brother, you did not necessarily need to keep it. Over against this, Jesus put the more rigid standard that it was a sin if you swore falsely by your brother, as well as when you swear falsely by the Lord, since at bottom you are, in any case, swearing falsely by the Lord. Jesus therefore said, in effect, that men should never swear falsely.
Jesus did not mean that for legitimate purposes and before proper authorities we may never swear. He himself took the oath before Pilate.

Verse 38. Here the Old Testament quotation given is that of Leviticus 24.20: “eye for eye, tooth for tooth.” But under the law this was to be done by the judges. Instead of justifying revenge, as the Sopherim interpreted it, this very rule was given to prevent revenge. The Jews wanted the freedom of lynch law; Jesus reinstates justice. Jesus does not for a minute mean that justice is not to be done. He himself has come to establish the law, to bear its penalty. Hence it is not possible to distinguish between a law of justice on the one hand and a law of liberty on the other hand that you may follow out, but need not follow out. We must be perfect, that is our duty; supererogation is out of the question. Even if we have done the whole law we are still unprofitable servants in the sense that we have done no more than our duty. Hence Jesus did not set Moses aside, but established him, and shows in addition that the manner of administration of justice had to be external, in the Old Testament dispensation, while in the New dispensation, since religion is to be separated from the State, the external administration of justice is to be limited to the activity of the State.

Verse 43. Here Leviticus 19.18 says: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” The Jews had simply perverted this to say: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemies.” Here Christ restored the true Old Testament teaching as is found, for example, in Proverbs 25.21: “If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty give him water to drink.” In addition to this, Jesus brings out that there was, to be sure, a command in the Old Testament given at various times to destroy the enemies of God, but that these were then to be destroyed because they were pointed out by God himself as his enemies. Now in the New Testament dispensation God no longer points out to us men who are his enemies. The New Testament is the spiritual dispensation. We have already seen that this does not mean that we may now freely love the devil and all his host. It simply means that in the New dispensation we are to seek to follow Christ’s own example in offering salvation to all.

Our conclusion, then, with respect to this whole section can be no other than that it corroborates what we have said above, that is, that the New Testament only brings out more fully than the Old the absoluteness of the standard of ethics.

Jesus does this by showing that the concession with respect to the Old Testament standard, such as we have in the case of divorce for other reasons than fornication, should no longer be tolerated. He expects his New Testament children to live at a higher ethical level so that he can carry his program through further with them than he could with his Old Testament children. Jesus does this again by showing that the demand of perfection extends even to the inmost depths of the heart. The Old Testament had already demanded this in its command that men should love the Lord their God with all their heart and with all their soul. Yet there were, at times, concessions on this point, and Jesus points out that things ought to be carried out now more fully in accordance with the original creation ordinance than they could have been in the Old dispensation.

We may say that just as Jesus brought the vision of the absolute summun bonum more intensively and more extensively before man’s eyes again, so he also interpreted the law in all its intensity and in all its extensity as the means by which men are to reach the summun bonum. If we preach the law as Christ preached it, there is no territory of life that does not fall under it. And what applies to Christ applies equally to Paul. All that
Paul has said can be subsumed under what Jesus said: “Be ye therefore perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.” And what Jesus said here is nothing more than what Moses said in Deuteronomy: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.” It is utterly false and unbiblical to contrast the New Testament with the Old as far as the standard of life is concerned. Both seek to bring to man the expressed will of God. The expressed will of God for man is simply that man shall reflect the moral glory of God on a finite scale. This is what God asked of man in paradise. This is what God asked of man in the Old Testament. This is what God asks of man in the New Testament. The only difference is that God has himself brought this demand to the consciousness of his people gradually, as they were able to bear it. In the Old Testament times, the believers were fed with milk, while in the New Testament times we are fed with meat. Both milk and meat can nourish and feed us.

At this point we should insert an exposition of the decalogue in accordance with the principles we have outlined. Suffice it to have discussed briefly the main principles that must be borne in mind with respect to the standard of ethics. On that question, just as on the question of the *summum bonum* of man, both the Old Testament and the New agree, and together stand opposed to all non-Christian theistic theories. As both present an absolute *summum bonum*, so both present an absolute standard. No other system of ethics presents either an absolute *summum bonum* or an absolute standard. As both maintain that the absolute *summum bonum* must be a gift of God’s grace to man, so both teach that the very revelation of the absolute standard is a gift of God’s grace to man, while certainly the ability to live up to it must be given us in Christ, who, by his substitutionary atonement, must fulfill the law for us. No other system of ethics says that either the *summum bonum* or the standard is a gift of grace, and no ethics teach that we need to seek the power outside ourselves in a substitute for us in order that we may fulfill the law’s demands. As both the Old and the New Testaments teach that the *summum bonum* cannot be reached except by the complete destruction of all evil, so both give us a standard in which not one bit of evil is tolerated, but evil must be completely destroyed. No other system of ethics ever demands the complete destruction of evil. Finally, as both teach that the *summum bonum* cannot be fully reached till some time in the future, so both give us a standard that none can fulfill in the present, that can be and is fulfilled in the present in a substitutionary way alone, but that will be fulfilled by us in the future. No other system of ethics promises the fulfillment of their ideals in the future, as none of them come from above, so none of them look above.

We are now ready to begin our journey toward the goal of the *summum bonum* outlined, guided by the revealed will of God as our standard.
Chapter 13: Faith As The Motivating Power In Christian Ethics

In the briefest possible fashion we must now deal with faith as the motivating power in Christian ethics. I may have California in mind as the goal of my journey. I may have route 66 marked out as the standard route by which I shall travel on my way to California. I may have a fine new Pontiac full of gasoline loaded with my baggage. All this will do me no good if there is no spark in my car.

The would-be self-sufficient moral consciousness is spiritually dead. The natural man may do many things which “for the matter of them” are good, but he does not do them to the glory of God as his goal, and in accordance with the revealed will of God as his standard, and from faith in the redemption through Christ as his motive.

“What is true Faith?” asks the Heidelberg Catechism, and answers its question in superbly beautiful words: “it is not only a certain knowledge whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in his Word, but also a hearty trust which the Holy Ghost works in me by the Gospel, that not only to others, but to me also, forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness and salvation, are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ’s merits.”

It is the Christian believer who speaks these words. He knows that he has been redeemed from the wrath of God that rested upon him for his sin. He knows and believes with all his heart that Christ Jesus died for his sins on the cross and rose again from the dead for his justification. He knows that he died with Christ to sin and rose with Christ to righteousness.

This Christian now joins with all the many fellow-believers in order conjointly, beginning at whatever point of history they find themselves, to establish the kingdom of God on earth. Their constant prayer is that God’s will may be done on earth as it is in heaven. “Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect” resounds in their heart. They constantly pray for forgiveness for their sins. “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” is their daily prayer. Their failure to attain the goal of absolute perfection within them and about them is a matter of ultimate concern for them. Yet, this concern does not lead them to doubt. They know that the forgiveness of sins and acceptance with God is a gift of the Holy Spirit. They know that they have, by the Spirit, been born from above, born of God. God will certainly complete the work he has begun in their hearts. With Paul they are able to say: “for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Tm. 1:12). They know too that a new heaven and a new earth will at last appear as the fruit of their Redeemer’s work in Palestine, and notably through his resurrection from the dead. Their own bodies will be raised so that they may be “fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Php 3:21).

It is thus that the believer, translated from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light (a) strives for the realization of the kingdom of God on earth; (b) gives praise to the grace of God whereby he is made alive from the dead and enabled to do the will of God,

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1 Question and Answer 21.
however imperfectly; (c) seeks to destroy remaining sin and evil within himself and round about him; and (d) looks forward with joy toward the future when the kingdom of glory will have been established, and a great host of the washed in the blood of the lamb shall gather round his throne, in the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness will dwell.

The exact opposite of this view of Christian ethics and of faith is found in the writings of modernist and new-modernist theologians. For a discussion of these, particularly of the latter, the reader is referred to some of the writer’s other publications such as *Christianity and Barthianism* and *The Confession of 1967.*
Part Two: Non-Christian Ethical Principles

Chapter 14: Greek Ethical Theory: Socrates

In his work, *History of Philosophy*, Wilhelm Windelband traces the development of ethical thought alongside the development of human thought in general. The early Greeks, says Windelband, noticed that the “things of experience change into one another.” Wondering at this fact, they sought “for the abiding ground of all these changes.” They looked for a “world-stuff.” In this conception of world-stuff was tacitly contained the “presupposition of the unity of the world.” All change was a coming out of itself and returning into itself of this world-stuff. This world-stuff was the *Arche* of their thinking.

This *Arche*, Anaximander said, is infinite. A finite cosmic matter would be dissipated in the course of time. And this infinite, says the same philosopher, is divine, *to theion*. This idea of the divinity of the infinite gave it a “sanction for the religious consciousness.”

In the concept of *nous*, as held by Anaxagoras, we have the “first instance of the teleological explanation of nature.” This teleological view of reality was the product of reflection. But the reflection involved in this view was not sufficiently critical. The Greeks themselves soon observed this. In their explanatory theories they had ventured into a world that is far removed from our way of looking at things in daily life. Do the senses then possibly deceive us? Must we be bold enough to say that it is in theoretical thought, in contradistinction from sensation, that we must seek for unity in human experience? Indeed we must. But when we do so our troubles begin to mount.

If we proceed and seek to satisfy the demands of theoretical thought, must we then with Parmenides hold that time and change are altogether unreal and illusory? Where then is the seat of error or illusion to be found? Heraclitus found “deceit caused by the senses, and the error of the multitude, to consist in the illusory appearance of the Being of permanent things.” If then theoretical thought produces such opposite views about the nature of Being can we even hold to its veracity any longer? The Greek does not ask this question. Windelband does not ask it either, at this point. The Greek assumes that the World-reason in which the individual participates in his knowledge is everywhere the same. Knowing is that which is “common to all.” It is therefore law and order to which every one has to unite himself. “By means of this characteristic, viz., that of universally valid law, the conception of knowing acquires a normative significance, and subjection to the common, to the law, appears as a duty in the intellectual realm as well as in the political, ethical and religious.”

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1 Note: The individual page references are found in the mimeographed copy of this syllabus in the library of Westminster Theological Seminary.
The Anthropological Period

In view of the development traced so far, it was no wonder, says Windelband, that the Greeks should soon ask themselves the question whether there is anything universally valid at all. The Sophists were so impressed with “the relativity of human ideas and purposes … that they disowned inquiry as to the existence of a universally valid truth in the theoretical, as well as in the practical sphere … ” It was then that Socrates rose up among his brethren. He maintained “faith in reason and a conviction of the existence of a universally valid truth.” But, Windelband remarks, “this conviction was with him of an essentially practical sort; it was his moral disposition … that made him hold this conviction of universal truth.”

At this point the reader may pause to take note of the similarity of the position of Greek philosophy reached when Socrates appears upon the scene to the ethical dualism of Immanuel Kant. 3 Allowing fully for the greater subjectivity or “inwardness” of Kant as over against Socrates, it remains true that there is a striking similarity between their views.

(1) Both were preceded by a period of philosophical speculation in which men sought by theoretical thought for a completely conceptualized interpretation of reality. This effort was in both instances based upon the assumption that the intellect of man participates in world-reason and must set for itself the ideal of exhaustive conceptualization of ultimate reality. The Parmenidean assumption that only that can exist which can be thought out without even apparent contradiction by man as inherently divine, was equalled by the Spinozistic idea that the order and connection of things is the same as the order and connection of ideas, that is, the ideas of man and God.

(2) Secondly, in the period preceding Kant, as well as in that preceding Socrates, the pure and simple rationalism held was countered by an ultimate irrationalism. Unable to reduce time and change to non-existence altogether, whatever reality was ascribed to them had to be ascribed as originating in chance. If the world of change cannot be wholly absorbed into the world of the timeless, then the world of the timeless must be thought of as turning into the opposite of itself, into the world of time.

It appears, therefore, that both in the time just preceding Socrates, and in the time just preceding Kant, the validity of the laws of thought and of behavior that man needs cannot rest upon an intellectually penetrable relation of the world in which we live to the world which is above us.

If then the universal validity of the norms of thought and action is to be maintained it must be simply postulated. The idea of validity must be taken to be a limit or ideal of thought. The teleological view of being and of behavior cannot be established intellectually on the monistic assumption that underlay both early Greek and early modern thinking. If then this teleological view of reality is to be maintained it must be maintained as required by the religious and moral consciousness of man in spite of the demands of theoretical thought. In the case of Kant we have here what Richard Kroner calls ethical dualism.

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3 Richard Kroner, Kant’s Weltanschauung.
But if the religious and moral demands of the human consciousness thus appear to be standing over against the demands of his intellectual consciousness, in reality they are united. Soon enough, both in the case of Greek and in the case of modern thought, the demands of theoretical thought are adjusted to the demand of religious and moral consciousness. In the case of Kant, we have here what Kroner calls ethical phenomenalism.

There will always be “toughminded” philosophers. These toughminded philosophers will be called materialists, mechanists, pragmatists and sceptics. But the “tenderminded” philosophers, those who want to interpret the lower in terms of the higher aspects of reality, will adjust the demands of thought to those of the religious and moral consciousness. With Socrates they will follow Anaxagoras and his ideal of the nous as though he were a God. With Kant they will project the categorical imperative. If Anaxagoras cannot “properly discriminate” between the final and the efficient order of the cosmos, they will hold that even so, somehow he must be right. If Kant works out his “irrefutable proof” of the intellectual discordance between the world of phenomena and the world of the noumena to the extent of flatly denying the possibility of knowledge of the latter, they will still follow him if, in spite of this, he insists on the primacy of the practical over the theoretical reason.

The Ultimacy Of The Moral Consciousness

The reason why those who hold the Christian view with respect to morality as well as with respect to religion should take notice of the interrelatedness of the moral and religious with the intellectual consciousness as signally obvious in such men as Socrates and Kant, is obvious.

(1) In the first place, taking note of this interrelatedness should guard them against every form of intellectualism in religious and ethical matters. Non-Christians and Christians alike engage in the intellectual statements they make with respect to religion and morality because they are already committed to their religious and moral principles. Their religious and moral commitments are pre-theoretical.

(2) The religious and moral commitments of Christians and of non-Christians are in principle exclusive of one another. The basic religious and moral commitment of the non-Christian centers in the self-sufficiency or autonomy of the consciousness of man whether in the intellectual or in the religious-moral field. The basic and religious-moral commitment of the Christian centers in the self-sufficiency or autonomy of God.

(3) Only the Christian is aware of the principial or exclusive character of these two points of view. The Christian knows that he himself has been taken out of the non-Christian commitment to man as sufficient to himself by God through Christ and his Spirit. Only those who are elected in Christ know what it means not to be in Christ. Only they who are born from above know what it means to be born from below. Only covenant-keepers know what it means to be covenant breakers. Only they who realize that their intellectual and religious-moral effort has become fruitful through the work of Christ and his Spirit know the futility and frustration of all of man’s efforts when these are based on the idea of the autonomy of man.

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(4) Christians will therefore be instant in season and out of season to proclaim Christ as the Savior of man in all the spheres of his endeavor. They will present the teleological view of reality as it centers in the wisdom of the world. They know that the wisdom of the world has been made foolishness with God. They are not deterred in this presentation of Christian teleology to those who hold to the immanentist view of teleology by any intellectual argument on the part of those who hold the latter view. Christians know that every intellectual argument advanced by the would-be autonomous consciousness of man rests upon man himself as swimming in the shoreless and bottomless ocean of chance. Christians will not avoid intellectual debate. But in their debate with the would-be-autonomous man the Christian will always lead every argument the latter offers back to the point where it is seen to rest on the religious commitment to the self-sufficiency of man who is withal wholly unintelligible to himself. On the other hand, Christians will seek to avoid giving the impression that their own position rests upon a faith construct similar to that of the non-Christian. On the contrary, they will point out that it is only upon the presupposition of the Christian position that it is possible to make intelligent and significant discrimination between the goal, the norm and the motivation of human behavior.

Each of these points will need further clarification as we proceed. At this juncture it must suffice to have pointed out that the moral consciousness of man, to which appeal is made as to a final authority in non-Christian works on ethics, is, from the Christian point of view, the moral consciousness of man who is a creature made in the image of God but who has fallen into sin, and that sin means spiritual deadness and blindness to the true relationships of life.

Back To Windelband

We return to Windelband’s story of the development of the moral consciousness among the Greeks. The Sophists of Socrates’ day held that all ethical judgment was merely conventional. Back of this was the notion that man can have no knowledge of ultimate reality as something that is objective. Socrates sought for objectivity both in intellectual and in ethical matters. But he could not find this objectivity in the views of his predecessors. He agreed with the Sophists that the methods employed by previous philosophers had found no objectivity in human experience. He agreed also with the Sophists in the idea that if objectivity is to be found it must be found within man’s own moral consciousness. In all fields “man’s ability rests upon his insight.” “Ability, then, or excellence (Tuchtigkeit, arety) is insight.” “Scientific knowledge (epistemy) is therefore the basis of all qualities which make man able and useful, of all single aretai.” And back of all scientific knowledge lies self-knowledge. Hence Socrates constructed for himself the motto, know thyself (gnoti seauton).

How then does the position of Socrates differ from that of the Sophists? If Socrates as well as the Sophists seeks objectivity in the subject, by looking within, is his position not as relativist as is theirs? The answer must be, of course, that Socrates found universality and objectivity within the self while the Sophists did not. The Sophists, says Windelband, “gave themselves to an analysis of the feelings and impulses which lie at the basis of the actual decisions of individuals.” From this basis they concluded to relativism. In opposition to this, Socrates “reflected upon precisely that element which was the decisive
factor of the culture of his time: namely, the practical, political, and social significance which knowledge and science had achieved. Just through the process in which individuals had achieved independence, through the unfettering of personal passions, it had become evident that in all fields man’s ability rests upon his insight. In this Socrates found that objective standard of men and their actions which the Sophists had sought in vain in the machinery of feelings and desires.”

**W. T. Stace On Socrates**

Windelband’s point is perhaps more clearly expressed by W. T. Stace in his book, *A Critical History of Greek Thought*. The Sophists, says Stace, gave great impulse to the study of ethical ideas. 5 Their merit is that they brought “into general recognition the right of the subject…. Man, as a rational being, ought not to be tyrannized over by authority, dogma, and tradition. He cannot be subjected, thus violently, to the imposition of beliefs from an external source.” But, Stace adds, the mistake of the Sophists was that, in thus recognizing the right of the subject, “they wholly ignored and forgot the right of the object. For the truth has objective existence and is what it is, whether I think it or not.” When they asserted that man is the measure of all things they were right, but they forgot that this is true because man is a rational being. Reason within man is the universal part of man. And it is to this reason “as the universal part of man that Socrates made his appeal.” I, as an individual, as a mere ego, have no rights whatever. It is only as a rational being, as a member of the commonwealth of reason, that I have any rights, that I can claim to legislate for myself and others. “You have no right to an opinion unless it is founded upon that which is universal in man.

Socrates was destined to restore order out of chaos because, though with the Sophists appealing to the self, he appealed to the self as carrying within itself the universal principle of reason and order. This did not mean that Socrates thought of himself as having within his possession a full knowledge of truth, goodness and beauty. He knew well enough that he and all men “live for the most part in ignorance of what they ought to know.” Even so, in contradistinction from the Sophists, he founded knowledge upon reason and thereby restored objectivity. For him all knowledge is knowledge of concepts. If I say that man is mortal, I am thinking, not of any particular man, but of the class of men in general. Such an idea is called a general idea, or a concept. “Now reason is the faculty of concepts.” And, “concepts are formed inductively by comparing numerous examples of a class.” “Inductive reasoning is concerned with the formation of concepts, deductive reasoning with the application of them.” “Now since reason is the universal element in man, it follows that Socrates, in identifying knowledge with concepts, was restoring the belief in an objective truth, valid for all men, and binding upon all men, and was destroying the Sophistic teaching that the truth is whatever each individual chooses to think it is.”

The significance of this for ethics is immediately apparent. Socrates developed his theory of objectivity primarily in the interest of the practical question of what constitutes the good life and what is best for the people. He was interested in discovering the nature of virtue “only in order to practice virtue in life.” The significance of his view for the

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practical life as Socrates saw it was that: (1) virtue is one and is identical with
knowledge. (2) This being the case, virtue is teachable to the young so that they too may
practice it. (3) This being the case, happiness may result for men because if men know
taste they will practice it. No one voluntarily does the wrong. “All the wrong doing
arises from ignorance.” Thus, by appealing to reason, that is to the universal aspect in
man, Socrates saved the objectivity of both knowledge and ethics. He saved both because
saving one is, in effect, saving the other. Saving knowledge is saving virtue, for
knowledge is virtue. Thus Socrates was a “restorer of faith.”

Of course, says Stace, we have not thus reached a fully satisfactory view of ethics.
“The movement of thought exhibits three stages. The first stage is positive belief, not
founded upon reason; it is merely conventional belief. At the second stage thought
becomes destructive and sceptical. It denies what was affirmed in the previous stage. The
third stage is the restoration of positive belief now founded upon the concept, upon
reason, and not merely upon custom.”

With Socrates we have reached the third stage. The Sophists had undermined all
ideals of goodness and truth. “Socrates is the restorer of these ideals, but with him they
are no longer the ideals of simple faith: they are the ideals of reason. They are based upon
reason. Socrates substituted comprehending belief for unintelligent assent.”

There is only one remedy for the ills of thought, and that is, more thought. If thought,
in its first inroads, leads, as it always does, to scepticism and denial, the only course is,
not to suppress thought, but to found faith upon it.” Socrates agreed with the Sophists that
the truth must be my truth, but mine “in my capacity as a rational being.”

At this stage we may ask Stace whether there is anything more to be said. According,
to his analysis we have in the view of Socrates a well founded and objective basis for
ethics. At least Socrates has put us on the way to such a view. If there should still prove
to be any defects in Socrates’ view they can be cured by applying more thought. But how
is this possible? Is not Socrates already standing upon the only foundation for objective
moral law within the reach of man? Can any appeal be made by thought to a principle
more universal than is already found in Socrates? The answer is obviously in the
negative. On the position of Stace the thought of God is not more universal than the
thought of Socrates. And if it were, there would be no way of finding it except by means
of the thought of Socrates.

Stace himself indicates the basic defect in the ethics of Socrates. He does so when he
deals with the followers of Socrates, the Cynics, the Cyrenaics, and the Megarics. All
these claimed to be followers of Socrates. But they differed in their notion of virtue. The
reason for this lays, at least in part, in the fact that Socrates had, after all, not clearly said
what virtue is. “If virtue is the sole end of life, what precisely is virtue?” Socrates had
given no clear answer to this question. The only definition he had given was that virtue
was knowledge, but upon examination it turns out that this is no definition at all. Virtue is
knowledge, but knowledge of what? Virtue is not knowledge of astronomy or of
mathematics. Of what then is virtue knowledge? Nothing remains but to say that virtue is
the knowledge of virtue. And to say this is to go in a circle.

Here we have the heart of the matter. What Stace is saying is that which has so often
been said about the ethics of Kant, namely, that it is purely formal. To escape the
relativism of the Sophists, Socrates could do nothing more than appeal to the idea of pure
form. And by doing so he lost all contact with the contents of the daily life of men.
Interested in the practice of virtue, Socrates could give no definition of virtue that did not lose all contact with practice. His difficulty on this point is that which is typical of all Greek ethics as well as of all Greek thinking. In his work *Reformatie en Scholastiek in de Wysbegeerte*, Vol. 1, Herman Dooyeweerd has shown that Greek thinking develops through various stages by using the form-matter scheme. This development, he points out, reaches its climax in Aristotle’s philosophy. We may add at this point that the difficulty Stace finds in the definition of virtue given by Socrates, is not only the difficulty found in all Greek thought, but in all non-Christian thought, modern as well as ancient. This point will concern us more fully later.

For the moment we turn to another point indicated by Stace. It is to the effect that the formalism of the Socratic definition of virtue can, on the non-Christian view, be remedied only by an appeal to the “irrational elements” in the soul of man. Stace quotes the criticism Aristotle makes on the ethics of Socrates. Socrates, says Aristotle, forgot the “irrational parts of the soul.” He adds: “Aristotle’s criticism of Socrates is unanswerable. All experience shows that men do deliberately do wrong, that, knowing well what is right, they nevertheless do the wrong.” It is easy to see, says Stace, why Socrates should have made this mistake, for “Socrates really does appear to have been above human weakness. He was not guided by passions, but by reason, and it followed as the night follows the day, that if Socrates knew what was right, he did it.”

Two remarks are in order with respect to the point here made by Stace. The first is that on his own showing the objectivity for knowledge and ethics which he says Socrates found by appealing to reason as the universal aspect in man, turns out to be an empty form, and there is no connection of this abstract universal with particulars except in terms of an irrational principle. In other words, Socrates, as well as the Sophists, has finally to come back to the realm of pure contingency. Thus we are back to the Sophistic notion that in practice there is no known validity to any moral law except what man, irrational in his individuality, is willing to approve. The situation cannot be remedied by “applying more thought” as Stace suggests. The application of more thought is meaningless if thought must be applied to the irrational. With this in mind the conclusion is inevitable that Socrates has not found anything like the true inwardness of ethical experience. If human personality is assumed to be a combination of abstract formal thought somehow related to purely irrational elements, there is no coherence in human personality at all. The “irrational elements” of the soul, which, according to Aristotle, Socrates forgot, are wholly out of reach of the rational or universal element which is supposed to control them. When Stace suggests that at least in the case of Socrates reason was wholly in control of his passions, we can only attribute this to unreasonable faith. Stace cannot make intelligible how in the case of any human being an abstract principle of reason can get into intelligible contact with that which is by definition purely irrational. It is only on Christian presuppositions that the false contrast between abstract universal principle and abstract irrational particularity and his environment can be overcome.

Stace himself seems to sense that the matter is not settled by saying that Socrates appealed to reason as the universal element in man. For if that were all, he might well be thought of as having maintained a system of philosophy. And yet this is what, even according to Stace, Socrates has not done. “Socrates constructed no philosophy, that is to say, no system of philosophy. He was the author of philosophical tendencies, and of a philosophical method.” He believed that he was guided in all his actions. It was this
voice, not simply reason as a universal element in him, that gave him premonitions “of the good or evil consequences of his proposed actions.” Socrates has faith “in the ideals of reason.”

The reader may note that in this respect too, Socrates prefigures Kant. Kant knows that no such a thing as a rational system of absolute truth and morality is within human reach. Kant held that no scientific knowledge was to be had of the realm of morality and religion. Socrates knew this too. Yet both felt that somehow they may hold to a teleological view of reality. They want the primacy of the moral over the physical. But if this primacy is to be maintained it has to be held by means of something like what has in modern times been called essence-insight (Wesensschau). In this notion of Wesensschau, reason as the universal element of man is no longer used in order to establish a monistic or determinist system of being. As Kant went beyond Spinoza, who said that order and connection of thought are one, so Socrates went beyond Parmenides who said that to be and to think are one. But how could Kant get beyond the rationalism and determinism of Spinoza, or Socrates beyond the rationalism and determinism of Parmenides? There was no other way open to them except by admitting the irrational and pure contingency into their system. When therefore Kant maintained the primacy of the practical reason over the theoretical, and Socrates maintained the idea of teleological view of reality in spite of theoretical scepticism, they both did so by the mere assertion that somehow good would come out on top of evil. Both Kant and Socrates as well as Spinoza and Parmenides continued to believe in the intellect of man as a tool by which man can legitimately make universal assertions about all reality. For both maintained that no such thing as an authoritative revelation can come to man. Both seek to maintain their principle of inwardness in ethics by making universal negative assumptions or assertions about the possibility of the revelation of God the creator to man as creature. For Kant any form of religion or morality must be within the limits of pure reason alone. Similarly, Socrates wants a definition of the “holy,” independent of what gods or men say about it. He is certain that anything that God might say about the nature of the good is adventitious. A definition of the good given by authority would be for him extraneous to the very idea of morality as sufficient to itself.

The picture that comes out of all this is that of a man who boldly applies the “universal element in him” in order to exclude God and his revelation, and then finds himself unable in terms of this universal element to give an intelligible account of morality.
Chapter 15: Werner Jaeger’s Concept Of Greek Culture

Someone may say that in choosing Stace as our interpreter of Socrates we have made it easy for ourselves. Does not Stace over-simplify the case when he says that Socrates cured the relativism of the Sophists by simply appealing to reason as the universal element in man? And was not Stace himself driven beyond this simple interpretation of Socrates when he mentioned the fact that Socrates did not simply appeal to reason but also to the “demon” within him? Is it not clear then that Socrates appealed to some sort of intellectual intuition rather than to the intellect pure and simple?

We therefore turn to Werner Jaeger’s great work on Paideia so as to learn from him about Socrates. Jaeger surely cannot be accused of narrow rationalism. It is his desire to understand the nature of the Greek spirit from a wide view of its culture. And his understanding of the Socratic view of the moral consciousness is part of his study of Greek culture as a whole.

Arete

In the first volume of his work Jaeger reviews the pre-Socratic period of Greek culture. The Greeks, he says, “are the philosophers of the world.” This means that their theoria “was deeply and inherently connected” with their art and their poetry, with the idea of vision. We may say that the Platonic idea is a “unique and specifically Hellenic intellectual product” and as such “is the clue to understanding the mentality of the Greeks in many other respects.” In particular, the “tendency to formalize which appears throughout Greek sculpture and painting sprang from the same source as the Platonic idea.” The Greeks had a unique instinct “to regard every part as subordinate and relative to an ideal whole.” And the “greatest work of art they had to create was man. They were the first to recognize that education means deliberately moulding human character in accordance with an ideal.” “From our first glimpse of them, we find that man is the centre of their thought.” But by discovering man “the Greeks did not discover the subjective self but realized the universal laws of human nature. The intellectual principle of the Greeks is not individualism but ‘humanism,’ to use the word in its original and classical sense.”

Humanism in this sense “meant the process of educating man into his true form, the real and genuine human nature. That is the true Greek paideia, adopted by the Roman statesman as a model.” This paideia therefore “starts from the ideal, not from the individual.” Even above man as “member of the horde” as well as above man “as a supposedly independent personality,” “stands man as the ideal.” “It is the universally valid model of humanity which all individuals are bound to imitate.” Even so, the ideal is not some abstraction above time and space. “It is the living ideal which had grown up in the very soil of Greece, and changed with the changing fortunes of the race, assimilating every stage of its history and intellectual development.”

With this general notion of Greek *paideia* in mind, Jaeger traces the development of the ideal of man in the history of Greek literature before Socrates. And this development centers around the idea of *arete*, virtue. For this reason the story of this development is of direct importance for an understanding of Greek ethics.

“The word *arete* had originally meant warlike prowess … but a later age found no difficulty in transforming the concept of nobility to suit its own higher ideals …” When Aristotle made his analysis of the moral consciousness he began with the “highminded *arete* of old aristocratic morality.” Thus it was clear, says Jaeger, that the “Greek conception of man and his *arete* developed along an unbroken line throughout Greek history.” It finally reached its high point in Plato and Aristotle with the idea of *kalokagathia*. The true man seeking the realization of the ideal man in himself “takes possession of the beautiful.” A man who truly loves himself will make the utmost sacrifice for this ideal of the beautiful life. Such a man may “choose to live nobly for a year rather than to pass many years of ordinary life” or “do one great and noble deed” rather than many a small one. Thus the “basic motive of Greek *arete* is contained in the words ‘to take possession of the beautiful.’ ” Thus the “Homeric poems and the great Athenian philosophers are bound together by the continuing life of the old Hellenic ideal of *arete*.”

With great learning and attractiveness Jaeger reviews the development of the Greek view of man in the poetry of early Greece. In this review he gives evidence calculated to establish the general thesis of the nature of the Greek concept of *arete* already mentioned.

**Homer**

Homer was a true educator of the Greek virtue because he sought to express “all the aesthetic and moral potentialities of mankind.” Poetry cannot educate unless “it embodies a moral belief, a high ardour of spirit, a broad and compelling ideal of humanity.” “Art has a limitless power of converting the human soul—a power the Greeks called *psychogogia*. For art alone possesses the two essentials of educational influence—universal significance and immediate appeal.” “Thus, poetry has the advantage over both the universal teachings of abstract reason and the accidental events of individual experience.” The “Greek epics express, with an incomparable depth and fulness, the eternal knowledge of truth and destiny which is the creation of the heroic age—the age that cannot be destroyed by any bourgeois ‘progress.’ ” Homer, therefore, became the “Teacher of all humanity.” “The world of Homer is throughout inspired by a comprehensive philosophy of human nature and of the eternal laws of the world-process, a philosophy which has seen and judged every essential factor in man’s life.” “For Homer, and for the Greeks in general, the ultimate ethical boundaries are not mere rules of moral obligation, but fundamental laws of being.” Homer sees life as governed by universal laws; and for that reason he is the supreme artist in the craft of motivation.”

Of course, Homer is not modern. He does not, as do modern writers, “see every action from within as a phenomenon of human consciousness.” For him, “nothing great happens without the aid of a divine power.” Even so, if we study the instances of divine intervention in his epics we “can trace a development from the occasional external interference of the gods—to the constant spiritual guidance of a great man by a divinity, as Odysseus is guided by the perpetual inspiration of Athena.” The “Homerian epics
contain the germs of all Greek philosophy. In them we can clearly see the anthropocentric tendency of Greek thought, that tendency which contrasts so strongly with the theomorphic philosophy of the Oriental who sees God as the sole actor and man as merely the instrument or object of that divine activity.”

What Jaeger here describes may be called the gradual development toward inwardness of the Greek spirit. The gods of Greece are gradually being ethicized. Their intervention in human affairs becomes less and less intermittent and mechanical. The idea of sufficient reason gradually takes over the function of the arbitrary will of Zeus. The “Zeus who presides over the heavenly council in the Odyssey personifies a high philosophical conception of the world-conscience.” The supreme deity of the Odyssey is a “spiritual power, whose essence is thought; a power infinitely superior to the blind passions which make men sin and entangle them in the net of Ate.”

**Hesiod**

As for Hesiod, who follows Homer, he shows the common people the connection between righteousness and their daily tasks. “When Hesiod identifies the will of Zeus with the concept of justice, when he creates a new divinity, the goddess Dike, and sets her close beside Zeus the highest of all gods, he is inspired by the burning religious and moral enthusiasm with which the rising class of peasants and townsfolk hailed the new ideal of Justice, the saviour.” The “aim of work is arete as the common man understands it.” “Thus Hesiod’s poetry shows us a social class, hitherto debarred from culture and education, actually realizing its own potentialities.”

**The City-State**

But though Greek culture is thus broadened so as to take in the peasant class, “Greek culture first assumed its classical form in the polis, or city-state.” “It was the firmer and more complete type of community, which expressed the Greek ideal more fully than any other type.” So the ideal which inspired the Spartan community and “toward which, with iron consistency, every effort of every Spartan was directed, is imperishable because it is an expression of a fundamental human instinct.” Plato recognized and immortalized this fact. Tyrtaeus changes the Homeric ideal “of the single champion’s arete into the arete of the patriot, and with that new faith he strives to inspire his whole society. He is endeavoring to create a nation of heroes. Death is beautiful if it is a hero’s death; and to die for one’s country is a hero’s death.”

At the beginning of the sixth century the new ideal of the city-state “found expression in the poetry of Solon.” “One of the most famous poetic utterances of the sixth century is the line, often quoted by later philosophers, which says that all virtues are summed up in righteousness. The line is a close and exhaustive definition of the essence of the new constitutional city-state.” And this “new conception that righteousness is the arete of the perfect citizen, embracing and transcending all others, naturally supplanted previous ideals.” But this means that the earlier arete was “raised to a new power.” Plato said that in the ideal state “Tyrtaeus’ poem praising courage as the highest virtue must be rewritten so as to put righteousness in the place of courage.” Aristotle held the same view. “Later ages did not recognize the fact that the ethical systems of Plato and Aristotle were based
on the morality of the early city-state; for they were accustomed to thinking of those systems as timeless and eternal.”

**Elegiac And Iambic**

Was there then a development of poetry to give expression to the new concept of the city-state? The answer is that in the city-state the life of the individual was subjected to a strict legal code, and that it was therefore in prose rather than in poetry that this ideal found its chief expression. “The constitutional polis was created by logical thought, and therefore had no basic kinship with poetry.” But poetry now found a new world, “the world of purely individual experience.” “This is the world opened up to us by the Aeolian lyrics and the elegiacs and iambic poetry of Ionia.” In it the “energy of the individual’s will to live” is expressed. But even this is done against the background of the city-state. There is no conscious solipsism in it. In exploring the new world of individuality these Elegiac and Iambic Greek poets were “still somehow bound by universal standards.” “The Greeks always thought of personality as actively related to the world, in fact, to two worlds, the world of nature and the world of human society and not as isolated from it.” “Personality, for the Greeks, gains its liberty and its consciousness of selfhood not by abandoning itself to subjective thought and feeling, but by making itself an objective thing; and, as it realizes that it is a separate world opposed to the external law, it discovers its own inner laws.” Thus “the formative influence of Homer” has by the process of adaptation to changing conditions of Greek life “contributed above all else to raise the individual to a higher stage of freedom in life and thought.”

**Hedonist Poetry**

Out of the trend toward individual expression the hedonist school of poetry developed. Mimnermus of Colophon writes to express “the joy of life.” “Without golden Aphrodite, what is life and what is pleasure?” “The hedonist school of poetry marks one of the most important phases in the history of the Greek spirit.” “Greek logic always posed the problem of the individual will in ethics and in politics as a conflict between pleasure and nobility.” “… the culmination of Plato’s philosophy is the defeat of pleasure in its aim to be the highest good. In the fifth century the opposition became sharp and definite; all the efforts of the Attic philosophers from Socrates to Plato were directed to reconciling the opponents; and they met in final harmony in Aristotle’s ideal of human personality.”

**The Culture Of Athens**

Coming now to the culture of Athens, we observe that it seeks to combine the “outward striving energy of the individual and the unifying power of the state.” “Solon is the first embodiment of this truly Attic spirit, and at the same time the greatest of its creators.” Solon, like his predecessors “places all his political faith in the power of Dike …” “… Justice is for him an inseparable part of the divine world-order.” The “violation of justice means the disruption of the life of the community.” Man’s life too is subject to
order. But, says Solon, the “hardest thing of all is to recognize the invisible Mean of judgment, which alone contains the limits of all things.” This idea of the mean and its limits, “an idea of fundamental importance in Greek ethics, indicates the problem which was of central interest to Solon and his contemporaries; how to gain a new rule of life by the force of inner understanding.”

**Early Philosophy**

Jaeger now turns to the question of Greek philosophical thinking. “It is hard,” he says, “to fix the point, when rational thinking began in Greece. There is no discontinuity between Ionian natural philosophy and the Homeric epics. The history of Greek thought is an organic unity, closed and complete.” “To adapt a phrase of Kant, mythical thought without the formative logos is blind, and logical theorizing without living mythical thought is empty.” We may therefore think of Greek philosophy “as the process by which the original religious conception of the universe, the conception implicit in the myth, was increasingly rationalized.” If we picture “this process as the gradual shading of a great circle, in smaller concentric circles from the circumference to the center,” rational thinking “invades the circle of the universe, taking possession of it more and more deeply, until in Plato and Socrates it reaches the centre, which is the human soul.”

The early philosophers such as Thales, Anaximander and Heraclitus were as bold in their use of “pure independent logic” as were the Ionian poets in their expression of their emotions. “Both ventures are based on the growing power of the individual. At this stage logic appears to work like an explosive. The oldest authorities shake and fall under its impact. “Nothing is correct but that which I can explain to myself on conclusive grounds, that for which my thought can reasonably account. “Yet in this victory of the rational over traditional authority, there is latent a force which is to triumph over the individual: the concept of Truth, a new universal category to which every personal preference must yield.”

It is impossible here to include even in outline form, what Jaeger says about these philosophers. Suffice it to mention Heraclitus was a forerunner of Socrates. For Heraclitus it was the human soul “with all its emotions and sufferings” that was “the centre of all the energies of the cosmos.” “Cosmic phenomena happened through him, he held, and for him.” His predecessors “had brought the Greeks to realize the eternal conflict between Being and Becoming. But now they were driven to ask the awful question: ‘In this universal struggle, what place is there for man?’ ” Heraclitus sums up his philosophy “in one pregnant saying, ‘I sought for myself.’ Humanization of philosophy could not be more trenchantly expressed.”

No philosopher before Socrates “awakes such keen personal sympathy as Heraclitus. He stands at the very pinnacle of the freedom of Ionian thought, and his ‘I sought for myself’ expresses the highest consciousness of selfhood.” A “new world of knowledge could be obtained if the soul were to turn to contemplate herself.” And it is impossible to “discover the frontiers of the soul—it has so deep a logos.”
The Soul And Its Depth

And *logos* was for Heraclitus “not the conceptual-thinking (*noein, noymo*) of Parmenides, whose pure analytical logic would not admit the metaphorical idea that the soul is boundless. It was a form of knowledge, the origin of both ‘action and speech.’ ” Not only is the soul too deep to be grasped by analytical knowledge, “Nature and life are a *griphas*, a riddle, a Delphic oracle.” So Heraclitus thinks of himself as the “philosophic Oedipus who robs the Sphinx of her enigma: for, ‘Nature loves to hide herself.’ ” “This,” says Jaeger, “is a new way to philosophize: a novel conception of the philosopher’s calling. It can be expressed only in words and metaphors drawn from intuition.” “Men must follow the logos. The logos is a still higher and more universal ‘community’ than the law of the city; and upon it men can support their lives and their thoughts, and ‘strengthen’ themselves with it, ‘as a city strengthens itself with law.’...’Men live as if each of them had a private insight of his own.’ ”

The failure of men to follow this logos is therefore not merely a failure of theoretical thought. It is deeper than that. Man must live as a “cosmic being.” Through its divine origin the self “is able to penetrate the divine heart of nature from which it was born.” But “cosmic wisdom” is not realizable “by the average intellect.” There are “warring forces within the unity of nature.” “Only if understood as life, does the existence of the cosmos lose its apparent contradiction.” Conflict, said Heraclitus, “is the father of everything,” and only “in conflict could Dike establish herself.” “As symbols for the clash and harmony of opposites in the cosmos Heraclitus uses the bow and the lyre. Both do their work by ‘counterstriving conjunction.’ The general conception which was needed in philosophical terminology here is that of tension: but it is supplied by the visual image. Heraclitean unity is full of tension.”

Inwardness

In what Jaeger has said so far he has led us, step by step, toward an understanding of Socrates and his view of the moral consciousness. Throughout his survey of early Greek poetry and philosophy, Jaeger makes clear that basically the Greeks are existential thinkers. All their love for analytical thinking, all their striving for insight into the nature of reality was in order to bring about in the individual and in the community throughout the generations following one another, the ideal human character. The repeated discussion of *arete* is the clearest possible evidence of this.

 Implicit, if not always fully explicit, in all the effort of poets, lawgivers, and philosophers was the search for a moral ideal, for man as an individual and for man as a member of the nation or even of the race.

 Implicit also in all the cultural effort of the Greeks was the search for an objective moral as well as intellectual standard or criterion. The thought and behavior of the individual must somehow fit into the pattern of reality as a whole. The individual is conceived of as being a participant in the cosmos. Objectivity, in logic or in morals, therefore naturally takes the form of the individual’s conforming himself to a pattern of existence and behavior that exists in its own right.

 Implicit, finally, in the development traced so far by Jaeger, is that the individual, as participant in the nature of cosmic order, has within him the insight and the power of
properly judging and of attaining the realization of the moral ideal so far as this is objectively possible.

Implicit in everything said so far is also the idea that there are irrational and immoral powers in the universe that make the full realization of the moral ideal impossible for any man. Heraclitus expresses this idea clearly with his idea of opposites. Striving and counterstriving is found everywhere. Even the best of men are confronted with fate and its relentless bludgeoning of good men and bad alike.

What then is the good man to do? Is he to submit to the antimonies that he finds in nature, whether considered from the point of view of sensation or of the intellect? No, he must look within himself and there find a moral unity that is higher than that which may be attained by sensation or by the analytical intellect. He must look within the innermost recesses of his soul to find there the intimations of the victory of the good over evil, and therefore of his own participation in that victory.

Jaeger points out that this tendency toward inwardness has not reached the point it has reached in modern times. The search for himself as Heraclitus speaks of it, and even as Socrates speaks of it, is not to be identified with the ethical dualism of Kant. But this is only a matter of time and of greater consistency. Sooner or later the inner principle of all non-Christian ethics as well as epistemology and metaphysics was bound to become more self-conscious of itself. This principle is that the ultimate distinctions between true and false, right and wrong, are to be made by man as ultimate. The Greek objectivism, both of knowledge and morality, is, after all, only an abstract principle or form. Thus both the notion of the objective moral ideal and of objective law were bound, in the end, to show themselves for what they are, projections of the would-be-autonomous moral self. And only when this is done will its radical antithesis to the Christian view of the moral ideal, the moral law, appear in its full clarity.

**The Mind Of Athens**

So far Jaeger dealt with *Archaic Greece*. In his second book (of Volume 1) he takes up *The Mind of Athens*. We shall need to be very brief in our survey of this part.

**The Drama Of Aeschylus**

When Arnold Toynbee seeks to relate the Christian religion to other religions, he finds great help in the famous aphorism of Aeschylus to the effect that “suffering teaches.” That teaching, says Toynbee, is also the heart of Christianity. Christ’s suffering exhibits the fact that reality is dialectical, consisting of ultimately evil as well as of ultimately good forces, and that man must somehow believe in the victory of good over evil.

Jaeger’s interpretation of Aeschylus is not radically different from that of Toynbee. Aeschylus “grew up to manhood under the new democracy which had swiftly repressed the aristocrats who strove to seize power after the fall of the Pisistratids.” A new task now faced the Athenians. And in Aeschylus they found a spokesman for their new ideals. “State and spirit now coalesced, and became a perfect unity: and that very rare unity gave the new type of man which appeared at this time its quality of classical uniqueness.” Montesquieu said that Greek democracy was “based on virtue.” The faith “in the ideal of
justice by which the young state was inspired now seemed to be divinely consecrated and affirmed in the victory over Persia. And now, for the first time, the true culture of the Athenian people came into being.” “Tragedy restored to Greek poetry its power of embracing all human interests.” “Epic and tragedy are two huge mountain-chains, connected by an unbroken line of foothills.”

The tragedies of Aeschylus gave expression to “… the new type of human character which was growing up in the fifth century …” “The earliest form of tragedy, which was not action but pure passion, used the force of sympatheia, through which the spectators shared the emotions of the chorus, to focus their attention on the doom sent by the gods to produce the tragedy.” Tragedy dealt with the problem of tyche or moira. It acted out “the terrors of human destiny …” Why does God send suffering into the life of man? Doom strikes individuals, but also whole families and generations of families.

Aeschylus starts with the idea of unmitigated doom but always maintains his faith “in the ultimate justice of heaven.” Thus “the boldness of Seven Against Thebes lies in its antinomy, its moral conflict.” The heroic Eteocles is mercilessly beaten down. Alas for him. But he attains greatness in his tragedy, “an otherwise unattainable height which man can reach even at the instant of his destruction. And the hero, by sacrificing his doomed life to the salvation of his fellow-men, thereby reconciles us to what might seem, even to the devout, a senseless and needless destruction of the highest arete.” And Eteocles suffers all the more nobly because he is not merely passive, but active in it all.

**Sophocles**

Thus we sense the significance of Aeschylus tragedy. He discovered the “meaning of destiny.” He made humanity itself the center of human life. Sophocles drew his human characters in accordance with the cultural ideal established by Aeschylus. Balance and proportion are for Sophocles “the principle of all existence, for they mean the reverent recognition of that justice which is implicit in everything and which can be realized only at the fulness of spiritual maturity.” “Sophocles’ tragedies are the climax of the development of the Greek idea that proportion is one of the highest values of human life.” Proportion is “the divine power which rules the world and human life.” “Sophocles guided his work by a standard and in it presented men ‘as they ought to be.’ ” His work “was a manifestation of the new ideal of arete, which for the first time emphasized the central importance of the psyche, the ‘soul,’ in all culture. In the course of the fifth century the word psyche acquired a new overtone, a loftier significance, which reached its fulness in the teaching of Socrates. The soul was now objectively recognized as the centre of man’s life.” They found structure in the soul for it acted according to laws. Simonides spoke of the arete as “‘built foursquare in hand and foot and mind.’” Humanism is born.

An important difference between Aeschylus and Sophocles must be noted here. “Aeschylus had tried to solve the problem of arete; Sophocles admits its insolubility as a fact.” And in the face of this his characters are the first who, by suffering, by the absolute abandonment of their earthly happiness or of their social and physical life, reach the truest greatness attainable by man.”

In accordance with the description of the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles, man is continually driven toward greater reliance on himself in the fact of the ever-increasing
power of fate. If the idea of arete reaches its most classic expression in Sophocles it is because the characters of his tragedies are face to face with the most irrational doom. In the tragedies of both Aeschylus and Sophocles men are noble and brave because they seem fearlessly to face unmerited doom. Their existence is, to begin with, existence unto death.

To be sure, it is not till we reach modern existentialism that this motif is worked out fully. But Greek ethics, so far as Jaeger has traced it for us, is basically of the same nature.

The Sophists conceived it to be their task to teach the conception of arete they had inherited, to the people. We shall not reproduce Jaeger’s discussion of them other than to mention the fact that he thinks of them as a necessary stepping-stone toward Socrates and Plato.

**Euripides**

We now briefly mention Euripides so as to complete the trio of tragedians. When Euripides lived, early philosophy had already made its impact. “Philosophy, which had had a sort of subliminal existence in early Greek poetry, now emerged into the light of day as independent nous: rational thought invaded every sphere of existence.” Accordingly the speeches of Euripides’ characters “strike us as being highly intellectualized.” They express a “new subjective capacity for suffering.” Self-reflection in connection with suffering is a new phenomenon in Greek tragedy. The result is that Euripides “could see no harmony between the cosmic and the moral laws.”

The reader will here inevitably think of the ethical dualism of Kant. The more self-reflection increases, the more the dualism between a “non-moral” world of nature and the internal strivings of the “free” and therefore “good” moral consciousness appears.

“Euripides,” says Jaeger, “was the first psychologist.” “It was he who discovered the soul, in a new sense—who revealed the troubled world of man’s emotions and passions. He never tired of showing how they are expressed and how they conflict with the intellectual forces of the soul. He created the pathology of the mind.” Jaeger expresses the “ethical dualism” of Euripides strikingly when he says: “Euripides’ psychology was produced by the coincidence of two new factors, the discovery of the subjective world and the rationalist approach to nature which was at that time revealing a constant succession of hidden territories. Without science, his poetry could not have existed.”

Euripides sounds extremely modern when we think of the fact that “in Medea and Hippolytus he revealed the tragic working-out of the pathology of sexual desire unfulfilled; while Hecuba shows how extreme suffering distorts the character, and presents the slow hideous degeneration of a noble lady who has lost everything into a repulsive and bestial thing.” “In his poetic world, always fading into subjective emotion and subjective thought, there is no fixed point.” “He makes no attempt to follow earlier poets in justifying the ways of God to man.” “Man is now no longer able and willing to abandon himself to any view of life which does not make himself, in the Protagorean sense, the ultimate standard.”

One thinks at once of Sartre when one reads Jaeger’s analysis of Greek tragedy involved in and expressing Greek philosophy. Jaeger says: “And so this development ends with a paradox: at the moment when his claim for freedom is loudest, man realizes
that he is completely unfree… Hecuba is incarnate suffering. To Agamemnon’s cry ‘Alas, alas, what woman has been so accursed?’ she replies, ‘None, unless you mean Fortune herself.’ “The accursed power of Tyche now stands in the place of the blessed gods. Its devilish reality grows more urgent for Euripides as the reality of the gods fades away.” “In religious matters as in others, no one has plumbed the depths of the irrational element in the human spirit so deeply as this poet of rationalism.”

**The Comic Poet**

But Socrates said that the true poet “must be both a tragedian and a comedian.” And “later Greek philosophy defined man as the only animal capable of laughter.”

The comic poet stands at a distance above his subject. Thus “Aristophanic comedy contemplates its subject from such a height and with such intellectual liberty that it abolishes the irrelevant ephemeral aspects of even the most trivial fact. What the poet describes is the eternal, because it is, in Nietzsche’s phrase, the All-too-human Humanity; and he could not describe it unless he could stand at a distance from it.” Thus *The Birds* of Aristophanes “gaily shakes off the pressing anxieties of the present, and makes a wish-picture of the ideal state, cloud-cuckoo-land …”

In his various plays Aristophanes brought two allegorical figures into the picture. They were the Just Argument and the Unjust Argument. The former represented the traditional and the latter the more modern, sophistic method and point of view. The Unjust Argument asks “who was ever profited by sophrosyne?” Did not Hyperbolus acquire “‘more than many talents’ of gold by his underhand tricks?” Surely, the youth would be foolish to follow sophrosyne for they would “abandon all the joys of life.” “If you take my advice, you will give free reign to your nature, rollick and laugh, think nothing shameful. If you are caught in adultery, deny your guilt and appeal to Zeus, who was not strong enough to resist Eros and women. ‘How can you, a mere mortal, be stronger than a god?”

The Unjust Argument “makes the audience burst into laughter by praising their own lax morality, and then explains that anything which is the practice of the vast majority of an honorable nation cannot possibly be a vice.”

The Just Argument shows the “complete unscrupulousness of the clever modern intellectuals, with their abnegation of all moral standards.”

**Socrates**

We turn now to Jaeger’s portrait of Socrates. He deals with it in Book Three of his work. The title of this book is *In Search of a Divine Centre.*

Ultimately Jaeger is interested in “the transformation of the Hellenistic Greek *paideia* into Christian *paideia.*” It is our own chief interest to understand his view of the relation of Greek to Christian culture and therefore of the relation of Greek to Christian morality.

But from a more limited point of view, and as a step toward this goal, Jaeger remarks that everything he said in the first volume should be taken as an introduction to Plato. So

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Socrates forms a link between the *paideia* of all preceding Greek culture and the final culminating Greek view of *paideia* found in Plato.

The fourth century B.C. was of the greatest possible importance. Through the gloom of political disaster there appear “the great geniuses of education…. Their cultural ideals, which outlived the independent political existence of their nation, were to be transmitted to the other peoples of antiquity and their successors as the highest possible expression of humanity.”

“In 404 B.C., after almost thirty years of war between the Greek states, Athens fell.” The effects were not merely political. The catastrophe “shook all moral laws, it struck at the roots of religion. If the disaster was to be repaired, the process must start with religion and ethics.” “It was in that time of suffering that the Greek spirit first began to turn inward upon itself—as it was to do more and more throughout the succeeding centuries.”

What Jaeger here speaks of as the turning inward of the Greek spirit had, as we have noted at several points, already begun to take place in the period preceding Socrates. And each time it was in connection with what was conceived of as being the relentless power of a non-moral doom overhanging individuals, families, the nation and mankind. As the Greeks faced up to this doom they realized increasingly that the true strength of the individual and even of the state “was the strength of the spirit.”

When Thucydides, the historian, looked back to the age of Pericles, the age of the greatest power of Athens, he observed that even then “the heart and soul of that power was the spirit of men.” So now, “the men of the fourth century thought hard about the relation of the state and individual, because they were trying to remake the state, starting from a moral reformation of the individual soul.” Their search for a new and higher ideal of state and society “ended with the search for a new God. The *paideia* of the fourth century, after it saw the kingdom of earth blown into dust, fixed its home in the kingdom of heaven.” Socrates’ place is to be seen in the light of this search “for a new God.” Plato and others revealed the “innermost meaning of Socrates’ search for the aim of life” in their dialogues of new philosophical prose poetry. Here was a new and higher poetry. “The centre of the entire struggle is *paideia*.”

Socrates “became for all eternity the ‘representative man.’ ” It was the death he suffered even more than his life that accounts for his eminence. Erasmus of Rotterdam “boldly numbered him among his saints, and invoked him with the prayer, *Sancte Socrates, ora pro nobis!*”

This fact itself indicates that it was the prophets of the “modern enlightenment” who made Socrates their hero. Socrates was seen as “the apostle of moral liberty, bound by no dogma, lettered by no traditions, standing free on his own feet, listening only to the inner voice of conscience—preaching the new religion of this world, and a heaven to be found in this life by our own spiritual strength, not through grace but through tireless striving to perfect our own nature.” The effort was made “to create a modern culture in which the indestructible content of Jesus’ teaching was blended with certain essential features taken from the Greek ideal of humanity.” Again, after the Reformation tried to bring only the “pure” form of the gospel, the Enlightenment brought about anew the “Socrates-cult.” Again there was no attempt to displace Christianity; the spirit of Jesus and that of Socrates must supplement one another. “Since the beginning of the modern era, he [Socrates] has had an enormous influence as the pattern of an *anima naturaliter Christiana.*”
But we must now listen to Plato’s estimate of Socrates. From the Heraclitean Cratylus young Plato learned that all is flux. “Then when he met Socrates, a new world opened up to him. Socrates confined himself entirely to questions of morality, and tried to discover the eternal essence of the Just, the Good, the Beautiful, etc.” Socrates was looking for a “fixed point in the ethical world.” Plato combined the position of Cratylus with that of Socrates. Cratylus’ doctrine that everything flows “referred to the only world that he knew—the world of sensible phenomena. But Socrates, in the search for the conceptual essence of those predicates like ‘good,’ ‘just,’ ‘beautiful,’ on which our existence as moral beings is based, was looking toward a different reality, which does not flow but truly ‘is’—because it remains immutably and eternally the same.” Socrates had introduced Plato to the idea of universal concepts, and Plato developed his own system from this beginning. Socrates himself did not venture into the notion of an independently existing ideal realm. He confined himself to “ethical questions.” His real interest was in finding a “theoretical basis for a new practical rule of life.”

This, says Jaeger, is the usual interpretation of Socrates. But this interpretation reduces Socrates “to a thin and unconvincing figure.” True, this interpretation is based on Aristotle. But Aristotle must be dismissed. Two more recent approaches to Socrates are given. One is by Heinrich Maier and the other by J. Burnet and A. E. Taylor. “Both consider Socrates to be one of the greatest men who ever lived.” Beyond that they differ. Maier says Socrates was more than a philosopher. “What he did was to create a new attitude toward life, which formed the climax of a long and painful ascent toward human freedom, and which can never be transcended by any other. The gospel he preached was the self-mastery and self-sufficiency of the moral character. Thus he was the anti-type of Christ, and of the oriental religion of redemption.”

The Scottish school (Burnet and Taylor) thinks that Socrates “was just what Plato says he was—the man who created the doctrine of ideas, the theory of pre-existence and reminiscence, the creed of immortality, and the ideal state. In a word, he was the father of European metaphysics.”

At this point Jaeger gives his own evaluation of Socrates. “The lines on which Socrates is now to be described have been set by the whole trend of our investigation. He is the central point in the making of the Greek soul. He is the greatest teacher in European history.” “Literally, he is the man of his time. He breathes the air of history and is lit up by its rays.” “He climbed to intellectual independence and self-mastery out of the Athenian middle class, that unchanging, God-fearing, conscience-heeding stock to whose staunch loyalty its great aristocratic leaders, Solon and Aeschylus, had appealed long before.” When Athens had “talked all traditional values out of existence,” Socrates “came forward, to be the Solon of the moral world.” “For the second time in Greek history it was the Attic spirit which summoned the centripetal forces of the Greek soul to combat the centrifugal—by setting up a firm moral order to counter-balance that creation of Ionian thought, the philosophical cosmos of warring natural forces. Solon had discovered the natural laws of the social and political community. Socrates now explored the moral cosmos in the human soul.”

The reader will again note the striking resemblance of this position to that of the “ethical dualism” of Kant. Socrates sees a purpose in the universe, in spite of what the natural philosophers have said about it. No teleology could be observed in nature. So he found it in the soul and he became the doctor of the soul. “He was the great authority on
human nature.” He exhorts himself and all others to cultivate the soul. He does this even in the face of death. “For, in Socrates’ view, the soul is the divine in man. Socrates defines the care of the soul more closely as the care of the knowledge of values and of truth, *phronesis* and *aletheia*. The soul is no less sharply distinguished from the body than it is from external goods. This implies a Socratic hierarchy of values, and with it a new, clearly graduated theory of goods, which places spiritual goods highest, physical goods below them and external goods like property and power in the lowest place.”

In this position of Socrates, as outlined by Jaeger, we see something approaching the dimensionalism of values that has developed in modern times on the basis of Kant’s ethical dualism. The spiritual values are said to be higher than the physical. They must be asserted to be such even though all science affirms a mechanical view of the physical cosmos.

What an “epoch making conception it was,” says Jaeger, this Socratic view of the soul. It became “truly representative of all the values implicit in the intellectual and moral personality of Western man.” The Christian sermon was eventually if indirectly influenced by the protreptic speeches of Socrates on the tendance of the soul. “In his *Wesen des Christentums* Harnack rightly described this belief in the infinite value of the individual soul as one of the pillars of the religion of Jesus. But before that it had been a pillar of Socrates’ ‘philosophy’ and Socrates’ educational thought. Socrates preaches and proselytizes. He comes ‘to save the soul.’ ” To serve the soul was for Socrates to serve God, “since he held that it was the mind and the moral reason. That was why it was the holiest thing in the world—not because it was a guilt-laden daemon visitor from a far-off heavenly region.”

Jaeger is anxious to point out the difference between the Socratic and the Christian view of the soul. In order to point out this difference he indicates that, according to Socrates, man’s moral existence “harmonizes with the natural order of the world.” For him the soul and the body are “two sides on one human nature.” “In his thought, there is no opposition between psychical and physical man; the old conception of *physis* which stems from natural philosophy now takes in the spirit too, and thereby is essentially changed. Socrates cannot believe that man has a monopoly of spirit. If there is a place for spirit anywhere in nature, as the existence of man’s *phronesis* shows that there is, then nature must in principle be capable of spiritual powers.”

It may be observed here that this ethical phenomenalism follows on the ethical dualism that we have earlier noted. Socrates had first to set his view of the inner life over against the externalism of the Sophists. His tendance of the soul might then seem to require a rejection of the legitimate pleasures of the body. His view might seem to be ascetic. But, argues Jaeger, it is not ascetic at all. His desire was only to establish the priority of the soul over the body. His ethic does not maintain that virtue must exclude happiness. On the contrary his idea of virtue is meant to be the foundation of true happiness. His idea of virtue is calculated to have men lead a balanced life. “Socrates declared the soul to be the source of the highest values in human life. Thereby he produced that emphasis on the inner life which characterizes the later stages of Greek civilization. Virtue and happiness now became qualities of the spirit.”

We see that the ethical dualism of Socrates was required in order that he might attain to his ethical phenomenalism or monism. His idea of the freedom of the soul as over against nature was held only in the interest of attaining to the mastery of the soul over
nature at last. In all this we have a prefiguration of the ethical development of Kant and
his followers. Socrates himself, in his own life “played the part of a model for the new
bios, the life based on spiritual values.” Thus Socrates was instrumental in interesting
men in the primacy of ethical things over physical. Socrates sought for mastery of
himself. But “moral autonomy would mean, for him, to be independent of the animal side
of one’s nature: it would not contradict the existence of a higher cosmic law of which this
moral phenomenon, self-control, would be an example.”

Looking back now over Jaeger’s conception of Socrates and his mission, it will be
noticed that it differs markedly from that of Stace. Stace had a very simple explanation of
the Socratic mission. He was simply appealing the universal element in man which is the
intellect. But we saw, when dealing with his view, that he was himself driven to the
admission that this was not a complete view. Socrates, he said, following Aristotle, was
not mindful of the “irrational elements in existence.” True, the Socratic definition of
virtue sounds rationalist and the insistence of Socrates that no one does wrong voluntarily
looks as though Socrates did not allow any place for the irrational in man.

Over against this picture of Socrates given us by Stace stands that of Jaeger. Jaeger
stresses the fact that Socrates was primarily interested in finding a fixed point for the
ethical life in the soul. In this respect, Jaeger agrees with Maier. On the other hand, this is
not, says Jaeger, the whole message of Socrates. If we limit his teaching to the gospel of
the moral will, says Jaeger, “we cannot understand the origin of Plato’s theory of Ideas
and the fact that Plato connects it closely with Socrates’ philosophizing.” Burnet and
Taylor were to this extent right when they made Socrates the father of European
metaphysics. There is, says Jaeger, only one escape from this dilemma. “We must
acknowledge that the form in which Socrates attacks the ethical problem was not simply
a prophetic message, an overwhelming moral preachment; but that some of the energy of
his adjurations to ‘take care of the soul’ went into an endeavor to discover the nature of
morality by the power of the logos.”

Socrates is looking for the highest values in human life and at the same time desires
“an agreement which must be recognized as valid by every one.”

What then, we now ask in conclusion, is the outcome of the whole matter pertaining
to Socrates? We may perhaps sum it up as follows: (1) Jaeger has shown with great
learning and skill the fact that Socrates does stand at the pinnacle of a process of cultural
development in Greece. Jaeger has traced for us this development toward inwardness of
Greek culture as a whole and of morality in particular. (2) Stace’s analysis of Socrates
rests on an oversimplification. Socrates is not a rationalist. Though the criticism of
Aristotle on Socrates may be partly right, it is not true that Socrates was “wholly without
knowledge of the irrational elements,” either as found in the cosmos about him or even in
the soul. His very idea of self-mastery was held in the interest of the suppression of the
passions in man so far as they were running away with his reason. In particular the fact
that Socrates appealed to the soul as the place where he might find a firm basis for ethical
action is proof enough of the fact that he found no moral challenge or criterion in the
universe about him. He could not answer the relativism of the Sophists and of Euripides,
who stood at the pinnacle of the history of poetry, by an appeal to the world. He could
find no footing for morality except in the soul as somehow participant in the laws of
another, a higher world. This is a position similar to that of the ethical dualism of Kant.
(3) But this ethical dualism had to lead on to and was already expressive of ethical
monism. Jaeger in effect holds to this point when he says that for Socrates the soul was divine, and when he says that Socrates sought for a principle of validity by means of his appeal to the logos. (4) It turns out then that the position of Jaeger is not radically different from that of Stace. Both regard Socrates as looking for validity by means of the idea of man’s participation in deity or in an abstract principle of rationality, the logos. On the other hand, both hold that if the way of rationalism were carried out consistently then the result would be the reduction of the idea of the good to pure form. Stace asserts that all the problems of thought must be solved by the application of more thought. He asserts that Socrates had not given a definition of virtue. Virtue is knowledge. True. But knowledge of what? Socrates did not say. Hence all the divisions between the Cynics, the Cyrenics and the Megarics. Thus according to Stace the appeal to inwardness ends, in the case of Socrates, in a pure abstraction. The Good is good and it is valid for all. But no one knows what the good is, and if he did know it he would be already absorbed by it. And when Jaeger seeks to give content to the Greek idea of culture as it came to a climax in Socrates, he can do so only by showing that Socrates’ assertion of the primacy of the ethical over the physical rested on nothing but his assumed autonomous moral consciousness. Then the idea of the teleology of the cosmos, the final control of the good over evil, in turn rests upon this assertion of man’s ethical independence over against the laws of nature. In other words, the ethical monism of Socrates is made to rest on his ethical dualism.

It may therefore be said that from his point of view Erasmus was quite right when he prayed: Sancte Socrates ora pro nobis. Socrates may properly have a place of honor among the saints of the renaissance and enlightenment men. And though Aristotle is more of a saint than is Socrates to those who follow Thomas Aquinas there is no basic reason why he should not be included in their calendar too. As for those who follow Luther and Calvin, they need not hesitate to appreciate Greek culture so long as they appreciate it from a self-consciously Christian and therefore critical point of view. The morality of Socrates is as truly autonomous as is that of Kant. As such it stands antithetically over against every principle of Christian ethic. On the Socratic basis man must cast up his own moral ideal, he must seek the way toward the realization of that ideal by the guidance of a criterion within himself, and he must seek the power that leads him onward toward that ideal also in himself. Self-frustration marks the whole course of growth toward inwardness as it reaches the point where Socrates is and then as it leads ever on till it reaches Kant and his followers. For always the same difficulty reappears. On the one hand is an abstract formal ideal or law, and on the other is a moral consciousness that cannot truly know and cultivate itself because it has no internal coherence.
Chapter 16: Greek Ethical Theory: Plato

In a brief study of Plato such as this we shall have to limit our discussion to matters of essential importance. We cannot enter more than casually into such questions as the date and order of the Platonic writings. We want to see how Plato develops the Socratic principle of inwardness, and then how Plato’s thought relates to Christian thought, and especially how Plato’s ethical theory relates to Christian ethical theory.

Plato was the first great systematic thinker of Greece. In his writings we have the first major form of systematic non-Christian speculation. He has gathered up the threads of previous Greek thought in order to present, if possible, a consistent whole. He speaks of arithmetic, of geometry, of spacial relations, of biology, of ethics, of logic and of theology. It would be instructive to take what he says on these various subjects and compare it with Calvinistic philosophy as set forth in the writings of Drs. Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd of the Free University of Amsterdam. It will not be possible for us to do this. We shall therefore take what seem to be the central ideas of Plato on the subjects in which he was most interested in order to analyze them as best we may.

It is quite common with Plato scholars to distinguish between an earlier and a later Plato. Though there is no agreement on details it seems at present fairly safe to say that the earlier or Socratic Plato dealt chiefly with matters of ethics and the later Plato dealt chiefly with matters of being and knowledge. On all three of these questions Plato took what has come to be called an idealist position. In ethics he stood with Socrates for the "objective" existence of the good. In ontology he taught that real being, or at least the most real being, is found beyond the world of sense. In epistemology he held that the "lower" aspects of life must be interpreted in terms of the "higher." The question that we are bound to ask then, is, what our relation must be to an idealist philosophy of this sort.

Modern philosophers, and more specifically Plato scholars, have frequently taken the position that Platonism and Christianity are virtually identical in their view of God and the universe. In his book on Plato, A. E. Taylor says: “I make no apology for having drawn freely on the characteristic language of Christian mysticism in expounding this argument. Under all the real differences due to the Christian’s belief in the historical reality of the God-man, the ideal of Socrates and the Christian ideal are fundamentally identical. In both cases, the central thought is that man is born a creature of temporality and mutability into a temporal and mutable environment. But, in virtue of the fact that there is something ‘divine’ in him, he cannot but aspire to a good which is above time and mutability, and thus the right life is from first to last, a process of which the merely secular and temporal self is re-made in the likeness of the eternal.”

Over against this position of Taylor must be set the fact that the Roman Catholic church has taken Aristotelianism rather than Platonism in order to use it for the construction of its natural theology.

It is not our purpose to enter upon a detailed comparison of Plato and Aristotle in order to judge which of the two, if either, can more easily be conjoined with Christian thought. We would rather call attention to the fact that Plato and Aristotle have frequently been thought of as together representing one type of thought, namely, idealist thought, and that what is then spoken of as Platonic-Aristotelian thought is introduced as a suitable

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foundation for the Christian religion. Platonistic-Aristotelian thought is frequently presented to us as offering a natural theology on which the church in the course of its history has quite properly built its revealed theology. In his History of Christian Doctrine, Dr. William G. T. Shedd speaks constantly of Greek theism. By it he signifies the thought of Plato and Aristotle.  

This Greek theism of which Shedd speaks is, according to him, essentially correct and may with little modification be taken as the foundation for the Christian religion. It is not from the philosophy of these men themselves, according to Shedd, that Christianity has suffered, but only from excrescences that have grown out of this philosophy. “For we shall find that the evil which Christianity has suffered from these philosophical systems has originated from an exaggeration of one particular element in each, and its sole employment in philosophizing upon Christianity, to the neglect of the remaining elements of the system.”  

When Greek theism was taken over by the Christian theologians it needed simply to be purified of some of the details that were not in harmony with the genius of the system. Speaking about nineteenth century methodology of German theology, Dr. Shedd says: “One thing, however, it is certain, that so far as it is a truthful and really scientific method of theologizing, it is due greatly to the influence of the Grecian masters in philosophy, and their successors.” Or again: “For although Descartes, Leibniz and Kant differ from each other, and upon important points, their systems are all theistic and therefore favorable to the principles of ethics and natural religion.”

We naturally ask how it is that Shedd is able to think of Greek theism as a good foundation for Christianity. The answer is that according to Shedd, Greek theism has been formulated by “right reason.” By “right reason” Shedd intends us to think of the reason of mankind in general apart from the question of regeneration. He calls it right reason because it has not allowed itself to run into extremes. He speaks with evident approval when he says that such men as Tertullian, Athanasius and Augustine did not reject the “common reason of mankind.” We quote: “But against the common reason of mankind, the unbiased spontaneous convictions of the race, no such remarks [critical remarks] are aimed. On the contrary, a confidential appeal is made to them by these very Apologists; while those systems of philosophy, and those intellectual methods that flow most legitimately and purely from them, are employed by the Christian Mind in developing and establishing the truths of revelation.”

The position here taken by Shedd may be said to be that taken quite generally in the history of Protestant apologetics. The position is that the natural reason of man, quite apart from regeneration, can come and has come to a true teleological interpretation of reality, to an interpretation which needs addition but no radical alteration by the Christian theologian. Thus Protestants would have a large measure of agreement with Roman Catholics in the field of apologetics. With Roman Catholics they could unitedly build a natural theology and offer it to the natural man as something that ought to be unobjectionable to him.

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3 Ibid., p. 59.
4 Ibid. p. 95.
5 Ibid., p. 96.
6 Ibid., p. 153.
What then, we ask, is this Greek theism, and this natural theology that is involved in it so far as Plato has spoken of it? Let us, in seeking an answer to our question, first turn to the earlier Platonic dialogues. In them the question is chiefly that of the moral ideal.

It is apparent even from the earlier dialogues that Plato has brought together in his thinking several strands of previous Greek thought. It is well to note this point here in order to obtain a true understanding of Plato’s method of research. On this point of the relation of Plato to his predecessors we quote Zeller: “Plato is the first of the Greek philosophers who not merely knew and made use of his predecessors, but consciously completed their principles by means of each other, and bound them all together in one higher principle. What Socrates had taught with regard to the concept of knowledge: Parmenides and Heraclitus, the Megarians and the Cynics, on the difference between knowledge and opinion; Heraclitus, Zeno and the Sophists, on the subjectivity of sense experience—all this he built up into a developed theory of knowledge.” The Eleatic principle of Being, and the Heraclitean of Becoming, the doctrine of the unity and of the multiplicity of things, he has, in his doctrine of Ideas, quite as much blended as opposed; while at the same time he has perfected both by means of the Anaxagorean conception of the Good, and the idealized Pythagorean numbers.\(^7\)

In seeking to blend the thought of his predecessors, Plato is evidently looking for a new solution to the problems of life. There was a general scepticism and hopelessness abroad in his day, inasmuch as it seemed to men to be impossible to find the true meaning of existence. Men had, generally speaking, come to the conclusion either with Parmenides that all reality is blank identity, or with Heraclitus that all reality is hopelessly unrelated plurality. This scepticism underlay the Sophists’ attitude when they claimed that one could equally well say that every statement is true as that every statement is false.

Socrates had in part seemed to overcome this scepticism. He worked on the principle that there is ultimate truth and that it is possible for the mind of man to know it. And in this his admiring disciple Plato follows him as is apparent throughout the earlier dialogues. It is very difficult if not impossible in many cases to distinguish Socratic from Platonic thought. For our purposes it is not necessary to do so. It is quite apparent that we are on the road to an understanding of Plato if we start with the notion that the human mind has within itself the powers to get into significant contact with ultimate reality. Plato carries forth the Socratic principle of inwardness. The Platonic Socrates constantly seeks for the universal element in the particulars of sense experience. By seeking for that which is common to various phenomena, he feels, you may catch the essence of the phenomena. Let us illustrate this point from his dialogues.

In The Greater Hippias, the question of the beautiful is up for discussion among the wits. Says Taylor: “The precise problem is this. We call an act of remarkable courage a ‘fine’ act, and we say the same thing about an act of outstanding and remarkable justice. The use of the word ‘fine’ in both cases implies that there is a something (a certain \textit{eidos}, form, or character—the word is little more than a synonym for a ‘something’) common to both cases, or why do we give the same name, ‘fine’? What is the ‘fine itself,’ ‘the just fine’ (\textit{auto to kalon}), i.e., what is it which is exactly and precisely named when we use

the word ‘fine’?” 8 When Socrates asks Hippias what he means by the word fine, Hippias constantly turns to examples. He is unable to define the thing itself. A true definition, such is the point we are to learn from this dialogue, “must be rigidly universal.” 9 Is it then impossible to obtain a universal definition by a study of the things of the sensible world in which we dwell? That does not seem to be the conclusion we ought to draw; it ought somehow to be possible for us to learn the true definition of a thing; yet we have so far not been very successful in doing so.

The method followed in the dialogue we have just discussed is the method generally followed in “the minor Socratic dialogues.” The Charmides deals with temperance and the Laches deals with valor or fortitude. We are given to understand that if we are to know what any of these virtues or qualities mean we must know what virtue as such is. “The problem of finding a definition of ‘virtue’ is at bottom the problem of formulating a moral ideal …” 10 This moral ideal is the projection of the self-sufficient moral consciousness.

From this point we are led into broader considerations. Where shall we learn to know about the true nature of virtue? We turn again to examples. A doctor practises medicine and by his art heals a man of his disease. But was it really best for this man to healed and was it really best for the physician to earn the money he received? Perhaps not. To know whether it is best for you to be healed or to die is to know yourself. We ought then to know ourselves, and in order to know ourselves, we must know those who have power over us. We must know our relation to gods and men and to all things about us. Thus we are led by simple questions into the most basic considerations of ontology and epistemology.

But now we are in a great danger. So far we have been stressing the fact that knowledge requires an a priori element. We must have a universal in order to understand particulars. But we seem to have come to the point where self-knowledge by itself is thought of as being sufficient. We have come upon the danger of thinking that we can dispense with the observation of facts and turn to introspection merely. Has the Socratic principle of inwardness then not led us beyond the Sophists, after all? In the Charmides, Critias defends the startling notion that self-knowledge is really a knowledge which is turned upon itself and is sufficient to itself. Against this Socrates argues that in all other forms of knowledge there is an object as well as a subject. Socrates contends that knowledge is always relative to something. It would indeed be a singular thing if there were a knowing which is not the knowing of some objects but “the knowing of itself and the other knowings.” 11

To prove the absurdity of exclusively a priori knowledge, Socrates goes on to point out that such knowledge would lead to practical difficulties. A physician needs to know whether a certain proposition which he knows to be true is applicable to his patients. We may say that a certain number of grains of arsenic are fatal. Such a proposition would be true, but the truth of this proposition would hang in the air if it were not proved in practice.

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8 A. E. Taylor, Plato, the Man and His Work, p. 30.
9 Ibid., p. 31.
10 Ibid., p. 47.
11 Ibid., p. 54.
Here we have the difficulty. We seem to need an *a priori* element in our knowledge; without it we cannot act scientifically, i.e., with good judgment. Yet when we turn to the *a priori* that we seem to need, it turns out to be like a Frankenstein monster that swallows up all individual things. It may for a moment appear as an attractive ideal that prophecy itself should become scientific, that we should know all the future and all the past by a simple insight into ourselves, but this is all too fantastic.

Thus we seem to have come face to face with a fundamental paradox. We need an absolute comprehensive universal in order that there may be unity in our practical living, but when we seek that unity and seem to find it, we have departed so far from practical life as to find that unity to be a pure abstraction.

In this situation we need the services of an expert. We seem to find a specialist in each branch of practical knowledge. Is there also an expert “metaphysician” who can instruct us in the art of asking and answering final questions? It does not seem so. Every man must, in the end, be his own expert.

A particularly instructive instance of earlier Platonic thought is found in the *Euthyphro*. Here the effort is made to establish the nature of (h)osiotes, piety, or religion. Euthyphro says that his father has committed an act of sacrilege. Euthyphro is afraid to live in the same house with such a person. Thinking of himself as an expert in religious matters, a “doctor of theology,” he brings his father to trial. So Socrates, who is shortly to be charged with impiety, inquires of this “doctor of theology” what then the nature of religion is. “There must be some one character which belongs to all action which is ‘religiously right’ (h)oison.” What is the idea, the *eidos* or the *ousia*, of religion? Euthyphro answers that religion “is what is pleasing to the gods, the irreligious what is not pleasing to them.” But are there then no differences of opinion among the gods? To which Euthyphro replies by suggesting that the truly religious is that on which there is unanimous agreement between the gods. But how then can we know that some of the gods might not think well and others evil of the act of Euthyphro in arraigning his father? So the suggestion comes to us that the gods have above them an ideal or idea of the religious to which they look up and by which they try to determine what is true and what is false in the religious deeds of men. Since there is assumed to be a plurality of gods, there is not one of them that has final authority. The question is asked: “Is a religious act religious because the gods approve it, or do they approve it because it is religious?” Plato clearly wants us to hold that the religious is religious intrinsically apart from the attitude of the gods toward it. As Taylor puts it: “That is, it is no answer to the question what something is, to be told what some one or some thing else does about it.” The Scholastics would say that an extrinsic denomination “throws no light on the quiddity or the definiendum.” Thus again it appears that every man must be his own expert.

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12 *Euthyphro* 5d.
13 *Euthyphro* 6d.
14 *Euthyphro* 11a.
15 *Euthyphro* 6e.
16 Ibid., p. 151.
17 Ibid.
The Soul

In everything that has been brought forward of Plato’s thought up to this point and in particular in what was said about the “expert” there has been the assumption that by looking within himself man can find an adequate principle of interpretation for all the problems that face him. In this respect he follows the Socratic principle of inwardness. Plato was willing to recognize that he had not succeeded in finding an adequate interpretation of life. We have seen that he saw the paradox that faced him in the notions of the abstract universal and the abstract particular. Yet he always returned to a further search for a better union of the universal and the particular to man himself as autonomous. That this is true and that it is of basic significance may appear somewhat more fully from a brief consideration of his doctrine of the soul.

The philosopher, reasons Plato in the *Phaedo*, has all his life been trying to escape from the body. In the body, i.e., by sensation, he cannot obtain true knowledge. Therefore his life is a “rehearsal of death.” He is happy to complete the process of life by entering upon death. In arguing thus, Socrates has been taking for granted that there is a life after death. How does he know this to be true?

To this Socrates makes reply by referring to the Orphic doctrine of the rebirth of all things. Opposites, he says, produce opposites. If this were not so the whole process of generation and decay would cease, and all would soon enter into death. But this argument is not conclusive. There is uncertainty about it all and the argument gives no guarantee that Socrates will at the time of his death enter upon a “better life.” So the appeal is next made to the doctrine of reminiscence. In the *Meno* this argument had been discussed. There Meno’s slave boy was able to solve problems in mathematics by the aid of mere suggestions from the things of sense. The conclusion was drawn that he must have had the truth of these things in him from a previous existence. The validity of this argument, therefore, depended upon the truth of the doctrine of Forms and of man’s consciousness as participant in them. But suppose we did exist before we came into this world, does this prove that we shall exist after we leave this world? Even if we could accept the two arguments so far considered as valid, “the child in us,” which is afraid in the dark, is not fully satisfied. Simmias fears that the soul may gradually dissolve at death. But what is it that can and does dissolve? It is only that which is composed and therefore mutable. Does the soul belong to this realm of the mutable? Socrates does not think so. When the soul deals with mutable things she walks warily and uncertainly, but when she turns to the realm of thought as such she walks with steady foot. She is apparently at home there. She seems herself to be a part of that realm. In short, she belongs to the realm of the divine. And belonging to the realm of the divine, she is immutable as the divine is immutable. Thus the universal of Socratic thought is made “objective.”

Even so Simmias and Cebes are worried. Simmias feels that the argument of Socrates is not sufficient. Suppose we take a lyre, and play upon it. The melody is invisible to be sure, and may be called “divine,” yet when the visible frame of the lyre falls to pieces the melody will fail. May not the soul gradually disappear as the body disintegrates? Taylor calls this the epiphenomenalist objection. To this is added the objection of Cebes which Taylor calls the scientific objection. Cebes argues that a tailor may weave many suits of

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clothes for himself and outwear them, but the last suit that he weaves and wears will outlast the tailor. The soul may outwear many bodies, but be outworn by its last body just the same.

Those objections, Phaedo tells us, struck consternation into camp. Socrates alone remains calm. Yet even he has no convincing reply. To Simmias’ epiphenomenalism objection, illustrated by the lyre, he replies that if its validity be granted, all moral distinctions would fall to the ground. We are bound to interpret the lower in terms of the higher. The very fact that man lives by these distinctions presupposes the reality of the eternal or unchangeable aspect of man. Says Taylor in paraphrasing the argument of Socrates: “If man were merely a creature of time, or again if he were simply eternal, the struggle could not arise; its tremendous reality is proof that man’s soul is the meetingplace of the two orders, the temporal and the eternal, and this, of itself, disposes of the simpliciste theory of human personality as a simple function of the passing state of the ‘organism’ or the ‘nervous system.’” Socratic “inwardness” is the source of true, eternal, universal validity.

The “scientific” objection of Cebes leads Socrates to say that we shall need, in order to answer it, to consider the whole question of “the causes of coming into being and passing out of being.” Socrates himself was once upon a time inclined to give a purely mechanical interpretation of nature. But by so doing he had been unable to understand the cause of even the simplest thing of nature. Then he became acquainted with the works of Anaxagoras who explained all things by the help of Nous. Yet Anaxagoras was not fully consistent. The result was that Socrates found himself driven to reliance upon himself. He found he had to work out a method for himself. This method was that employed in mathematics. We investigate things by asking what significant statements we can make about them.

With this question we are not, for the moment, concerned. Our main interest at this juncture is to point out that for Plato the soul is immortal because it is divine, i.e., it is of a piece with whatever of divinity exists. We may again use the words of Taylor to sum up this point: “Thus, in the end, the imperishability of the soul is accepted as a consequence of the standing conviction of all Greek religion that to athanaton equals to theion equals to aphtharton. It is the soul’s ‘divinity’ which is, in the last resort, the ground for the hope of immortality, and the divinity of the soul is a postulate of a reasonable faith which the dialogue never attempts to ‘demonstrate.’ The argument for it must resemble that of the primacy of the practical reason in Kant. The last word of Socrates himself on the value of his demonstration is that its ‘primary postulates’ (i.e., the ‘forms’ and the divinity of the soul) really demand further examination.”

The final argument in the Phaedo for the immortality of the soul rests upon the conviction that the Forms do exist and that the soul participates in the Form of life. Now the Forms do not permit of their opposites. So the soul participating in the Form of life cannot be touched with death which is the opposite of life.

In the Symposium we strike upon similar ideas. Here the soul is on its journey from temporality to eternity. When man has finally put off temporality and put on eternity he

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19 Ibid., p. 198.
20 Ibid., p. 201.
21 Ibid., p. 206.
will see with a direct vision. What will he see? Will he see God? We believe that Burnet and Taylor are right when they contend that the soul of man in Plato does not finally expect to see God but the supreme Form of the Good. It is in accord with the whole of Plato’s approach to the problems of philosophy to say that for him ultimate reality was the impersonal Form. It is only if we take a Christian position in which God is really thought of as the Creator of the world that God can consistently be taken as the supreme reality. Now Plato has sometimes been taken to believe in creation. Even Taylor says that the idea of an actual creation was not foreign to Plato. But if this is true we feel compelled to maintain that this is a remnant of an interpretation of life that he is definitely keeping under.

In Plato we note an interesting and highly important phenomenon. Everything that has to do with the origin of things is left in obscurity. Plato simply takes for granted that the soul is uncreated. In the *Timaeus* the soul of man is part of the world-soul. The “tendance of the soul” for each individual man is therefore, as was the case with Socrates, not a struggle between sin and grace, but is a slow journey from temporality to eternity. If man does not strive to attain eternity, he falls back into mere mutability and temporality. If he does strive to attain and strive consistently to attain eternity he may expect to reach complete identification with supreme reality. His knowledge and service of the good in this world has been piecemeal and will give place to immediate vision by identification with its object. Thus the soul returns to its eternal home.

It is important to note that Taylor identifies this conception of the soul and its tendance with true Christian mysticism. To this we are compelled to reply that when the difference between God and the universe is ignored, when the creation doctrine is not taken as one of the constitutive elements of theology, we have cut the nerve of true Christian mysticism. True Christian mysticism presupposes creation, the fall and the historical atonement through the blood of Christ.

We are now in a position to deal very briefly with Plato’s more mature conceptions of being and knowledge. The Platonic Socrates tended to separate sharply between the forms and the objects of sense. Sensation did not offer true knowledge because it did not offer universal knowledge. Says Dr. Gordon Clark: “Before Plato’s time, no one, apparently not even Parmenides, doubted the reality of sense objects. Yet it was this very natural assumption that the objects of sense are the objects of knowledge which blocked the progress of thought. Resumption of progress awaited the suggestion that interest should be shifted to a new world of reality.” Thus we watch the birth of Greek theism, the product of right reason. When the suggestion of the existence of a higher world is not only made but accepted as true in the earlier dialogues it seems at first to necessitate the denial of the existence of the sense world altogether. We have then a sort of ethical dualism. Plato seemed at first to be ready to walk in the footsteps of Parmenides and others who were ready to follow what seemed to be the requirements of human logic at the expense of common sense. Thus there was in his earlier thought a tendency to hypostatize the Forms. On the other hand, there was a tendency to stress the unrelated particularity of the things of sense and their subjection to a general flux. But gradually

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22 Ibid., pp. 225–226.
23 Ibid., p. 281.
Plato seemed to realize that the Forms and the things of sense must not be too rigidly separated. Accordingly, there is in the later dialogues a constant recurrence to the question of the relation of the Forms to the things of sense. The things of sense are no longer said to be unreal but simply other than the Forms. The things of sense are said to participate in the Forms. The Soul, that is the world Soul, is introduced in order to mediate between the abstract world of Forms and the world of Becoming. The world of Becoming, insofar as it may be said to be a product, is the combination of meeting-point of Ideal principles on the one hand and “necessity” on the other hand.

As the complete separation of Forms from the world of Becoming led to dualism in ontology, so it had also led to dualism in epistemology. The assumption of the earlier dialogues had been that man, being in essence divine, must really participate in absolute knowledge. But this is obviously impossible. We shall therefore have to drop to a lower plane. We shall have to maintain that knowledge is not universal. Only thus can we avoid a dualism between the knowledge of God and the knowledge of man. God would not understand us and we would not understand God unless we bring the whole question of being and knowledge down to a more common sense level. Speaking of this matter Constantin Ritter says: “But if any one is supposed to possess such absolute knowledge, which would be much more exact than our human knowledge, we would have to ascribe it to a god. However, this would be followed by a much worse conclusion, viz., this god with all his knowledge of the Ideas would not know anything about us and about the things which we human beings know, since absolute knowledge has no relation to realities of the human world, just as the absolute rule which God exercises has no relation to the individual man. Or conversely, our knowledge and our authority do not extend to the absolute, divine essences. ‘Surely,’ replies Socrates, ‘it would be a most astonishing conclusion to deny that God has knowledge.’”

We appear thus to be compelled to save the possibility and actuality of knowledge by bringing the Forms and the things of sense in the relation of juxtaposition to one another. At least such is the opinion of Natorp when he contrasts the position of Plato with that of Christianity. He holds that Christianity with its doctrine of the self-sufficient God can bring no relationship between man’s knowledge and God’s knowledge. Natorp says that Plato does not have an über den Wasser Schwebenden Gott-Schöpfer. Plato’s god is gebunden an einen von Haus aus ihm ausserlichen, ausserlich bleibenden Stoff...” In this respect, then, Natorp reasons, Platonism is superior to Christianity. Thus we have a sort of ethical monism.

Grote argues that Plato never at any time meant to hold to the existence of an absolute knowledge. We may ignore the differences between Plato scholars on this question. Whether as in the case of Taylor and others the Platonic theory of being and knowledge be said to be virtually identical with the Christian conception of being and knowledge or whether with Grote, Natorp and others the Platonic theory be said to be opposed to the Christian conception, there is a large measure of agreement between them to the effect that, in any case, Plato was on the right road to true knowledge. Plato did no more, we are told, than to recognize that in every judgment about any part of reality there is an a priori

26 Paul Natorp, Plato’s Ideenlehre (Leipzig, 1921), p. 471.
27 George Grote, Plato and the Other Companions of Socrates, 3 vols., 1867.
and an *a posteriori* aspect. Aristotle, to be sure, related the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* elements still more closely to one another than Plato did, but Plato no less than Aristotle, knew that they implied one another. In our intellectual interpretation of the universe we are on the one hand bound to follow the law of non-contradiction and on the other hand bound to recognize “facts” as they are. The question then is as to the extent to which we can think of our logical categories as giving us a true picture of the facts with which we deal. It would seem, we are told, that on the one hand we must presuppose that our logic and reality fit one another so that we may think of our knowledge as being true to fact, while on the other hand we know that our logic can never cover the whole of reality, so that there is always an uncertain element in our knowledge. Our knowledge can be no more than a probable knowledge.

We cannot take time to set forth the Platonic theory in greater detail. Nor is it necessary for our purposes to do so. We are chiefly concerned to evaluate this Greek theism from a Christian point of view.

We maintain that Greek theism cannot with any fairness be presented as offering us a good theistic foundation on which Christianity may be built as a superstructure.

In the first place, the starting point of Plato’s philosophical method does not permit him to come to genuinely theistic conclusions. Plato’s starting point, like that of Socrates, presupposes the rejection of a genuine theism. That starting point is based upon the assumption that there is no creation out of nothing, that the human consciousness is sufficient to itself. Let us look at this matter carefully.

We can do this best, perhaps, if we reason back from the Christian doctrine of God to see what sort of starting point for human reasoning is involved in it.

The Christian doctrine of God tells us that God is a completely self-interpreted being. God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. This implies that in God, being and consciousness are coterminous. If there were any being in God not coterminous with his consciousness his consciousness would not be self-sufficient. There would then be a not-yet-interpreted being over against the consciousness of God, and God’s consciousness would therewith be subjected to the time-process.

This doctrine of God is the foundation of a truly theistic or Christian ontology, and therefore also of ethics. Arguing from it we note that it leads us to a very definite notion of non-being. If God is self-explanatory and self-existent, non-being is truly non-being. God is then in no sense defined in terms of non-being. Non-being is not “otherness” to being which then would be “otherness” to non-being. In short, there is no sort of correlativity between being and non-being. Of God we may say that his being is determinative of his knowledge and his knowledge determinative of his being.

It is this notion of God’s being and this notion of non-being that is presupposed in the Christian doctrine of creation. Creation by God is creation out of, or perhaps better, into nothing. Thus the created universe can in no sense serve as a correlative to God.

This simple but basic notion of ontology involves an equally simple but basic notion with respect to human knowledge. Man together with the universe about him has been created into nothing. His being is derived. His intellect therefore, as an aspect of a derived being, must constantly attune itself in its interpretation of all it meets to the interpretation of God. It is God’s interpretation that determines the nature of all created being. Consequently if man’s interpretation of any created being is to be a true
interpretation, its truth lies primarily in its analogical correspondence with God’s interpretation.

Let us illustrate this pivotal point by an analysis of the question of the future. Let us think of Adam after he received the commandment of God not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Here was God’s pre-interpretation of the future. Suppose now that this interpretation of the future by God had not come to Adam till after a number of years had passed since his creation. Suppose further that during that time Adam had observed “the course and constitution of nature,” without constantly being attuned to God’s interpretation of it. Would he not have concluded that there could be no harm in his eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? He had perhaps eaten many times of that tree without harm befalling him. Could he now believe that after God had forbidden him to eat of that tree death would follow upon his eating of the tree? After God forbade the eating of the tree, God’s interpretation of the future and his own interpretation of that future upon the basis of the “observed course and constitution of nature” would stand opposed to one another. The only solution would be for man, the creature of God, to accept without hesitation God’s interpretation of the future. And this teaches us that from the outset it was the proper thing for man not to make any absolutely independent observations on the course and constitution of nature. That is, man should at once, from the outset, set his own interpretations of the universe in self-conscious subordination to God’s interpretation of the universe. God gave this interpretation from the beginning.

It was this that Adam and Eve failed to do in the hour of temptation. When the negation of Satan was placed before them over against the affirmation of God, Adam had to choose whether or not he would self-consciously submit his own interpretation to God’s interpretation. Here God as absolute being and Satan as a derivative being, were each offering opposing interpretations about the future of the course and constitution of nature to Adam and Eve. Here was Eve, herself a derived being, to decide between the two interpretations. As the absolute being who had created the universe into nothing, God controlled the future. He alone was in a position to know what would happen in the future. But Eve decided that the question of being had no bearing on the question of interpretation. She therefore concluded that it was perfectly legitimate for her to think that Satan’s interpretation might possibly be right. She admitted the theoretical relevancy of Satan’s hypothesis with respect to the problem she faced. She assumed that in the course and constitution of nature, conceived of as an entity not yet interpreted, that is, in the appeal to brute fact, lay the final test of the truth of the two opposing hypotheses she knew.

Suppose now that she had been right in all this. That would have proved God wrong. It would have proved that God’s interpretation had no control over the course and constitution of events in this world. It would have proved that God as well as man was face to face with facts that are beyond his control. It would have proved that God himself would have to employ the empirical method of research. Thus God and man might become joint companions in a common scientific enterprise.

We are now in a position to understand the significance of Plato’s philosophy as compared to a really Christian position. Ever after the entrance of sin into the world, man has assumed that there is no God in whom being and interpretation of being are coterminous. Applied to the universe this means that men have assumed that they can
reasonably ask the question, What is it? before and independently of the question, Whence is it? Man took for granted that his thinking need not be attuned to the thinking of his Creator in the sense above discussed, but may run its own course.

That human thought did seek to run its own course independently of God is apparent from the history of Greek philosophy. It is a commonly reported fact in the histories of philosophy that for early Greek philosophy qualities were not distinguished from the facts or particulars to which they were applied. This is a most interesting and arresting fact. In it we are confronted, it would seem, with the petrification of the rebellious attitude assumed by Adam and Eve when they declared their independence from God. When man declared his independence of God he, in effect, denied that in God being and meaning are identical. He denied that in God, in the I Am, subject and predicate are the same. He denied the self-sufficiency of God’s self-affirmation, and affirmed the “otherness” of non-being over against God. In all this he, by implication, asserted the complete separation of logic and fact. It was reserved for the temporalistic philosophies of our time to work out the implications of this original assumption. Early man assumed that thought could control fact and should control fact. In this he was right. But he was wrong in the further assumption, included in the first, that the identification of thought and being, of logic and fact, can be found if one speaks of thought per se and of being per se, without introducing the distinction between divine thought and divine being. Without the assumption that thought and being are coterminal in God the Creator-Redeemer, human thought could not have gotten under way. With the assumption that human thought together with divine thought is legislative for being, philosophic thinking was bound to be led on the wrong way. Thus we observe in the course of Greek philosophy a development of most marvelous complexity in which we can only adore the wisdom of God that in spite of basic wrong it brought forth so much good, and that in spite of this good it is also so basically wrong. Let us seek to appreciate both the good and the false, but always without separating the one from the other.

It was soon to become apparent that human thought cannot legislate for the whole of reality. Only the absolute I Am can say, “I Am,” without needing to say anything more. God as absolute subject, and only he, need have and can have no correlative diversity beyond himself. Only God cannot be classified.

An interesting and important point to note here is that when the inevitable distinction between subject and predicate appeared in the course of Greek philosophy, it came by way of abstraction. Abstraction was the only way in which the Greek philosopher could distinguish between universals and particulars, granted his assumptions, and this abstraction amounted to a contrast. There was for the Greek no God in terms of whose presupposed identity of being and interpretation he could approach the diversity of the created world. If he could not himself pre-interpret the diversity of the universe he would have to conclude that the diversity is utterly uninterpreted. Hence brute fact on the one hand and impersonal and abstract universal law on the other hand proved to be the naturally emerging correlatives when once Greek thought was started on its way.

By way of illustration of what has just been said, let us take Anaximander’s concept of the apeiron.

“The interest attaching to this notion of the apeiron,” says Robert Adamson, “is, I think, that it marks the first step in the progress, which the Greek mind took with remarkable rapidity, of abstraction from the concrete reality. For though the apeiron is
still held as something existing in rerum natura, yet, in the conception of it, all the features which characterize concrete objects are removed; the first opposition is made between the real which is not directly apprehended but is held on grounds of logical necessity, and the apparent world of multiform concrete existences which is apprehended through the senses."

Adamson, like many other historians of philosophy, assumes that it was quite natural for the Greeks to turn to abstraction when they faced the uncontrollable manifold of sense experience. From the Christian point of view we should say that this course was natural, to be sure, but natural in the sense that it had become natural for fallen man not to keep God in his thoughts. The method of abstraction as employed by the Greeks, and as employed by the “scientific method” today, is the only method that a sinner, who has declared his independence from God, can follow in his thinking.

The fruit of this method of abstraction was an artificial separation of various aspects of the created world. In Anaximander’s philosophy we observe the first major effort to save the universal control of human thought over assumed brute fact by setting a qualityless apeiron over against the world of sense. For some time Greek speculation continued on this track. In the case of the Pythagoreans and the Eleatics this process had developed into a strong contrast between the world of sense and the world of thought. The world of abstract thought—so dear was the desire for legislative control to the sinful human heart—was said to be the real, and the world of sense was said to be unreal.

This sharp and artificial contrast between the world of sense and the world of thought is but indicative of the general inability of the Greeks to recognize true dimensionality in the created universe. Because they did not recognize the true dimension of God as Creator-Redeemer, because they assumed that the question of his being had no bearing upon what he said, because they therefore to all intents and purposes wiped out the distinction between God and man, they were not able to observe and honor the differences that God had created in the universe. So, for instance, the Pythagoreans said that things are numbers. It was an attempt to subject the higher as well as the lower aspects of the universe, man included, to arithmetical manipulation. Thus there could be no recognition of the uniqueness of the higher dimensions of created existence.

On the other hand, when the higher dimensions of created existence in spite of all efforts to keep them down clamored for recognition, and finally won recognition, this recognition was won at the expense of the rightful place of the lower dimensions of existence. Thus the sense world for a time had all reality denied to it and sensation was not given its rightful place in the knowledge process.

Plato comes into the picture when the process of abstraction and the consequent separation of the world of sense from the world of thought had reached its first major impasse. We do not say that the process of separation had gone as far as it could go. It had not. Purely abstract systems of logic such as we know in the modern day were unknown to the Greeks; they had not wandered far enough away from the father’s home for that. Nevertheless it was apparent that the process of abstraction led into a blind alley. Zeno’s paradoxes may be thought of as the first tower of Babel that intellectual speculation sought to build. In them we have the first major expression of man’s stupefaction when he begins to face something of the abyss of the irrational which he has

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created for himself. As a boy who believes in ghosts most vehemently denies their existence, so human speculation which insisted by assumption on its universally legislative powers faces the endless realm of brute fact which is the correlative of these assumed legislative powers and turns to a violent denial of the existence of not yet exhaustively interpreted fact. Zeno denied genuine reality to the facts of the sense world because he could not comprehensively understand them.

Plato saw that all this was leading thought into a blind alley. We have noted how the Platonic Socrates looked for the “fine in itself.” We need not debate the point to what extent the earlier Platonic dialogues represent the thought of Plato or the thought of Socrates. It is certain that Plato struggled with the stage of Greek speculation presented to us in the Platonic Socrates. It was with the purpose of saving knowledge that Socrates separated the universals from the world of sense and looked for the “common.” Thus because man failed to recognize the “common,” i.e., the plan of God that underlay the world of sense experience, he turned to a “common” that should be really universal and legislative while yet not dependent upon God. Thus the early realism of Plato was the result of a process of thought which in its fundamental assumption implies the non-existence of God. There was a fundamental error in Plato’s reading of the book of nature as well as in his reading of the book of conscience. A natural theology based upon the early realism of Plato can no more serve as a foundation for the superstructure of historic Christianity than the Hudson River could serve as a foundation for the Empire State Building. To affirm that the good is good in itself and therefore to affirm the existence of Ideas in themselves is at the same time to deny that God exists in and by himself. It is to affirm that the laws of logic rest in a universe independently of God. To give logic no better foundation than this is to prepare the way for the frank avowal that A may at any time be B.

But if all this is plain, what then of the moderate realism of Plato’s maturer thought? We have observed that in the later dialogues Plato sought to bring the world of sense and the world of thought together by thinking of the former as participating in the latter. It is this moderate realism, this realism that avoids the extremes of denying “common sense” and yet elevates the world of thought above the material world, that is spoken of as Greek theism and that is offered to us as a foundation for the Christian edifice, even by orthodox theologians.

We believe, however, that the moderate realism of Plato’s later days is not basically different from the more extreme realism of his earlier days. In his later days no less than in his earlier days, Plato made the reach of human knowledge a test of the fully real. What lay beyond this reach he gave over to irrational forces. We may not unfairly sum up the difference between Plato’s earlier and his later thought by saying that his later thought allows more room for the irrational than did his earlier thought. When the manifold of experience proved refractory to the manipulation of human thought and yet insisted on being recognized (given the assumption that there is no such God as Christianity contemplates) as something utterly uninterpreted. When it became ever increasingly apparent that the individual fact did not permit of exhaustive classification by the intellect of man, man took for granted that such facts must find their partial “explanation” in dark chance. Thus the teleology that we find in Plato is only a partial teleology and a partial teleology is a poor teleology indeed.
Of both extreme and moderate realism we may no doubt assert that they are, from the Christian’s point of view, “preferable” to nominalism. To maintain the “objective” character of truth is indeed worth much. It has no doubt restrained men from deeds of despair and led them on to earnest endeavor in the various fields of human research. Thus Platonism has no doubt contributed its positive bit to the preparation of the world for the coming of Christ. But this relative good that we may find in Platonism should not blind us to the fact that Platonic realism or modern idealism is basically opposed to the Christian scheme of things. Platonism itself, and not merely the excrescences that have grown out of it, is an enemy of Christianity. Its chief service in preparing the world for the coming of Christ was, we firmly believe, a negative one. Platonism affords one of the greatest, if not the greatest, historical example of what St. Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians 1.20–21. “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save those that believe.” In all phases of his thought, Plato assumes the ultimacy of man. He takes for granted that man’s capacity for knowledge is the test of true reality. Christianity offers to the world the conception that only God is ultimate. Between these two conceptions of a starting point one will have to choose. Plato follows the method of abstraction, the only method that fits with his starting point. Christian philosophy follows the method of concretion, the method of implication into God’s interpretation. At the conclusion of its process of philosophical speculation, Platonism at last reaches the notion of some vague principle of the Good to which God must look up as he manipulates the essentially refractory elements of an independently existing non-being. Christianity believes in creation. Fully recognizing the historical service tendered by Platonism, we nevertheless maintain that there can be no peace between Platonism and Christianity, not even a truce, but only war.

29 The argument presented by E. Gilson in his The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy does not, we believe, disprove our contention on this point. [The original text does not indicate the location of this footnote, although its order in the chapter has been maintained.—ed.]
Basic to any consideration of modern ethical theories is the question of the relation of speculation to revelation. In modern times there are many ethical theories which seem to be based on revelation while in reality they are based on speculation. It is frequently difficult to discover the speculative framework that underlies much of what is called Christian ethics.

It is well, then, that we concern ourselves with the three-volume work of Richard Kroner, dealing with the relation of speculation and revelation in the history of philosophy. Kroner is a Christian theologian and philosopher who seeks to combine speculation and revelation in such a way as to do justice both to the Christian revelation and to an essentially Kantian view of speculation. What is our estimate of Kroner’s position to be? An answer to this question will help us to find our bearings with respect to the nature of much modern ethical theory.

Kroner’s work is divided into three volumes. The first deals with ancient, the second with medieval and the third with modern philosophy. We shall deal with these three volumes in succession.

In the foreword of the first volume Kroner gives us an intimation of the direction of his argument throughout his three volumes. He says: “Although the Greeks did not know revelation in the Biblical sense, and although their speculation originated independently of this contrast, still there is an element in Greek speculation that corresponds to revelation—a fundamental vision not derived, and indeed not derivable, from any empirical observation or rational analysis of facts observed, but, rather, intuitively conceived.”

Then when he turns to his analysis of the Greek spirit in the first volume he at once points out that in their search for a first principle the Greek philosophers depended much upon intuition and imagination. When Thales said that all is water, this water “was not H₂O.” It was mysterious stuff that was “seen” with the eyes of the speculative mind.

We are not to think that Kroner finds an easy transition from Greek intuition to Christian revelation. “Greek speculation is not only pre-Christian; it is outright un-Christian. The very undertaking to discover the root of all things by means of human intuition and hypothesis is radically un-Biblical or even anti-Biblical. It is hardly necessary today to emphasize this fact. Indeed, Kierkegaard has made it so compellingly evident that one has to be blind or deaf not to recognize it.”

It is of interest to note that Kroner brings Kierkegaard into the picture this early. His own view, he thinks, is in agreement with that of Kierkegaard. At a later point we shall return to this. For the moment this fact only indicates to us something of the nature of the

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1 The individual page references are found in the mimeographed copy of this syllabus in the library of Westminster Seminary.
problem that confronts Kroner. Is Kroner going to follow Kierkegaard in his method of first setting up a sharp contrast between the Christian and the Socratic approach in order after that to find the higher unity between them by means of his religious imagination? Is his method in this work going to be like that which may be observed when modern theologians seek to find a place for religion by means of Kant’s primacy of the practical reason? At this point these questions are raised in order that we may all the more easily follow Kroner in the argument of his work now under discussion. Greek speculation and Christian revelation, he thinks, stand over against one another; yet eventually they must make peace. Such is the argument of Kroner. There is first independence, even dualism, but there is also, and chiefly later, interdependence. The conclusion drawn is finally that there has been interdependence, even if not obvious, from the beginning.

For speculation, the “point of departure is not the result of a deliberate and spontaneous investigation; it is a flash of mind, a dictate of inspiration. No great metaphysical system can ever do without this quasi-revelatory element. Divine revelation, on the other hand, cannot be passively received.” Speculation needs vision and revelation needs an active response. Will these two facts lead to a pact of coexistence or even to an interchange of substance between them? Or will one of them win the competition between them at last? Is Kroner’s way of posing the problem of the relation between them any indication as to which one will win out at last in his view?

Perhaps we may already hazard an answer if we hear him pose the problem in typical post-Kantian fashion when he says: “In many respects speculation and revelation belong to different spheres. Speculation is a method by which truth is known. The truth that speculation knows is scientific, i.e., ‘theoretical,’ detached, demonstrative, impersonal; it is disengaged from the thinking subject, as an individual. The truth mediated by revelation, in contrast, is ‘practical,’ ‘committing,’ undemonstrable, personal—in short, religious; it is addressed to man as an individual. And yet rivalry exists between the two spheres, because the truth of both claims ultimacy. The question of primacy is therefore inevitable. Ultimacy cannot be shared—it is indivisible; two ultimates are mutually exclusive. Which truth is higher, that of speculation or that of revelation? How can they live together? How are they correctly related to each other? If we call the ultimate divine, then are things divine known more adequately, more profoundly, and more completely by speculation or by revelation?”

Does not this way of putting the question already betoken a typically post-Kantian answer? It is certain that neither Luther nor Calvin would have put the problem this way. Limiting ourselves to Calvin, it is obvious that he would not say that speculation is a way by which truth is known impersonally. Calvin was, if anything, existential. He was existential at every point. He required that man see himself as covenantally confronted in the realm of science or “theoretical thought” no less than in the realm of religion, narrowly speaking. Being existential, he never would have allowed that religion is “practical” as this term is used in post-Kantian philosophy. For this usage assumes that God is not revelationally present in the realm of theoretical thought. Calvin’s approach was that of requiring men to be confronted with God in every fact of sense experience, in every interpretation made by his intellect, by means of a prior interpretation already given man in God’s speech to man even at the beginning of history. Kroner’s stating of the problem between revelation and speculation seems to be made in terms of the modern freedom-nature scheme. It assumes that the sort of answer given to the problem of the
relation of speculation to revelation by Kant is essentially the same as that which is given by the Reformers. His own answer to the problem will, no doubt, also be in terms of the post-Kantian scheme of things.

Kroner continues to formulate his problem more fully by setting forth the nature of revelation in terms of post-Kierkegaardian fashion. “God the creator of heaven and earth,” he says, “is so exalted above the reach of man that any endeavor to make him the object of investigation and of a theory is not only hopeless but also simply irreverent. It is incompatible with his unspeakable majesty and his incomparable sovereignty. If this transcendent Lord rules the world, as he has created it and sustains it, then all merely human effort to know his nature is absurd. The only acceptable human attitude toward this King of kings is obedience, reverence, adoration, fear, and love.”

How utterly diverse this description of God and his transcendence is from that of Calvin. Kroner assumes the autonomy of theoretical reason as this is based on the assumption of man as ultimate. He assumes with Kant that the knowledge man has of the world of space-time about him is that which the categories of his own mind have imposed upon the raw, purely contingent stuff of experience. This does not mean that he holds a strictly rationalist position with respect to human knowledge. He may hold a more realist position such as recent philosophers maintain. He may hold, for all we know at this point, a phenomenalist or existentialist position such as is also held by many recent philosophers. Even so, whether idealism, realism, phenomenalism or existentialism lies back of Kroner’s analysis of the idea of revelation, this analysis is in any case diametrically opposed to the view held by the Protestant Reformers. The whole idea of covenant theology, as involved in Calvin’s view of the relation of God to man and as later worked out by his followers, presupposes the self-sufficiency of God. Consonant with this is the idea that God is inescapably known by man who is created in his image. Not as though God is thus exhaustively known. If man were to know God exhaustively he would have to be not a creature equal to, but God himself. But the basic relation of God to man, according to Calvin, is positive. Therefore God and his intentions for man are knowable by man.

On Kroner’s view man must be thought of as knowing himself and his world whether or not God has anything to do with either. God is therefore thought of as the “wholly other” than man. Kroner’s view of God’s transcendence is virtually the same as Anaximander’s idea of some sort of infinity of indeterminate existence. To say that the proper attitude toward such a God is that of obedience is, to turn the idea of the covenant as developed by Reformed theologians on the basis of Scripture, upside down. Man cannot be obedient to a wholly indeterminate principle of infinity. There is no meaning to the word obedience unless man has knowledge of God. But then the knowledge that man has of God is, in the nature of the case, not the product of some impersonal research but rather the obedient reflection on the revelation of God. Knowledge must itself be taken up into the covenantal relation that man the creature sustains to God.

It is perfectly true, as Kroner asserts, that “the living God cannot be enshrined in a logical system.” But why should we accept the false alternative that is presupposed in such a statement? Why not say that man’s logical abilities must be engaged in finding as much coherence as they can in the revelation of God to man, always remembering that man’s “system of truth” is a human re-expression of the revelation of God and as such is never exhaustive or infallible. Only the revelation of God to man is infallible. And that
revelation, given to sinful man in Christ and by Christ through his Spirit and apostles to the church, is found in Scripture. Man’s active re-interpretation of this revelation does not need to be perfect, exhaustive or infallible. Man knows that he “possesses” that truth in Christ’s presence on earth and in the expression of his mind in Scripture. And this possession of the truth, this knowledge, is inherently existential and religious. Therefore if one holds to this traditional Protestant view of revelation one cannot accept the contrast between knowledge and revelation as formulated by Kroner. The living God cannot be met if knowledge and revelation are thus set over against one another in an original dualism. At no level do knowledge and love or obedience admit of being thus, contrasted with one another and least of all when we speak of the relation of man’s thinking or “speculation” in relation to the revelation of God.

Kroner therefore sets for himself a problem that he cannot solve when he says that the “living God of the Bible deters all conceptual knowledge, and yet in some way he stands for that ultimate truth which speculation tries to grasp in its own right.” Kroner is bound to have revelation and speculation meet. “The religious and the speculative Ultimate are in the final analysis the same Absolute.” Kroner is right, of course, in saying that they must meet. But they can meet only on the presupposition that revelation is primary and that human speculation is, when properly conducted, the attempt of covenant-redeemed man, man in Christ, to submit his every thought, his every conceptual thought, captive to the obedience of his Lord. If this approach is not taken from the outset, the subordination of revelation to speculation is a foregone conclusion. And with this subordination goes the destruction of human speculation. Human conceptual thought cannot operate in a vacuum. Yet it is condemned to doing just that unless revelation, in the sense mentioned, is presupposed as basic to the intellect as an aspect of the whole personality of man.

The ethical question has not been forgotten in saying all this. When Socrates assumes the autonomy of the moral consciousness and when in modern times Kant does likewise, they are finding their absolute, their absolute ideal, their absolute criterion and their self-sufficient motive power in man as autonomous. Neither the Socratic nor the Kantian position can ever be harmonized with the Christian position, no more in ethics than in the field of knowledge. If the one could be done, then the other too could be done. As it is, neither can be done.

Kroner says that speculation is incomplete without some form of revelation, some intuition. On the other hand, he says that biblical revelation “undoubtedly shows a trait of rationality.” This in spite of the fact that “the God of the Bible deters all conceptual knowledge.” What does Kroner mean by a “trait of rationality?” Is not the whole relation between God and man of a practical, non-conceptual nature? Obviously Kroner cannot maintain his idea of a wholly practical, i.e., a wholly non-conceptual relation of man to God. Such a relation would be that of pure mysticism.

So also Socrates, representing speculation “seldom, if ever, reached a doctrinal and conceptual conclusion. Socrates represented a living philosophy: philosophy not to be verified by reasoning alone but by the very life of man.”

In view of such statements as these about revelation and speculation, it would seem that, on Kroner’s view, the difference between them is, after all, only one of degree. The “living philosophy” of Socrates is not a matter of conceptual knowledge alone. The relation of the “living God” is not only practical, it has some rational traits. The contrast between speculation and revelation is thus softened down from what it first was said to
be. And this softening down is, implicitly, a victory for speculation. The Christian revelation is imperious in its nature. Christ wants to be Lord of the conceptual thoughts of men as well as of every other aspect of their personality. And the autonomous intellectual and moral consciousness of man is equally imperious. It seeks to withdraw the realm of conceptual thought from the Lordship of Christ by claiming the honor of its origination in man instead of in God. It seeks to withdraw that which is beyond the reach of the conceptualizing powers of man from God by claiming that it is without order. By doing this it reduces this “wholly other” realm into something that is in turn potentially rationalizable by man.

In this connection it is of interest to note what Kroner has to say of Herman Dooyeweerd’s claim that all theoretical thought is controlled by a religious groundmotive. There is, says Dooyeweerd, the groundmotive of apostate or fallen mankind. Theoretical thought, the conceptualizing activity of man, is never neutral and impersonal. If the man who engages in the conceptualizing process is a Christian, he has by grace, through the work of Christ and his Spirit, learned to think in terms of the teachings of creation, fall, and redemption in Christ. The Christian’s philosophy is within this framework, and this framework is not the product of his philosophy. If, on the other hand, he who engages in the conceptualizing process is not a Christian, then he thinks in terms of a framework of abstract universality or pure form and an abstract particularity or pure matter. The non-Christian, as well as the Christian, is religiously committed to this framework, and his philosophy is therefore controlled by it.

In his work *Reformatie de Wysbegeerte en Scholastiek*, Volume 1, Dooyeweerd has shown how the development of Greek philosophy was throughout controlled by this form-matter scheme and that this scheme came to its climax in Aristotle’s philosophy. Kroner refers to another work of Dooyeweerd’s, namely, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*.

As might be expected, Kroner cannot allow the truth of Dooyeweerd’s claim. Kroner is too deeply committed, religiously committed, Dooyeweerd might say, to the assumption of the autonomy of theoretical thought to admit Dooyeweerd’s view. Kroner’s very definition of the nature of speculation as a would-be-self-sufficient effort on the part of man at finding an answer to the question, “What is ultimate reality?” indicates this fact.

Kroner will allow room for the influence of religion upon Greek culture, but not for religion as Dooyeweerd thinks of it. For Kroner religion is not a matter of basic-all-controlling significance. It may be present or it may not be present. “As far as I can see, there is no religious groundmotive within Aristotle’s system. I shall show that Aristotle’s emphasis upon form is not religious but aesthetic in origin.” Of the Greeks in general it may be said, argues Kroner, that their religion “did not censor their thought.” The “Greeks were entirely free to think and to teach.” “By introducing the idea of heresy, the Christian church alone seriously restricted the freedom of thought.”

On this contention of Kroner’s we may remark as follows. Dooyeweerd’s view is not disproved by it. By religion Dooyeweerd means the basic motivation of the heart whence are all the issues of life. If the “religion” of the Greeks did not censor their thought, in Kroner’s sense of the term, then this only signifies that their basic framework of thought is not set free from the ravages of human apostacy. Human thought is free only when it is restored to its proper place in the framework of creation—sin and redemption through
Christ. Therefore it is true, in a deeper sense than Kroner realizes, that Greek thought was controlled by their basic religious commitment, and therefore bound for self-frustration. Thinking themselves free to follow the facts where they might lead, and thinking themselves true to the requirements of the laws of logic, the Greeks assumed uncritically, that is, religiously, that the facts are not created and controlled by God and that the logical function in man is not a gift of God. Accordingly their principle of individuation involved pure contingency or irrationalism, and their principles of unity, to work at all, had to reduce all individuality to participation in and ultimate identification with abstract form. Thus the “freedom” of thought of the Greeks was no better than the freedom of a fish out of water. True freedom of thought is freedom to develop itself in relation to the order of the cosmos created and directed by God through Christ.

In the second chapter of his general introduction, Kroner considers the Perspective of the History of Philosophy. A “history of philosophy cannot … be more objective than philosophy itself” because “a history of philosophy is both a historical and philosophical work.” That is to say, when we study the “facts” “so far as they can be known in objective fashion” we still, from the outset, view them from the point of view of the “philosophic position of the historian.”

Does this imply that we must subordinate the speculative effort of man to the perspective of revelation? It does not. “But it does remind us of the limits of speculation, and therefore it furnishes us with the best perspective for the understanding of the history of philosophy.”

It is thus frankly as one who believes in the Christian revelation as the highest perspective available to man that Kroner evaluates Greek philosophy. Of course, his Christian perspective is that of Kant, and especially that of Kierkegaard. “Modern speculative philosophy has undergone its ‘last judgment’ in Kierkegaard’s critique.” He sums up his basic analysis of Greek speculation in the following words: “Ancient speculation did not succeed in thinking out the divine mystery, because the right approach to it is not theoretical, logical and rational, but is practical, devotional, religious, and spiritual. This fundamental insight makes it plain that the language of the Bible, better than that of philosophic thought, can open the horizon to a legitimate knowledge of the divine, which knowledge serves the moral and religious needs of man and not the impersonal inquiry into an objective truth. It also makes it clear that the epic and the dramatic are the proper medium of communicating the nature of the Ultimate, impenetrable to theoretical analysis and synthesis. The history of philosophic speculation discloses this insight and has therefore to be interpreted from this perspective.”

Thus “revelation dominates the scene from behind the horizon of thought, just because it can never be resolved into thought. It reveals what cannot be analyzed or demonstrated and what therefore is the supreme basis, the ultimate goal, and the eternal center of all that can be analyzed and demonstrated. Its relation to speculation is therefore paradoxical. Revelation is potent only so long as it is not drawn into the argument; it dominates the field only so long as it does not enter it.”

Completely unaware of revelation, Greek thought was free and unrestricted. But “the true God remained hidden.” In medieval times philosophy was less free than it was in Greece. In modern times, philosophy though less original and powerful than it was in ancient times, yet “found its own principle” when it became critical of “pure reason.”
In his delineation of the development of Greek speculation, Kroner expresses agreement with Jaeger who, as earlier noted, observes that “there is no discontinuity between Ionian natural philosophy and the Homeric epics …” “Indeed,” says Kroner, “Hesiod is a transition between the epic and the speculative systems.” The water of Thales is a “mythical water.” When he sought for a unifying principle of reality he depended largely upon his imagination. Greek speculation was new in relation to the poetical and religious views that preceded it, but it was new only in the sense that a branch of a tree is new or distinct while yet it is at one with the tree.

Speculation was “more spiritual in intent than mythical religion.” But this does not deny that “Beauty is the key to the understanding of the mentality of the Greek world.” In essence Hegel was right when he said that the religion of the Greeks was the religion of beauty. And pantheism “was the consequence of the worship of beauty.” The religion of cosmic beauty was the “religion of the nation at large.”

How then can such a religion of beauty which involves pantheism be said to be a preparation for the gospel? Kroner answers that speculation itself furnished the connecting link between the early popular religion of Greece and the “recognition of the Lord of the Bible.” This does not mean that philosophy can itself develop a theism, if by theism we mean the doctrine implied in biblical faith. Philosophy can “never be theistic, for it can never come into contact with the living God but can only conceive of the idea of a divine being.” “Greek philosophy never went beyond the idea of a world-mind.” Even so, Greek speculation “dislodged the polytheistic gods and approached Biblical monotheism.”

At this point Kroner goes on to show that Greek speculation itself eventually reached an impasse. How could the form and matter of Aristotle, which marks the climax of Greek speculation, be brought into unity with one another? On a speculative basis one cannot stop with an ultimate dualism, nor can one stop with an ultimate abstract unity. Unity and duality always involve one another. “The Hellenic Logos was thus eventually transformed into the Christian Logos.”

Of course the Christian Logos does not develop out of the impasse reached by Greek speculation. The secret is that the “power of revelation was present from the very beginning, when speculation set out to gain knowledge of the divine, although this power was not yet known as that of revelation. There was within speculation a kind of substitute for revelation, namely, intuition, as contrasted with that of analysis.” By clarifying the issues, speculation “matured the religious consciousness to the point where it could realize that it is wiser to obey the commandments of a holy God and to appeal to his mercy and grace than to seek to penetrate to the depths of the deity by theoretical thought.”

Of course there is a “kind of affinity between logical clarity and moral purity…. And to the extent of this affinity, the Greek thinkers did attain knowledge of the divine being. To that degree Plato advanced in the direction of revelation. The more consistently speculation proceeded, the more logical its arguments, the more did philosophical concepts approximate to the incomprehensible. There is an inner coincidence between the truth of one realm and that of another. What is true in thought cannot be false in faith. And, therefore, as far as thought could go in the right direction, it went at the same time in the direction of the true faith. It failed only when it transgressed its limits.”
The reader will note that Kroner has led us into a very complicated situation. Here is human speculation. Its logical conclusion is that of pantheism. It can never “encounter the living God. It ends in a blind alley.”

An “impersonal comprehension or vision” cannot do anything but lead us to an “abstract relation between the thinking mind and the Absolute, as its object.” Yet, at the same time, the more logical speculation is the more it approximates the incomprehensible and leads us in the right direction. Speculation failed only “when it transgressed its limits.” Where are these limits? Who or what determines them? Speculative thought itself must determine them. Can we expect that it will ever learn to do so? How can it do so without denying the legitimacy of its whole enterprise? For Kroner the speculative enterprise as carried on by the Greeks was a perfectly legitimate enterprise. Kroner does not agree with Dooyeweerd to the effect that there is present in this speculation the effort to suppress the revelation of God the creator. By starting off its enterprise of speculation on the self-sufficiency of the consciousness of man, Greek speculation attained logically to the idea of a God who is not the creator, but is merely a cosmic principle. Are we to applaud this enterprise as legitimate, as brilliant, as leading logically to pantheism, and then ask those who engage in it to stop at a certain point and make room for the idea of a God who is the creator of man and the world? This is apparently what Kroner is asking us to do. He thinks that when Paul speaks of the wisdom of man as having been made foolishness with God, he is merely asking the Greeks to stop short of running to the logical conclusion of their course.

Back of this analysis, as earlier noted, lies Kroner’s commitment to the freedom-nature scheme of modern post-Kantian thought. By this scheme, Kant and his followers are seeking an escape from the dilemma into which their own method has brought them. In this scheme man’s conceptual analysis can, in the nature of the case, produce nothing but an abstract result. But man cannot pray to the absolute mind when comprehended in conceptual forms. By means of his conceptual knowledge man can find no God, not even a god. The inner unity between the abstract and the concrete cannot be attained by any conceptual effort. Nothing conceptual can be said about the God who is the living and true God.

But though all this is true, the philosophers themselves “moved toward the Biblical primacy of the ethical in its contest with the aesthetic.”

From other writings of Kroner we know that in his mind it was the philosopher Kant who, by means of his development from ethical dualism to ethical monism enabled man, in modern times, to combine the theoretical effort that leads to abstraction with the religious worship that requires the concrete. In other words, Kroner’s analysis of Greek speculation as preparatory for the coming of the gospel is made in the light of the modern idea of the gospel as the projection of an ideal of God and of Christ who must, in spite of our logic, somehow rule for our good over the world.

The whole matter of the development of Greek philosophy in the direction of the gospel is summed up in this one phrase of Kroner’s. The philosophers moved toward the biblical primacy of the ethical in its contest with the aesthetic. “On the level attained by classical speculation, the philosophers of the final period returned to the cosmological trend of the first, but ascribed primacy to ethical and religious considerations.”
Socrates

The figure of Socrates must be regarded as the most striking illustration of the significance of this process of the Greek spirit from the aesthetic to the ethical. “Socrates was a Greek anticipation and counterpart of Jesus Christ.” Of course “such a Greek Christ was no Christ at all.” Yet a comparison between the “human features” of Socrates and Christ “shows the close kinship between speculation and revelation, between philosophy and prophecy, between the cause of both, existing in spite of the vast gulf between the methods, the origin, and the spirit of the two approaches to the Absolute. It shows that philosophy cannot deny the outstanding value of personality even in its seemingly impersonal and detached contemplation. It shows that the ultimate truth cannot be reached by any man without the effort of the whole man—his thinking mind, his striving will, and his feeling imagination.”

“By his very existence and personality” Socrates “illustrates that philosophy and religion are inwardly bound together. The philosopher who searches more than he finds is most akin to a man chosen by God to reveal the truth.”

Socrates abandons any claim to knowledge of the Absolute and yet does not fall into “the pitfall of skepticism…” “The truth can only be the permanent goal of striving and the ideal of acting. Socrates did not only teach this insight: he proved it by his life. His life became his philosophy; the latter could not be divorced from his conduct and attitudes.”

Accordingly, he “opened an absolutely new horizon.” For him the “greatest wonder is not the outer world, nor even the invisible power governing it. The greatest marvel is the soul of man. Cosmic beauty is as nothing when compared to the beauty of the inner man. If any access is to be had to the deepest ground of existence, it is to be found in the inward part of man himself, in the center from whence springs the ability to control and govern one’s own life. In that inner center man encounters the deity; here is the source of all virtue, devotion, loyalty, courage, justice, veracity, and moderation.”

Thus Socrates brought to Greek speculation “an element completely alien to it, an element that might be called revelatory, in the sense of the Bible.”

“Philosophy as understood by him was a new life, a renewal of the heart as well as instruction of the mind.” Kierkegaard was right when he called the attitude of Socrates a “passion of inwardness in existing” and an “analogue to faith.” “Socrates applied means of discussion and methods of thought well in line with the theoretical nature of the Greek, e.g., his love of debate, gift of logical reasoning, predilection for contemplation and reflection. And yet the spirit animating his conversation was no longer Greek.”

The new dimension introduced into Greek speculation “is the dimension of the Biblical conceptions of man and God. Of course Socrates did not know anything about the revelation of the Biblical Creator and Lawgiver; nevertheless, his soul groped and longed for it.”

In short, Socrates “discovered the dimension of the moral conscience, a dimension unknown to the Greeks, at least in the sense of an inner tribunal of the individual self—so central in the Christian consciousness.” Here then we have the “new inwardness which characterized his personality and conversation.” “There was a depth in the soul of Socrates more akin to the depth of revelation than to that of speculation and cosmic intuition.” In the dialogue *Phaedo*, Socrates speaks of his basic position when he says:
“When the soul descries herself in herself, she passes there into the realm of the pure and eternal … and as long as she is allowed to stay within herself, she ceases to err…. Is this not the state of the soul that we call wisdom?”

To find what is true and right, the soul must have “conversation with itself” Socrates thus “paved the way toward a new religion.” By means of the soul’s inner conversation with itself the “possibility of comprehending the deity in a new way” was opened up. Socrates said: “The soul most resembles the divine.” “To Socrates immortality meant a most intimate alliance with ‘the good and wise god,’ as he calls Hades in that dialogue. ‘The real philosopher has, therefore, reason to be of good cheer when about to die…. No one who has not studied philosophy [that means, who has not loved wisdom and sought for it] and who is not entirely pure at the time of his departure is allowed to enter the company of the gods, but the lover of knowledge [philomathes].’

How high a concept of a philosopher and of philosophy! How religious a view! In the *Symposium* the philosopher is called a ‘friend of God.’ For ‘the gods have care of anyone whose desire is to become just and to be like God.’ In no other man did Greek philosophy fulfill so perfectly its mission of preparing for the gospel.”

What may be spoken of as the “doctrine” of Socrates is, therefore, really “a kind of ethical wisdom like that taught in the Bible, especially by Jesus himself.”

Socrates “refuted the Sophistic thesis that there is no distinction between good and evil, and thereby he created the philosophical science called ‘ethics.’ But he created it in the form of an applied conviction.” There is nothing intellectualistic in such a position. For him the word *phronesis* “does not mean intuition (*noesis*) nor knowledge (*gnosis*), nor scientific understanding (*episteme*); rather it implies ethical considerations, a kind of moral pondering in which purpose, prudence and thoughtfulness are factors.”

The ideas that knowledge is virtue and that no one does evil voluntarily must be seen in the light of this meaning of *phronesis*. And when thus seen they appear to be one in meaning with the thought of Paul. “Both Socrates and Paul are of the opinion that evil is not the result of a deliberate will.” “Only the devil wants the bad for the sake of the bad.”

Of course Socrates “is still a Greek.” For him evil springs from lack of wisdom, i.e., ethical insight. For Paul evil springs from desire, passion, impulse and interest. We may therefore to this extent speak of Socrates as an “ethical intellectualist.” Even so, for Socrates thought “can never be separated from faith.” For him happiness was a “state of the soul dependent upon goodness and wisdom.” It was his “religion of the soul” that made him formulate his notion of *eudaimonia*.

Socrates then is the “most religious philosopher of antiquity, the most Christian figure in the pre-Christian pagan world. It is this kinship that makes him great. No wonder that the Athenians did not like him and eventually put him to death.” “His faith was the deepest source of his philosophy and the source of his personality. In the moment of danger and trial this faith granted him the courage and the spiritual freedom to speak as Plato tells us he did. His faith was no longer a pagan faith; neither mythical nor cosmological, it was an ‘analogy’ to the Christian faith. Socrates was so lonely and alone because no one shared or could share in his faith. It was his personal charm and *charisma*.”

“The god whom Socrates obeyed and served had not yet been revealed to his nation.” He had no successor among the Greeks. He could have none. He must not be held responsible for Plato’s theory of ideas. Kierkegaard “erred in assuming that Socrates was
the author of the thesis that we know the truth by way of recollection.” In the Apology, Socrates “bluntly admits that he has no knowledge about man’s destiny after death, as he has no knowledge of any scientific kind.”

Kroner expresses his final conclusion with respect to the figure of Socrates in the following words: “Unless we assume that God inspired and commanded Socrates to prepare for the coming of his Son, on the level and in the language of Greek philosophy, Socrates demonstrated, by his personality and conduct, that the human mind has resources enabling it to approach by its own effort, the truth revealed in the Bible.”

For ourselves we cannot rest in any such conclusion as that of Kroner. The alternative that Kroner places before us is not required by the facts of the case. Socrates, like all other men, was a sinner. As such his philosophy or lack of it was an attempt to justify to himself his covenant-breaking attitude. It is not a virtue of a child to be “seeking” for its mother when its mother alone is daily caring for it. In other words, the much lauded Socratic ignorance is the expression of a moral consciousness that is alienated from its origin in the Creator, and seeks to justify its apostacy to itself by a search for goodness in a vacuum.

We may well agree with much of what Kroner and Jaeger as against Stace say in their analysis of the Greek spirit in general and of Socrates in particular. There is nothing narrowly intellectualist about Socrates. In Socrates it is, no doubt the “whole man” that has conversation with itself. But this fact only points up the necessity of saying that it is then the whole man that is repressing the truth about man’s creatureliness and sin. It is the whole man who would be wholly autonomous that speaks to us so dramatically and so tragically in the figure of Socrates.

If Socrates be regarded as the highest product of the Greek spirit, this only points up the striking character of Paul’s words: “Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God’s good pleasure through the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Cor 1:20–21). To be sure, the revelation of God was present among the Greeks. Their poetry no less than their philosophy, and their philosophy no less than their poetry fails to reveal its true significance except in terms of the presence of God’s revelation among them. That is to say, the Greek spirit in them is straining itself to the limit of its God-given capacity in order to find a fine-figured substitute, for man as obeying and loving God the Creator and bountiful benefactor. The ideal or perfect man of Greece is the perfect covenant-breaker, the ideal man of Scripture is the perfect covenant-keeper.

To say this is not to lack appreciation for the Greek paideia. There was much in it that was “good,” “beautiful,” “noble,” and “true” in a relative sense. We must greatly admire the fact that man, though a sinner, can attain to so high a form of culture as is found in Greece. But we admire this not because we think that apostate man can, in terms of his own resources, produce any such thing. Nor do we admire Greek culture because we think that in it apostate man is, in terms of its own resources, gradually becoming aware of the limits of its own efforts, whether poetic, theoretic or ethic, and is therefore reaching out “somehow” toward revelation of the true God. The God of Greece is not, either overtly, or under cover, the God of Christianity. The idea of Greek theism is a misnomer. But though Kroner sees this well enough, he has no eye for the depth of the gulf that separates the best product of the Greek spirit, from the idea of the grace of God.
in Christ through which alone, even a picture of the ideal man can be drawn. The idea of “inwardness” as both Jaeger and Kroner find it developing in Greek thought is therefore to be regarded as a step in the direction of the internally self-dependent moral consciousness as found in Kant’s ethics. And this means, in the last analysis, that the development toward “inwardness” of Greek thinking is a step in which apostate man hardens himself even in the face of the moral bankruptcy that confronts him in terms of his own principle, toward all possible invasion against the requirements of the Creator-Redeemer of Christianity. The more clearly the revelational requirements come to apostate man, the more desperately he kicks against the pricks. At the same time the impossibility of finding any intelligible difference between good and evil in terms of the self-sufficient moral consciousness of sinful man becomes increasingly plain.

Kroner’s own analysis of the development of the Greek spirit is the best evidence of this. The Greek concept of theoretical thought, leading as it does, on Kroner’s own account, to a wholly impersonal Absolute, is the wholly proper method of speculation. But this method of speculation presupposes that man is not the creature of God. Only he who lives by the redemption of Christ knows that he is a creature and seeks, by grace, to act as such. And the man who is existentially aware of his creaturehood, does, by that token, no longer believe in the self-sufficiency of his theoretical thought. His theoretical activity is carried on in terms of the presupposition of creation and redemption as revealed in Scripture. His speculation is subject to the obedience of Christ. And with this obedience of Christ goes freedom from the impasse involved in theoretical thought that is obedient only to the moral and intellectual consciousness of the sinner unredeemed.

When Kroner allows the theoretical activity of apostate man to run its reckless course to the end, which is that of abstract form, he is, by implication, already committed to the idea of pure indeterminacy as the correlative to this pure form. The combination of the abstract result of autonomous theoretical thought and “concrete” intuition can nowise be shown to explain, in any sense, either the intellectual or moral predication of man. Socrates is, as Kroner asserts, a prophet, but not of the God and Father of Jesus Christ.
Chapter 18: Modern Ethical Theory: Kant

The Ethics Of Kant

From Kant’s major work on epistemology, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, it is plain that “in writing it, he was contemplating and preparing the way for his other, and especially his ethical works” (1).

Basic to this preparation is the idea that the theoretical reason can in no wise leave the field of sensuous experience. The *a priori* of sense, the *a priori* of the understanding and even the ideas of reason, are unable to tell us anything of the field of freedom in which ethical relations obtain. Knowledge is limited to the realm of the phenomenal.

Even so, says Edward Caird, according to Kant, the relation to the realm of the noumenal is an open one. While *The Critique of Pure Reason* shows that the ideas of reason have a use in relation to experience, it shows also that they stand in an asymptotic relation to it, as giving rise to an ideal of knowledge which cannot be realized in experience. The *Critique* thus leaves room for the possibility that the ideas of reason may refer to realities which, because of the nature of our perceptions, as well as of our *a priori* conceptions (which have essential relation to these perceptions), cannot be determined as objects of knowledge. And it is into this room that, according to *The Critique of Practical Reason*, the moral consciousness introduces itself—giving assertorial value to the ideas which *The Critique of Pure Reason* left problematical, and changing the possibility of things in themselves, which correspond to the ideas of reason, into a certainty, though a certainty of faith and not of knowledge.

Description Of Kant’s Ethical Principles

Here then we have what Krone calls the ethical dualism of Kant. Caird as well as Kroner thinks of this dualism of the first two *Critiques* as passing eventually into what is tantamount to a monism. As we need the *Critique of Practical Reason* in order rightly to interpret the *Critique of Pure Reason*, so he says, we need the *Critique of Judgment* in which he seeks to mediate between the theoretical and practical consciousness in order to see that the “realistic dualism of the first two *Critiques*” is all but turned “into an idealist Monism.”

With these remarks as our background we turn now to Kant’s ethical works. In them we have the copingstone of his whole effort. For in them he asks the question how “that reason in relation to which all objects are determined, is conceived of as determining itself.” In them the idea of inwardness of which we have spoken in connection with Socrates, is most fully expressed.

Kant was seeking to resolve an “antinomy between opposite principles which seem to rave equal or similar claims to our acceptance.” The field of science seemed to require the idea of necessity while the field of ethics is based upon the notion of freedom. These

1 Note: The individual page references are found in the mimeographed copy of this syllabus in the library of Westminster Theological Seminary.
are exclusive of one another. And yet man is involved in both of them. So Kant sought
for a solution of the principle of science and the principle of ethics by means of a “regress
upon the ultimate conditions of knowledge or thought—conditions which are
presupposed in the controversy itself, and therefore in any settlement of it that may be
arrived at.” For with the principle of inwardness goes a certain principle of continuity.
Kant seeks for a unity that underlies the pursuit of science and the pursuit of ethical
ideals…. The “great antagonism” between the principles of physical science on the one
hand and the principles of the moral consciousness on the other hand must somehow find
their solution by an appeal to presuppositions underlying both. No solution could be
found by an extension of the principles of science into the realm of ethics and religion.
Any such extension would include all of man’s life within the realm of nature and
necessity.

Fortunately Kant was able to show, we are told, that the validity of the principles of
science cannot even be demonstrated “except in such a way that limits them to the sphere
of phenomena.” These principles can be shown to be true “‘only in relation to what is in
itself contingent, viz., possible experience,’ and this, because they are only the principles
through which experience is possible.” Thus the justification and the limitation of
scientific principles are involved in one another. The ethical inwardness of Kant requires
not only its own principle of continuity but also its own principle of discontinuity. Each
of these, their relation to one another and their joint relationship to the principle of
inwardness, will be discussed later.

What Kant is saying is that the scientific principles of necessity are valid and to be
accepted by all men, but that this validity at the same time implies the limitation of
science to the I-it dimension. This validation and limitation of science brings great relief
to the modern theologian. He can now commit himself without reserve to the principles
of modern science. When he brings the message of Christianity he does not have to enter
the realm of science. He does not need to engage in any such debates as have been carried
on in the past. The idea of freedom as the basis of all ethical and religious asseveration
has been preserved by means of the limitation of necessity to the reason of the
phenomena.

As noted, the limitation of science and its validation are involved in one another. This
limitation and validation is accomplished by bringing all experience into relation to the
one self-sufficient subject. It is this point that Caird is concerned to stress. Kant, says
Caird, was all too often not aware of the tendency toward the subordination of all
temporal spatial reality to the one self-unifying subject that stands above it. All too often
Kant argued as though the abstract unity, the unity of logical relations, is the thing at
which human experience must aim. When he reasons in this fashion he finds that there is
an object in itself back of all the causal relations of the phenomenal world. But what he
was really effecting was the subordination of all mechanical relations, to the idea of the
one subject that stands above them. When the matter is thought of in this way, we do not
need to rest in the “realistic dualism” to which Kant seems so often to lead us. We then
realize that the real significance of Kant was to be found in the fact that for him “the
relations of objects as external to each other and externally determining each other, and
of events happening after each other and successively conditioning each other in time,
which are expressed in the Analogies of Experience, are relations which do not exhaust
the fact; for as related to the self, these objects and events have a unity and community in
spite of their difference and externality, of which no account is taken in such determination of them.”

It is precisely at this point that we have the origin of much of modern theology. Here is the idea of Kroner’s ethical dualism advancing on to his ethical phenomenalism or monism. Here is the primacy of the teleological over the mechanical. “We thus learn not merely to refer the chain of causality to a *causa sui* as its highest link, but to reinterpret the necessity of nature as itself an element in the process of freedom, and element which, for certain purposes of science, it may be convenient to isolate, but which cannot legitimately be regarded as a *res completa*. In this way the Kantian conception of nature as that which exists for spirit will lead us directly to the Hegelian view that it exists only as a manifestation of spirit.” We may add that the position of Kierkegaard, namely, that truth is truth of the Subject, owes its origin to this. And all those who largely depend on Kierkegaard for their idea of the primacy of the Subject and therefore the primacy of faith owe their basic insight to this.

Thus it appears that the critical regress of Kant both leads to and presupposes the idea of the self-sufficiency of the human subject. And this is assumed to be its freedom. Science itself is made to depend upon this freedom. How then can science deny its mother? The consciousness of any fact in the field of science presupposes the free self as ultimate. All the objects of science must, if they are to be intelligible, be related to the “unity of the self for which they are.”

From the Christian point of view we have here the deepest possible rejection of the triune God of Scripture as the self-sufficient subject in relation to whom alone all facts in any realm, lower or higher, have their meaning. In short, in Kant’s position, we have a complete reversal of the covenantal relation in which man, the creature, stands to God. The covenant is in Kant’s case, as well as in that of Adam, monopleuric, but man instead of God is now the one who ordains its ordinances.

It is on this assertion of the inherent self-sufficiency of the moral and religious consciousness that all possible stress is to be laid. At the end of the first *Critique*, Kant does seem to regard the antithetic of reason as the bulwark of man’s moral and religious consciousness. But this is true only in a negative sense. The ideal demands of reason, Kant had already argued, are that reality should answer to its requirement completely. In other words, Kant holds with Spinoza that ideally we should be able to show that the order and connection of things is identical with the order and connection of ideas. But since the idea of contingency must also be taken to be ultimate, we cannot ever expect to reconcile our actual knowledge with the demands of thought. No one can show the impossibility of the ultimacy of our moral and religious experience. “All therefore, that the Antithetic shows, is that phenomena, viewed as existing in themselves and so forming a closed circle, are self-contradictory. If, however, we avoid this error, and do not attempt to bring things in themselves into the sphere of phenomena, or stretch the sphere of phenomena so as to include things in themselves, the Antithetic disappears.”

Caird goes on to raise what he calls the natural objection to such a view. What comfort is there in a mere negation? He answers this question by saying that for Kant “this negation is of the highest importance both speculatively and practically. Kant’s *non liquet* is not meant merely to stop human reason from attempting to go beyond a limit which, for aught we know, may have nothing real lying beyond it. It is in his view a fixed bar, an absolute interdict, to science, which prohibits it from applying its principles to one
great department of human existence, and thus leaves that department to be judged on its own merits and according to such principles as it supplies for itself. Henceforth, no one is entitled on empirical principles to explain away any consciousness of ourselves which may arise when we regard ourselves, or which implies that we regard ourselves, not as objects among other objects in the world, but as subjects for which all such objects are.” Our moral and religious principles are “inexpugnable,” by the weapons of empirical science. And the field of science itself needs that which cannot be explained in terms of itself.

**Man’s Moral Self**

Man, says Kant, who knows all nature beside himself only through sense, knows himself not only so but also through pure apperception, and in acts of inner determinations which he cannot reckon among the impressions of sense. He is for himself a phenomenon; but he is also, in view of certain faculties, a purely intelligible object, since the action of such faculties in him cannot be attributed to the receptivity of sense.”

While man has the consciousness of objects, in what today is often called the I-it dimension, “he has also the consciousness of himself in opposition to these objects in the analytic judgment of self-consciousness—which implies the synthetic judgment, but is not identical with it.”

The complete ethical self-sufficiency of Kant’s moral and religious self is expressed best in the idea that in man’s consciousness of acting “the subject-self is made its own object.” The theoretical consciousness cannot find such a self-consciousness. This is the case because this theoretical consciousness is confronted with something already given to it. But in the practical self-consciousness this consciousness is the only object that is given to itself. Thus the consciousness of the self is the “consciousness of the subject for which all objects are as acting in view of its own idea of itself, and determining itself as an object and other objects in conformity with that idea.”

But the question still remains whether we really have such a self-consciousness. Kant answers in the affirmative. His view, says Caird, is that “Such a consciousness of our own activity is directly involved in our consciousness of ourselves as responsible under the moral law.” In relation to moral law man experiences the sense of an ought. This he does not find in the natural world.

Here then is where the ethical consciousness begins. The free moral consciousness makes a demand upon itself. It sets an ideal for itself. It then represents to itself a world conformable to its ideal. The moral self is not restricted by the question as to whether its ideal can be realized in the world of theoretical thought. The moral man is dependent on nothing but himself for the attainment of his ideals. To “make the ideal realisable in the

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2 In *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant says: Allein der Mensch, der die ganze Natur sonst lediglich nur durch Sinne nennt, erkennt sich selbst auch durch bloße Apperception, und zwar in Handlungen und inneren Bestimmungen, die er gar nicht zum Eindrucke der Sinne zahlen kann, und ist sich silbst freilich einesteils Phanomen, andernteils aber namlich in Ansehung gewisser Vermogen, ein intelligibeler Gegenstand weil die Handling derselben gar nicht zur Receptivitat der Sinnlichkeit gezahlt werden.
most important sense, all that is necessary is that it should be capable of being a motive of action.”

But if the ethical life thus seems to take its beginning by virtue of its dualistic stance in relation to science, it should be remembered, Caird again warns us, that the ultimate aim of Kant’s total approach is that it goes onward and forward to a concrete instead of to an abstract relation of the world of the self to the world of things. It goes forward. Kroner would say, from ethical dualism to ethical monism. And if this fact is duly considered it will appear, argues Caird, that faith is not something less than knowledge but something more. We shall then find that the self, so far from standing dualistically over against the world of phenomena, really develops itself through this world. Thus, the struggle with circumstances is virtually one with the struggle with self.

**The Formulation Of The Moral Law**

The objection most often made against Kant’s idea of the moral consciousness, says Caird, is that it is an “attempt to extract positive content from the merely negative idea of self consistency … ” Why should the attempt to “get difference out of bare identity” be more successful in the practical than in the theoretical sphere? Did not Kant himself teach us that concepts without percepts are empty even as percepts without concepts are blind?

To answer this objection, argues Caird, we must realize that Kant’s view stands over against that of Hedonism. In Kant’s ethics we have the “final and most explicit expression of a view of the moral life which, in some form or other, has held the balance with Hedonism through the whole history of ethical philosophy.” We find that nominalism and realism have been constantly engaged in a hopeless battle. In this battle “mere particulars, unrelated and unorganized, are set against the abstract universal which determines nothing because it does not determine itself: or attempts are made on each side by compromise to heal the connatural wound of an abstract theory without admitting the claims of the opposite principle.” With Kant we have reached the final stage of that struggle. And with him the seemingly hopeless battle is apparently going to end in peace.

**The Metaphysics Of Morals**

What are the terms of this peace? To answer this question let us first ask how Kant established peace between the formal and the material elements in the field of knowledge. He did this by starting from the fact of knowledge and by looking for the conditions which make this fact possible. But this way is not open for Kant in the field of morality. Morality is that which ought to be, not that which is. Therefore Kant cannot start with the actual “achievement of men as moral beings, but only with the principle which is the motive and criterion of such achievement … ” Kant cannot start “with the fact of man’s existence as a moral being, but with the ‘quasi-factum’ of the moral law.”

Accordingly, Kant starts his discussion of ethics with the examination of the concept of duty. “The moral law, instead of being itself deduced as a principle necessary to the possibility of an experience actually given, ‘becomes itself the principle for the deduction of the existence of inscrutable faculty’—that of freedom.”

It is by his analysis of duty in this fashion that Kant hopes to reach the “adamantine basis of the moral consciousness.” For when the will of man acts for no regard of
consequences and from no inclination, then he acts solely from a sense of duty. We can reason back from the idea of duty to that of the will because the will is the only source from which duty as a law could spring. It is therefore the idea of moral self-determination that is basic to all. “Moral action is reason willing reason, reason acting on a motive derived entirely from itself, as opposed to action on a motive of passion, which as such necessarily comes to it from without.”

So far we seem to have no overtures of peace between the formal and the material claims made in the interest of the true moral life. We seem to have merely a repetition of the claims of pure a priorism. “Reason, willing reason, is reason making its own form its sole interest, irrespective of everything else.”

**The Critique Of Practical Reason**

The argument of the first chapter of *The Metaphysics of Morals* is repeated in the opening chapters of *The Critique of Practical Reason*. In these chapters Kant speaks of three theorems in relation to the principles of practical reason. The first theorem is that no empirical object can have a proper influence on the will if this will is to act from a truly ethical motive. Involved in the first theorem is the second, namely, that all material practical principles are reducible to self-love. If a man acts on the basis of them he does not act from the sense of duty and does not act ethically. The third theorem is again involved in the first two. Since the true ethical act cannot proceed in relation to an object and in relation to any merely material principle, “we have nothing left but the mere form of the will, as the will of a rational being in which reason enacts or wills itself as reason.” So we are still left without any overtures of peace between purely formal and purely material ethical theories. If there is to be truly ethical action, the will must follow such maxims as are “fitted to be elements in a universal legislation.” Thus the moral consciousness is identified with the “consciousness of the form of law as the motive of action.” On Kant’s view “the self can will itself as universal, and this, as against all particular desires, will constitute its determination of itself.”

It was Hegel who spoke of this position of Kant as pure formalism. “Until some particular line of action has been suggested with which we are to be consistent, we cannot say what self-consistency means. The abstract universal is barren: it does not differentiate itself. If it be true that in the sphere of theory the formal laws of identity and contradiction are merely negative criteria of truth, how can they acquire a different character in the sphere of practice?”

But Hegel forgets that for Kant the idea of law is interwoven with that of self-consciousness. With Kant reason is self-consciousness. Self-consistency is therefore “consistency with the self.” Now the self is that which, in Kant’s case, has refused to identify itself with an object. Its action has reduced objectivity to that which obtains in the realm of phenomena alone. Objects are objects as existing for the self. Surely this self which reduces objects to objects for itself can and must be the ultimate source of its own action. In the phenomenal world the self cannot find itself realized. “But, if we cannot find it realized, can we not ourselves realize it?” Objectively we cannot. But subjectively we may “set before us our aim to bring the world into accordance with the pattern of self-consciousness …” And this ideal world is that in accordance with which we act. We create for ourselves the “world as it should be, i.e., a world which has with itself the
perfect unity of self-consciousness, and in realizing which, therefore, the self-conscious being would simply be realizing himself.” Of course the realization of a world in accordance with the unity of the moral self can never be accomplished. Nevertheless the idea of such a world must be the pattern in terms of which the moral self acts in relation to the facts of the phenomenal world. And the world of nature can only represent that ideal world.

“From this point of view,” says Caird, “we are prepared to disentangle the truth from the error in Kant’s ethical conceptions.”

We must first appreciate, he says, the antagonism Kant finds between “spirit and nature in the moral life.” But every antagonism that is made absolute loses its meaning. Kant’s formalism must be supplemented with a truth to which he has opposed it. And this can be done only if we recall again that the real argument of Kant’s work is the method by which he works toward and into concrete reality. “The strong point in The Critique of Pure Reason was the proof of the relativity of object to subject; its weak point, its regarding self-consciousness as only negatively related to the consciousness of the object, and therefore as only making us set up an unattainable ideal for it, but not furnishing a positive principle for its interpretation. In like manner, the strong point of The Critique of Practical Reason is its view of the ego as expressing itself in the determination of the self as object, and through it of the objective world generally; its weakness is its conception of this determination as negative rather than positive, and hence as incapable of realizing the goal which it sets before itself. To see the defects of Kant’s theory, therefore, as in the case of The Critique of Pure Reason, we have to follow him to the point where he stops, and to show how inevitable it is that those who adopt his principles should advance beyond his results.” If we interpret Kant in this fashion, argues Caird, then we have attained to the peace between the formal and the material principles of ethics for which we were looking.

It is in terms of such a concrete combination of form and matter in ethics that the whole significance of the warfare between flesh and spirit is to be understood. Kant’s ethics “has the congenital fault of all merely negative systems.” But in spite of this his basic motive was not the denial of all relation between the universal of the pure moral self-consciousness with the particulars of the phenomenal world but the subordination of the latter to the former. And this subordination of the world of sense to that of the spirit is expressed in his idea of the kingdom of ends. Of course, even this kingdom of ends may be set and is set over against nature by Kant. But again, if we think of the fact that his ultimate motive back of everything was the overcoming of all absolute antitheses by means of their combination in a concrete whole, then we see that the flesh and the spirit need not be set over against one another in absolute fashion. We therefore point out that “though the consciousness of self as active is distinguished from, or opposed to, the consciousness of its determination by particular desires, it implies that consciousness.” The antagonism of desire and duty can only be understood in relation to a unity which is presupposed in that antagonism.

Self-consciousness “must be conceived as a principle of self-determination, i.e., as in itself synthetic, if it is to have any content at all, if it is to give rise to any idea that can determine action; and when it is so conceived, it carries us beyond the opposition of the formal a priori principle to the empirical matter in which it is realized. In this respect Kant himself has supplied us with all the ideas needed for his own correction.”
The Idea Of Freedom

Caird now takes up more particularly the critical question of Kant’s view of human freedom. This idea is basic to the whole ethical question. In a way the question of freedom has already been discussed. For the very idea of duty, as noted, presupposes that of freedom. But we now ask more particularly how man can consider himself at the same time an object in the realm of nature and a member of the kingdom of ends. How can necessity and freedom coexist in the same subject?

To begin with, it must be noted that as the outcome of the first Critique we have learned that even the law of external necessity which marks the realm of nature “cannot be taken as an absolute law, as an ultimate determination, even of the objects to which it is applied.” Then too, as the first Critique also teaches us, the conscious self “cannot be taken as merely one object among others, just because in it there is realized a principle which qualifies the existence of all objects. They are determined as bound to each other by a law of external necessity only for a self, and therefore a self cannot be determined as bound to them by that law.” In this way we seem to have lifted the self out of all absorption by the sphere of necessity. But there is the difficulty that “the self appears also as one of the objects of experience.” Kant seems therefore obliged “to apply to it all the principles which he applies to other objects.” And therewith the freedom of the self seems to disappear. But here the idea of the practical consciousness jumps to our aid. It is not, like the theoretical consciousness, from the beginning concerned with objects. The practical consciousness regards itself from the outset as a subject. “In it the ‘I,’ for which other objects are, is regarded as itself the source of the determination which it gives to itself as an object.” The very idea of action by the self presupposes awareness of that action as springing exclusively from itself. “For, only that action can be regarded as the action of a self which it attributes to itself, i.e., the action in which it is conscious of being determined by itself, and free from determination from without.”

Here then is the basic idea of ethical freedom. It is the idea of complete autonomy. Here we have also at the same time a fuller insight into the relation between freedom and moral law. “For the moral law is a law which is bound up with the consciousness of the self as a subject, in such a way that obedience to it is equivalent to making the self as subject our end.”

Kant knows that the relation between the free self and the passion to which it yields because of its relation to the world of nature is mysterious. But he is certain that we are as free selves never “fatally determined by passion,” because we “always make it our motive by free choice.”

In his whole discussion of freedom as in his discussion of moral law, Kant is, says Caird, too formalistic. But in the case of freedom as in that of law, Kant enables us to correct his view by means of his own principles. If only we realize that freedom and passion cannot be set in absolute antagonism against each other, but that they presuppose a higher unity, then all is well. This is Caird’s contention. And this is essentially the idealist development and “correction” of Kant’s ethics. We shall return to this point later. For the moment it may suffice to have noted the idea of freedom as that which indicates absolute self-sufficiency. As such it virtually ascribes to man the place that Christianity ascribes to God.
Moral Feeling

What Kant says about freedom and law must be supplemented with what he says about the moral feeling. Since the law arises out of our own moral nature, man stands in awe of it. We impose law upon ourselves as self-conscious rational beings. “Reverence for such a law throws us down in order to raise us up: if it makes ‘our mortal nature tremble like a guilty thing surprised’ before the awful legislation of reason, it enables us at the same time to feel that our mortal nature is not our inmost self.” Our attitude to this law is therefore neither that of pleasure or of pain, but of reverence. “We might best describe it as a positive feeling reached through negation; for the moral law, while it makes us abstract from our own nature as sensuous beings—as particular objects like other particular objects in the world we know—at the same time makes us feel that we can determine ourselves by our universal nature as rational subjects.”

Reverence is primarily reverence for law. But it is also reverence for persons as are believed to have realized the law in themselves. But can we find anyone in this world who has thus realized the law in himself? The answer is in the negative. Even “the Holy One of the Gospels” cannot be said to have embodied the law perfectly. Did he not say: “Why callest thou me good?” No one can therefore be an example to us. “The ultimate appeal is always to the law within, and it is through conformity to it alone that any person can claim our respect. Hence, it is the sole determinant of the end for which we should act.”

At this point Kant introduces what is, in recent thinking, constantly spoken of as the notion of paradox. The object of our reverence must be wholly beyond anything that can be empirically perceived. If this object were now or ever has been empirically observable, it could not be an object of reverence. For then it would be an object among other objects. On the other hand, the object of our reverence must be wholly one with us. If this were not so it would have no relation to us at all. Kant expresses both these ideas. Caird says: “Reverence at once repels us from, and identifies us with, that towards which it is felt.” Accordingly, Kant’s idea of reverence must be said to be a “positive feeling reached through negation …”

At this point, as at earlier points, Caird criticizes Kant’s notion of reverence by correcting him in terms of his own principles. According to Kant’s basic principles, argues Caird, nothing can have any significance for man unless it stands in relation to his self-consciousness. And if this principle is applied properly, he continues, there can be no such sharp dualism between reverence and inclination, as Kant makes. For inclination is inclination of the self and is transformed by the self. If this point be kept in mind, argues Caird, we shall have the more concrete approach that has come forth in thinkers after Kant who applied the principles of Kant more consistently than Kant did himself.

At a later point we shall concern ourselves with this type of criticism. We shall in particular have to consider whether the Kantian idea of reverence can be supplemented or superseded by the Christian idea of love. So much is clear, namely, that the kind of love that would be consonant with the Kantian notion of reverence would have to be indiscriminate love. It would have to be universal love. That is to say, it would have to be the sort of love that thinks of the inherent goodness of every human being. On Kant’s basis every human being must be treated as a person and not as a thing. And this means
for him that there is absolute moral worth in every human being. Whatever the empirical,
manifestation of his life, underneath it all, in the realm beyond the power of human
observation, and often contrary to what that observation seems to indicate, is the free
moral self. And that free moral self is always an object of reverence.

What then of Kant’s principle of radical evil? To this question we shall also return.

The Summum Bonum

One major point remains to be considered. It is the question how Kant attempts to get
beyond his ethical dualism. In all that he says about the free moral person, he has laid
constant emphasis upon its self-sufficiency over against the phenomenal world. The pure
practical reason acts exclusively in terms of itself and therefore regardless of
consequences. In particular it must never be induced to do the right and avoid the wrong
because of the inducements of reward or punishment. Such inducements, together with
the idea of love and of inclination, belong to the realm of empirical objects. If man is in
any wise and to any extent influenced by them, he no longer does the right for the sake of
the right. Then he has no reverence for the law and therefore no reverence for the self
back of the law.

Even so this dualistic relation between the moral and the natural world must
eventually be overcome. Kant’s principle of continuity requires that there be somehow a
higher unity between them. Without such a higher unity the determination of the self in
terms of perfect freedom would have no content. Therefore “freedom, which was in the
first instance defined by Kant merely as the negation of the necessity of nature, has to be
represented by him, not merely as blank self-determination but as self-determination
which determines also the necessity of nature. Otherwise, the negation of the necessity of
nature would directly carry with itself the negation of a freedom which was defined only
in opposition to it.”

Caird recognizes the fact that speaking thus he has really introduced the later notion
of the dialectical relation between the two worlds of Kant. He says that Kant was really
governed by this dialectical principle even though he set it forth with reluctance. Kant’s
basic commitment is to the moral law “as a merely formal requirement of universality
(springing out of the judgment of self-identity, the ‘I am I’ by which the self determines
itself as one with itself in opposition to all that is objective) … ” But he is driven at last to
“give synthetic meaning to the merely formal principle in reference to that very nature to
which it, as a law of freedom was opposed.” When he is thus driven on by means of his
final principle of continuity to unite the world of nature and that of freedom, he
introduces the notion of the *summum bonum*. Therefore perfect goodness which must in
the first place stand on its own feet in terms of itself must be conjoined with perfect
happiness.

When Kant connects virtue with happiness he naturally asks first: What is the nature
of the connection between them? In reply, he first says that they must not be identified.
For have we not set the good will sharply over against the idea of rewards? The union
between virtue and happiness must therefore be higher unity, but a unity in which the
distinctiveness of each of the items unified is maintained. In particular the inherent self-
sufficiency of the good will must not, after all, be swallowed up by the idea that it is
ultimately identical with happiness. Kant also asks, what then are the conditions on which
the combination between the good for the sake of the good and the idea of happiness is to be effected? Have we not seen that there cannot be in the empirical world any complete embodiment of the absolute goodness? True, but the appeal is made to a higher principle of unity. And this higher principle is already implicit in the notion of the good will itself. For surely the will cannot be required by law to do that which it cannot do. The moral imperative “implies the possibility of perfectly realising virtue.” And if this should then point us to a wholly other world of which man has no knowledge at all, then we must introduce the notion of a “progress ad infinitum in which a continual approximation is made to the conformity of our sensuous nature with the moral law.” It is only from the divine point of view that we can suppose that there is a final summing up of this infinite series.

And precisely here appears the necessity for introducing the idea of God. In the first Critique it has been shown, according to Kant, that man can know nothing of God. Every form of natural theology was rejected in the first Critique. Even so it was shown, even in the first Critique that the idea of God was possible and even necessary as a limit to the infinite series of man’s process of intellectual interpretation and action. And now that we have insisted over and over on the absolute antithetic between the two worlds so far as knowledge is concerned and have made our appeal for a union between them wholly in terms of ethical necessity, we can bring God back into the picture. Now that we have shown that there cannot possibly be an embodiment of the absolute in history, we can show that history without the ideal of an absolute is without meaning. The moral strivings of man cannot be seen to be complete without such an ideal. There cannot be in the empirical realm, as noted, not even in the Holy One of Scripture, an actual embodiment of the absolute good. It is all the more necessary that we have the notion of the absolute good as rewarded by absolute happiness before us as an ideal. The absolute good is, we must assume, present in the will of every man as a person. But man is also a sensuous being. Because of this, he cannot fully express his good will that lies hidden within him, without the sensuous world. To be sure, the good will is not, in the last analysis, controlled by his sensuous nature. If it were, he would not be truly free. And only the truly free man can be the wholly good man. Therefore, when man does evil he does it from his own free will. It is precisely because this is true that evil is radical. Even so, the radical evil is never ultimate. The free will is first of all the good will. Even the evil which proceeds from this free will is not something in the nature of fate. The free man has always within him the powers that will remedy evil. But he cannot remedy the situation so as to express it fully in the world of the sensuous. If he could, he would himself be an embodiment of true freedom in the world of necessity. And this even the Holy One of Scripture could not be. So the moral will needs the ideal of the identification of virtue with happiness in a world wholly beyond the present world. And it needs the idea of God as the one in whom the infinite process has been summed up.

And the god that is thus required to exist by the moral life must be one who, by his will, “is the cause or author of nature.” Thus the postulate of the moral experience involves the idea of the “highest original Good.”

Of course the existence of God cannot by this method, “be made the basis of our obligation to obey the moral law … ” Christianity, argues Kant, does not make the knowledge of God the ground of the law “or place the motive to fulfill that law in any consequences attached by the divine Being to obedience. On the contrary, it maintains the
idea of duty as the only true motive of action, and also the ground of our belief in God. Now this gives us the true idea of Religion; for Religion is not obedience to a will that is foreign and alien to our own, in view of certain sanctions which that will has attached to its arbitrary decrees: it is a consciousness of our own will as one with the will of God, and hence as directed to an end which not only may, but must, be capable of realization.”

“We have, then, three postulates of practical reason which are closely related to the three Ideas of theoretical reason.” We have first the idea of the self. We have found it to be totally above nature and therefore free. As such the self exists permanently. The moral life is a process that must go on forever. The self is immortal. Then secondly, we now find this moral self thinking of the world as an appearance of itself. At first negatively related to the world, the free self is now to be seen as in control of it. Yet not the will of man as such can thus subject the phenomenal world to itself. The finite self requires for its own intelligence of itself the idea of God. By means of God alone can the good man visualize to himself the perfect world which the good man is bound to imagine for himself. The moral will needs to postulate an all wise and all good and all powerful being. “We postulate God as that which we require him to be, just as we postulate freedom and immortality; so that ‘the righteous man may say: I will that there should be a God; I will that, though in this natural world, I should not be of it, but should also belong to a purely intelligible world; finally I will that my duration should be endless. I insist upon this, and will not let this conviction be taken from me.’ Yet this is not a case in which a mere subjective wish deludes us into the assumption of the existence of its object. It is the one case where the ‘I will that a thing shall be’ is equivalent to the assertion that ‘it is.’”

**Religion And Morality**

It is clear from all this that for Kant it is not religion that determines morality but that it is rather morality that determines religion. Caird says that Kant keeps God out of the moral life “… or brings him in, only as a Deus ex machina …” This, he adds, is due to Kant’s basic individualism. Kant starts with having human personality stand externally over against its environment. And then he brings in God mechanically to tie his two separated worlds together again. But rather than depend on this general statement of Kant’s view, Caird turns to Kant’s analysis of religion. In his work, *Religion within the Limits of Pure Reason Alone*, Kant considers the question as to how far the teachings of Christianity can be made to comport with his own basic convictions. Perhaps he may even be willing to make some concessions of his own at a proposed summit meeting between the claims of the independent moral man.

**Sin And The Radical Evil**

According to Christian doctrine the individual person finds himself coming into the world burdened with sin, inherent in his racial relation. But on Kant’s principle the individual cannot think of sin as something given, as something for which he has no responsibility and which he cannot change. The bias to evil that man finds in himself cannot be explained by either his sensuous or his rational nature. Evil action must therefore spring from a misuse of freedom by man himself. And this implies that the evil
act as well as the good act must be thought of as originating not in time but in an act of
the moral man as back of time. In fact no moral act can be thought of as originating under
conditions of time, for whatever is done in time, “must be referred to some other event
that precedes it as its cause.” But this is not to explain the origin of evil. We can have no
more knowledge of evil than we can have of anything noumenal. The biblical idea that
the first man was tempted to sin by an evil spirit only indicates the incomprehensibility of
the origin of evil. And when the Bible speaks of the sinfulness of later men as being
inherited from Adam, this too is nothing but “an expression of the truth that sin is due to
an act of freedom.” “In this case, the first in time simply does duty for that which is prior
to time itself.” When the Bible speaks of grace as removing evil within man, this too
must be referred to as an internal act of the will. Granted that the idea of help from
without were intelligible, it would remain true that we must “so to speak, open our wills
to receive” this aid, “by our own free action.” And if the Bible speaks of a new man that
replaces the old man within us we realize that this can be nothing absolute. At most there
may be improvement of character.

The Struggle Between Good And Evil In Man

Evil is due to the perverted maxim of the will in man himself. The removal of evil can
come only from within. Yet though the principle by which the evil must be overcome is
within us we can represent it as being the son of God coming down to us. This son of
God then stands for the idea of humanity “in its complete moral perfection.” And we may
say that as many as receive the son of God, this son of God gave power to become the
sons of God. But we must remember that it is by a “practical belief in this Son of God,
that man can hope to be pleasing to God.” For no example of perfect goodness, as has
been earlier noted, can be of any help to us, unless it served merely to awaken within us
“a consciousness of the ideal of our own nature.”

If we only keep in mind that our belief in the Son of God is practical, and not
theoretical, we may even speak of him as our substitute and “of God as imputing his
merit to us and seeing us in him.” We can never have in our empirical existence
“objective proof of our inward conformity to the divine law.” Yet so far as “we are
conscious of continued purity of will, we may rise, in the sense of our unity with the
ideal, to a foretaste of the joy which we cannot but associate with an unalterable will for
the Good.” And this unity we may fitly present to ourselves “as an eternal bliss of
heaven, secured to us through unity with our divinely human Lord, while its opposite
sorrow will appear to us as an endless Hell, through identification with the spirit of evil.”
Thus though the whole change from evil to good in man is an internal action, we may
speak of this change as indicating a morally different man. The ideal heavenly judge
would evaluate it so.

Here then is Kant’s “Deduction of Justification.” In it he obliterates, says Caird, “all
ideas of external substitution and transference.” “In this way all the dogmas of
Christianity may be interpreted as an expression of the moral revolution whereby the bias
of man to evil is overthrown; and, if so, it is well for us to continue to pay reverence to
the outward vesture, that has served to bring into general acceptance a doctrine which
really rests upon an authority within the soul of every man, and which, therefore, needs
no miracle to commend it to mankind!”
We must always remember that in the “phenomenal appearance of the God-man, it is not that which falls under the senses, or can be known by experience, but the ideal of our own reason (which we see exemplified or embodied in it), that is, properly speaking, the object of saving faith. And so far as this is the case, faith in the God-man is one with the principle of a good life.”

If we do not remember this, we should be reduced to saying “that God has mercy on whom he will, and whom he will, he hardeneth: a text which, taken literally, is the \textit{salto mortale} of human reason.”

Sacred history “must be interpreted as having its sole value in an exhibition of God-pleasing Humanity, and not as an account of historical facts, which a man may or may not believe without its making his moral state better or worse.” We are interested in God only because of “what he is for us as moral beings.” We may therefore speak of him as a threefold personality. We may speak of creation, redemption and election. But in all that we say about God and his work we are concerned with the moral relations of our own being. The means of grace are to be regarded as ways “in which we may work upon ourselves by means of the Idea of God—an Idea which, when it springs out of our moral consciousness, has not little power to quicken and confirm it. But we must always remember that the right way is not from divine grace to virtue, but from virtue to divine grace.”

\textbf{Caird’s Evaluation}

At the conclusion of his whole work on Kant, Caird gives us his evaluation of Kant’s conception of the relation of Christianity to natural religion. Kant’s philosophy had, says Caird, led him to a certain view on religion. When he compared his own view of religion with Christianity he was testing his own convictions.

Kant had taken his stand on the moral consciousness as a consciousness of a universal law of reason. This led him to an isolation of the moral self from its historical and social environment. “In the inmost secret of their being, moral persons are atomic individuals who resist all fusion, and even, beyond a definite limit, repel all approximation; and the principle which unites them and keeps them united must therefore be not within, but without them.” On such a basis, Caird says, religion could come in only as a sort of supplement to morality. It would seem then, according to Caird, that “any appropriation by Kant of the formulae of Christian doctrine must be a mere Procrustean attempt to force a moral Individualism into the language of a creed which is nothing if not social, or even socialistic.” Yet there is one point at which the Kantian and the Christian view of things seem to harmonize. Both the Kantian and the Christian doctrine of evil and its removal takes place in an act beyond the empirical realm. For Kant the homo-phenomenon may be said to be neither saved nor lost. The homo-phenomenon “neither falls nor is redeemed, by his own act, but only by the acts of the homo-noumenon. And the whole language of Christian theology as to imputed guilt and imputed righteousness, can be accepted as the Vorstellung, the natural symbol for the truth.”

In fact, says Caird, Kant cannot help but express himself in language similar to that of Christianity. “We must speak of that as an event or a series of events in time, which is really a timeless act, because otherwise we could not speak of it at all; and we must speak
of it as done for us by another—by a man who has realised the ideal of Humanity—in order to distinguish it from particular empirical acts.”

Kant’s critical philosophy can, says Caird, perform a very fine service, if it will “prevent us from transferring the necessary imperfections belonging to the symbolic form, in which alone we can express the truth, to the truth expressed.” And finally, suggests Caird, Kant helps us to overcome his own abstractions. He always does. His formalism requires him to think of the moral will as exclusively related to and expressed in obedience to law apart from all temporal and sensuous relations. He starts out by relating the consciousness of the moral self sharply over against the consciousness of objects. Such a view is like that of the Stoics. And on such a view the origin of evil is utterly inexplicable. Why should there then be any passions in man at all? We should then have to attribute the origination of evil to a devilish desire for evil. And the turning to good from evil would be as inexplicable as the turning from good to evil. But Kant takes man to be both rational and sensuous from the beginning. And this prepares the way for a higher unity between these seemingly hostile aspects of human experience. Man recognizes his tendency to yield to his impulse as his own tendency as well as he recognizes the law that he seeks to obey as his own law. And thus unity is effected between the lower and the higher in man.

**Evaluation Of Kant’s Ethical Principles**

In the preceding section it has from time to time been suggested that Kant’s ethical views cannot possibly be brought into accord with the ethic of Christianity. This must now be more systematically developed. Even so we can deal only with the main concepts of Kant’s ethics. These concepts are those of the ethical self, the categorical imperative and God. We shall take these in the order mentioned.

**The Ethical Self**

In the preceding chapter we heard Kroner speak of the ethics of Socrates as exhibiting a tendency toward inwardness. We shall take our start from this point. In Kant the ethical inwardness Kroner speaks of finds its first major modern expression. This inwardness, Kroner feels, is a great step forward toward the harmonization of speculation and revelation. When he dealt with Greek speculation, Kroner pointed out that its principle was monistic. As such it could stand in no other relation to revelation than by that of complete opposition. At the same time Kroner contended that the principle of revelation was already operative in Greek speculation. But it was operative, he argued, only under the surface of speculation. Even revelation made its influence felt upon speculation. It did this in that speculation became aware to some extent of the limits of its capacity. And Socrates was aware of this limitation more than were others. Therefore he did not, as did his successor Plato, work out a metaphysics. Socrates remained sceptical of the possibility of high flights into the unknown. He therefore had more respect for intuition than did others. He felt that man must do good regardless of whether or not he had speculative knowledge of God. Socrates’ thought may, accordingly, be said to reveal a tendency toward the idea of the primacy of the ethical. And this primacy of the ethical finds its first open advocate in Kant.
With great profundity of learning Kant limited reason so as to make room for faith. In the last section of his first *Critique* he indicates that even speculation is not adequate to the needs of its own program unless it introduces the notion of God. But this notion is not, and must never be, the notion of God obtained by natural theology. If we speak of God after the fashion of natural theology we do not have the primacy of the ethical. In that case we are basing even our ethical assertions upon speculation. Then we are somehow seeking the human self, the moral law and God as its author among the objects of the empirical world. And that means that the self is not free, the law has no imperative authority and God is in need of something more ultimate than himself. In short, with natural theology we have not escaped the field of relativity. If we are to have any explanation of our sense of ourselves as subjects rather than as objects, of the imperative nature of the moral law, and of God as absolute, we have to get above the relativities of the empirical realm. If we are to have any assurance of the actual union of happiness with virtue, it must be in terms of God who is above rather than the product of speculation. In short, we need to subordinate our speculation to revelation. But then this revelation must not itself come to us in the guise of speculation. That is, revelation must not come to us in the form of direct identification with the facts of the empirical world. In the empirical realm there can be no direct manifestation of the absolute in any form. If revelation came to us in the form of speculation and in that form sought to press its claim upon us, we should, as free ethical subjects, have to reject it. We should have to reject it in the interest even of the true claims of revelation. The true claims of revelation cannot be heard if at any point they are directly identified with empirical objects. The empirical realm must be seen to be the phenomenal realm. It must at every point be subjected to the noumenal realm. And this cannot be done unless the moral self is seen to be an absolutely free and autonomous self, unless the moral law be seen to be the law of this moral self spoken to itself, and unless God be such a God as the moral self requires for the victory of goodness over evil.

**The Self-Sufficiency Of The Ethical Self**

For Kant, everything depends then on the true inwardness of the ethical self. That is to say that to all intents and purposes the self must be sufficient to itself. It is this that is expressed in the idea of freedom. What is the meaning of this idea of freedom? Commentators constantly point out that freedom means for Kant first of all freedom from involvement in the necessity of the world of nature. And then they often add that while freedom thus conceived is only a negative idea, Kant was really after something positive. He wanted ethical ideals to prevail ultimately over the necessities of nature. For that reason he thought of the free man as constructing for himself freely, that is, in terms of the pure practical reason, a universe in which the good would be fully rewarded for their goodness. And while he could find no indication in the world of phenomena of a tendency toward the victory of good over evil, he postulated his God as one through whom the good would become victorious in the world. In terms of such a God the good man would have the courage to go on with his struggle toward the ideal of absolute goodness. The moral life is inherently an infinite process. But without the notion of a God in whom, as it were, there is a summation or climax of this process, the strife would seem to be hopeless.
Many commentators find Kant not fully true to his own position. Some find him defective because of his negativism and formalism. But few find him basically mistaken in his interpretation of the moral self as free and autonomous. Kroner says: “Kant’s ethical principle is in accordance with the gospel which emphasizes throughout that not the effect of our doings, but only the purity of our heart matters in the sight of God.” He adds: “Morality alone makes the person a person, the self a self. Kant breaks resolutely with the pre-Christian notion of man as substance, a notion which Christian thinkers still held. Man is, a subject because he is will; he is a person precisely because he is able to obey the moral law. Even Descartes and Leibniz had still clung to the Greek notion of man and his world. Only Kant made a sharp cleavage between the world and the self, and thereby recognized that similarity between man and God spoken of in the Bible.”

Our own criticism of Kant’s view of the moral self may well be set over against that of Kroner. Kroner’s view of revelation has, in the first place, been constructed after the pattern of Kant’s philosophical principles. Kroner asserts that Greek speculation was monistic. Kant’s view of man is not basically different from that of the Greeks. Both hold to what Dooyeweerd calls an immanentist view of man. When Kant limits knowledge so as to make room for faith, he is merely recognizing the fact that man cannot exhaustively conceptualize all being. His ideal of knowledge is as rationalist as that of the most outspoken of rationalists. He, no less than Parmenides or Spinoza, holds that ideally man should be able to think of knowledge and reality as being coeternal.

Kant differs from his “dogmatic” predecessors only in the fact that lie, more than they, was aware of the basic antinomy involved in this assumption. Kant sensed clearly that if man, the thinker, would think clearly and to the end, he would himself be swallowed up in pure thought. He sensed also that if Pure Thought were to refer to the individual thinkers it would have to think what is unthinkable on its basis. So Kant tried to make the most of a bad situation. He did this by thinking of abstract thought and contingent being as correlative to one another. Apostate thinking must somehow combine abstract rationalism with equally abstract irrationalism.

The rationalism of apostate thought assumes that only such being can be known by man as can be conceptually described by himself. This means that individuation must be by complete or exhaustive conceptual description. All reality, the changeable as well as the unchangeable, time as well as eternity, must be penetrable by the logical manipulation of man. All apostate thought is therefore determinist and monistic. It cannot allow that God is the creator of man. It cannot allow that God’s thoughts are higher than man’s thoughts. It cannot allow for revelation. It assumes that God and man are of a piece with one another. If God is said to be higher than man it remains true that man is inherently divine. Man participates in God. Man is potentially divine. Man must realize himself by absorption in God.

Correlative to this rationalism of apostate thought there is an equally ultimate irrationalism. Man knows that he cannot conceptually penetrate all reality. When Parmenides claimed to be able to do so he was compelled to deny the reality of time and change. On his view nothing new could be added to what already existed. All existence was eternal, changeless existence. But Plato and Aristotle, not to mention others, realized that change could not be denied. What were they to do with it? On their basic apostate assumption they could not allow that God’s plan was back of it. So they had to think of it as pure contingency, as non-being or potential being. In their view man is the individual
thinker rather than a bit of thought just because he is, and to the extent that he is involved in pure contingency. How then can the individual thinker think himself? He cannot. If he thinks, he is not the individual that thinks. If he is an individual, he does not think.

And how then shall the individual thinker use the laws of thought? If he thinks these laws, then it is not he that is thinking them. He cannot identify himself. He cannot intelligently say I am. For when he is, or exists as an individual, then he does not think, and when he thinks, it is not he that is thinking. In vain did Descartes seek a solid footing for human knowledge by means of his famous *cogito*. For if he thought, it was not he that was thinking. And if he then thought of God, then both he and God would be absorbed by thought thinking itself. And thought thinking itself (Aristotle) would be abstract thought, not thinking.

And involved in the loss of the principle of identity is the loss of the principle of contradiction. No concept can have any relation to anything, unless thingness be identified with thought. And even if this identification were assumed, there would be no differences, no individual thoughts or things within thought. All thought would be one thought. And thought without a thinker is empty.

Many thinkers before Kant sensed the dilemma of this position, but none of them would give up the futile effort of seeking to catch things, changing things, things floating in a boundless and bottomless cauldron of chance, by means of unadjustable static, or abstract thought, in which, if they were caught, they were also lost.

Kant’s Copernican revolution involved the idea that he gave up trying to rationalize the irrational in the way that all his predecessors had attempted to do this. Norman Kemp Smith tells us that Kant was the first to take time seriously. That is to say, he openly disclaimed the possibility of the direct identification of rationality with changing factuality. Any such direct effort Kant spoke of as dogmatic thought. And dogmatic thought, whether of the rationalist or of the empiricist school, he argued, always runs into the same blind alley. It never can make contact between abstract thought and abstract brute fact. Therefore no form of dogmatic thinking can account for scientific knowledge. And no form of dogmatic thought can account for the significance of moral and spiritual reality as it is based on human freedom and autonomy. On the dogmatic view man would actually have to be in possession of exhaustive knowledge to be able to say that he knew anything. And how can man know the changing realities of space and time by means of exhaustive conceptualization? Again, if man knew everything, then on the dogmatic view, he himself as an individual would be swallowed up in the network of his conceptual relations. He would no longer be free.

What then was the answer? How was science to be saved? And how was freedom, and with it morality, to be saved? Kant discovered the answer to both questions at once. In fact the two questions involve one another and require a single answer. The answer for Kant lies in the idea of the utter self-sufficiency or freedom of human personality. Science is to be saved by assuming that man’s free theoretical thought is the source of the order found in it. Morality is to be saved by assuming that man’s free moral personality is virtually the source of the moral law. And by making the ultimately free or autonomous human personality the source of both the order of nature and of morality, both were to be united in one whole.

It is thus that Kant hopes to attain what none of the rationalists or determinists had ever been able to attain, namely, the subsumption of all reality, temporal and eternal,
under one principle of unification. He obtained indirectly that which dogmatic thinking had sought to obtain directly. He found a principle of unification that overarched both God the creator and man the creature. He assumed that this formal all-inclusive principle of unity was a presupposition, or precondition of the possibility of any experience. Denying the innateness of ideas in the way that Descartes and others had maintained it, Kant argued that no one can speak of anything without doing so on the presupposition of the formal principle of unity that he presented. The very laws of thought had to work in subjection to this principle of unification. If God or man were to say I am, they must do so subject to the formal principle of unity that envelops both. If the law of contradiction is to be employed by either God or man it must be done subject to this principle of unity. Identification and differentiation alike must be subject to the one all comprehending principle of unity.

But this all comprehending principle of unity is what it is and operates the way it operates precisely because it is correlative to the idea of pure contingency. For dogmatic thinkers the idea or fact of contingency had been that which had terrified them. To them it was the bottomless quagmire over which and on which no logical bridges could be built. Logic worked with static concepts, and contingent factuality was like the water of a bottomless and shoreless ocean. Thus the principle of continuity and the principle of discontinuity could never be brought into fruitful relation with one another. How are synthetic judgments \textit{a priori} possible? Dogmaticism had no answer. But Kant did. He made the amazing discovery that contingency is a help rather than a hindrance to the procedure of logic. But then logic must itself be made correlative to contingency. The scientists must be required to give up their hopeless search for identification by direct and exhaustive description. The philosophers must be required to give up their aim of actually attaining the full coordination or identification of logic with reality. The theologians must be required to give up their claim that they can identify the presence of God at one point in history to the exclusion of others. Contingency must remain active at all times and everywhere. It is precisely the ever present activity of pure contingency that enables the principle of unity to operate and be effective. For then this principle itself becomes flexible.

It is the correlativeity of the purely formal principle of unity and pure contingency that, on Kant’s view, unifies science, philosophy and theology. This is true because the very possibility of any of them requires the actuality of all of them in terms of the idea of the free or spontaneous human personality. It is the free or autonomous human personality that furnishes the formal principle of order for the field of science. It is the free autonomous personality that furnishes the formal principle for the world of moral relationships. And it is the free or autonomous personality that projects the idea of God as the means by which both his ideal of knowledge and of morality are to be realized.

Finally, it is the correlativeity of the purely formal principle of unity and the idea of pure contingency as they operate in conjunction with one another on the presupposition of the free man that guarantees the primacy of the moral or religious ideals over those of science. The world of science may properly be spoken of as the world of necessity. The law of contradiction requires us to assert that man cannot be both free and determined. In consequence we may be required to set the world of freedom or morality over against that of science. And thus it may seem that we are seeking to escape the dilemma of dogmatic
thought by simply postulating the fact of man’s freedom as operating in the noumenal world. And of this noumenal world man can have no knowledge.

But this dualism between the noumenal and the phenomenal world is not final. On the contrary, this dualism or contrast is made within a unity that involves the primacy of the noumenal over the phenomenal. This unity requires the subjection of the world of necessity to that of freedom. There is no final necessity anywhere. To hold that there is would be to revert to dogmatism. There could be no necessity unless man had been able to signalize it by means of his exhaustive description of the relation of every fact to every other fact. But the order or regularity of the field of science, so far from killing human freedom, finds its source in this freedom.

To be sure, the fact that the order of nature has its source in human freedom does not mean that man can produce nature. Man must, to be sure, to an extent be receptive. The material of knowledge and the material of morality come to man from without. Kant insists on this point over against the rationalists. But even so the order of nature, and of morality, is due to the formalizing activity of man. And there is no intelligible factuality for man except such as he has himself ordered.

What all this amounts to is that the free man of Kant is to all intents and purposes the same as the ego of Fichte. Fichte says that the ego posits itself. Kant says virtually the same thing. And herewith he is only carrying forth the assumption of all apostate thought to its logical conclusion. In the final analysis there is only one alternative facing all men. They can either make God or they can make man the ultimate or final point of reference in predication. In Kant the free or would-be autonomous man, in the last analysis, takes the place which is ascribed to God in Christian theology. Kant was quite consistent with himself. He made science, philosophy and theology consistent with one another by having them all proceed from man as autonomous. Herein lies the inwardness of his ethical theory.

The Moral Law

Only a few words need now be added with respect to Kant’s view of the moral law. The basic point with respect to it has already been made. On the Christian view the moral law is the expression of the will of God as man’s Creator and Redeemer. By using it as his guide, man, the creature of God, can express his loving obedience to God. In other words, the true knowledge of the law and the desire to obey it is found only in those who have been redeemed through the atoning death of Jesus Christ. To be sure, the knowledge of God and of his will is increated. Every man knows God and his will. Rom 1.19, Rom. 2.14–15 But since his fall in Adam (Rom 5:12) every man has been active in warding off the requirements of God within and about him. Every man has done so and is doing so by taking the law out of the context of God’s living and loving self-communication of God with man. In paradise man’s knowledge of the will of God for him was a matter of total person-to-person confrontation. Man was not to live by the will or law of God as expressed in the facts of the universe and as expressed in his own constitution apart from verbal communication on the part of God with man. Man was to fulfill the mandate given him by God by loving obedience to God. Every fact round about man as well as his own constitution were lit up in terms of the principle of unity supplied by man’s creator.
When man fell into sin he sought to separate himself and all the world about him from his creator. He sought for a principle of unity that was higher than the creator-creature distinction. This he finally located in himself. And he sought for a principle of diversity or discontinuity independent of God by relieving all the facts of reality from God’s control. This principle finds expression in the idea of pure contingency. Kant combines the principle of continuity invented by apostate man with the principle of discontinuity also discovered by apostate man. He was not the first to do this. But he, more clearly than his predecessors, made the free or autonomous man the determiner of the nature of continuity and of discontinuity. Accordingly the idea of law is more clearly and outspokenly regarded by him than by earlier philosophers as really nothing more than a projection of man himself.

When Kant therefore speaks of the moral law as absolute, we must take this to mean that the autonomous man who projects it will allow no law-giver above himself. And when Kant speaks of reverence for the moral law he in the last analysis means reverence for man as the giver of the law. It is the religion of human personality as sufficient to itself that masquerades under the high sounding terms of reverence for law. When therefore Christian men say that Kant’s ethics can be supplemented by Christian ethics, they appear not to have seen the basic contrast that exists between the self-sufficient man of Kant and the self-sufficient God of Christianity. In particular, when men seek to add the idea of love to the “rigorism” of Kant’s ethics they do not seem to see that the idea of love is, by itself, as much of an abstraction as is the idea of duty as advocated by Kant. It is only if love be first of all the love that God has for himself as self-sufficiently holy, righteous and true, if it be secondly the love that God has shown to men in redeeming them through his Son from the wrath to come for the hatred that they as sinners have toward him, and if it be thirdly the love that men, by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit have for God and his Christ, that love is saved from being the love of man the sinner for himself. The ideas of love as well as the idea of law must first be interpreted in the context of creation-fall and redemption. If they are thus interpreted, they will stand over against Kant’s self-loving man who makes such laws as will promote his covenantbreaking effort in relation to God the Creator and to Christ the Redeemer. Kant has interpreted the idea of law in terms of his assumption of ultimate or free human personality. He has no room for the ideas of creation, the fall and redemption in his system of thought.

**God And The Summum Bonum**

What is true of Kant’s idea of the law is true also of his idea of God. The latter, no less than the former, is the projection of the autonomous man. Both are means by which the free personality is seeking to accomplish its great aim of realizing its own ideal of perfect control over nature and perfect happiness in this perfect control. Kant has not for a moment given up the rationalist ideal of perfect knowledge and perfect control of nature. He has merely given up the notion that this ideal can be fully realized at any specific time. Often enough Kant is interpreted as though he made a final break between his world of phenomena and his world of noumena. But, as Wilbur M. Urban points out: “for Kant the empirical cannot be separated from the speculative. The establishment of this fact constitutes his ‘deduction’ or validation of the speculative ideas which, he says,
‘will complete the critical work of pure reason.’” On Kant’s view even empirical research needs the ideal of complete unification as a limit. And this notion of complete unification is as a limit for Kant, something that is similar to the Good in Plato. Says Urban: “The axiological movement as a whole of which, as we have seen, Kant is in a sense the inspiration, consists in restoring the notion of the Good to the central position which it had in classical European philosophy.” Kant’s idea of the primacy of the practical reason places the Good as it is visualized by the free or autonomous man above God. In Kant’s view of things, no less than in Plato’s view of things, it is man’s ideal of the good that stands above God. In the Timaeus Plato used his god merely as an imaginary artificer who would do what man himself found he could not do, that is, realize the concept of the good as defined by man himself in a changing temporal world. In his Republic, Plato finds that when he considers the matter conceptually good and evil are equally ultimate principles. But then he postulates the supremacy of the good over evil. What Plato did in ancient times Kant does with greater self-conscious articulation. For him, as for Plato, the idea of God as actually knowing and controlling all things is a product of dogmatic thought. Man could not know such a God unless he were himself such a God. Therefore such a God is said to be unknowable. And dogmatism is castigated for having thought of itself as knowing such a God. But then Kant himself brings this same sort of God back into the picture by way of postulation. A God thus brought in is the product of man’s construction. As such he is not objectionable to Kant. As such he is even necessary for the realization of the free man’s ideals. It cannot be said that Kant has limited reason in order to make room for faith, if by faith is meant faith in the God and in the Christ of Christianity. We cannot agree with Kroner when he argues that Kant has limited speculation in order to make room for revelation. If Kant’s God is to be spoken of as revealing himself, then it must be added that he reveals only what the free man wants this God to reveal. He will never reveal to man that he is a sinner and needs to be saved through the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He will only reveal to man the idea that he is on the right road scientifically, philosophically and theologically. He will help the free man to hide from himself the fact that the dilemma of dogmatism is as little solved by Kant as it was by his predecessors. There is on Kant’s view no guarantee of any actual unity in science and philosophy any more than in theology. On his view contingency is ultimate. It is meaningless to speak of imposing the formalizing activity of the universal mind of man, itself a product of chance, on a bottomless and shoreless ocean of chance. The only possible foundation for science and philosophy as well as for theology is the presupposition that God as all-controlling and Christ as actually redeeming does actually exist and is actually known by man. But to hold this position requires us to give up the idea that man himself is the source of unity in human experience. In seeking such unity as only God can have, apostate man cuts himself loose from the possibility of having any unity in experience at all.

In an earlier chapter we heard Kroner speak of Socrates as working in the direction of ethical inwardness. That is to say, Kroner thought of Socrates as making room for revelation, even if unconsciously, because he opposed the type of speculation that Plato after him engaged in. And by his anti-speculative attitude, Socrates, according to Kroner, was working in the direction of the primacy of the ethical as it came to expression in Kant’s primacy of the practical reason.
But we have now seen what this Kantian principle of inwardness entails. It entails that the Christian idea of inwardness must be rejected. The Christian view of inwardness rests upon the fact that the triune God is inwardly sufficient to himself. He is in himself the full expression of the law of his being. He is the full expression of the law of love of himself as the highest, the only ultimate, the only self-sufficient one. He it is that has created man in his image. He it is that renews man, his image bearer, into a relation of obedient love to himself. Here and here only, is exhaustive person-to-person confrontation. Here the I-it dimension is not set over against the I-thou and the I-Thou dimensions. For here all rests upon the one who alone says I am. On this basis human personality has unity within itself. To be sure, on this basis human personality does not know itself in terms of itself. It does not say lam until it has heard God say I am about himself, and thou-art to man. On this basis man the creature and covenant keeper says with David, the man after God’s heart, O how love I thy law. And when he says this, he finds himself. Then he is free. For only in David’s Son are men made free. Kant’s free man cannot find himself. He is lost in the void. If he found himself he would, in finding himself, commit suicide. Yet he could not commit suicide. For all his effort Kant cannot escape the face of God. His effort of interpreting the free man in a vacuum cannot succeed. Man is always coram Deo as his creature. Kant cannot repress the claims of God upon man. Man is what he is as standing in covenant-relation to God. If he is not by the grace of God a covenant keeper, he is a covenant breaker. And as such he cannot escape the wrath of the Lamb. Kant therefore is not the philosopher of Protestantism. He is the philosopher who would destroy Protestantism.