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HOBBESIST AND HUMEAN ALTERNATIVES TO A RELIGIOUS MORALITY

KAI NIELSEN
University of Calgary and The Hastings Center

I

In his *Letter Concerning Toleration* John Locke remarked, "... those are not at all to be tolerated who deny the being of a God. Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist. The taking away of God, though but even in thought, dissolves all."[1] When we read this now, we feel the cultural distance between ourselves and the Seventeenth Century. Even such a progressive and reasonable thinker as Locke, is, in this respect, at a very great distance from us. There are in North America Neanderthal undercurrents, indeed at present very vocal and powerful undercurrents, which still think in this way, but among the intelligentsia, both religious and non-religious, such thinking is totally alien. David Gauthier commenting on this passage from Locke remarks:

> the supposition that moral conventions depend on religious belief has become alien to our way of thinking. Modern moral philosophers do not meet it with vigorous denials or refutations; usually they ignore it. If the dependence of moral conventions on religious belief was necessary for Locke, it is almost inconceivable to us.[2]

Is this just a shift in the *Weltgeist* or does it have rhyme or reason? Does the taking away of God or the thought of God – the sincere belief in His existence – dissolve all as Locke thought? If it does, that would indeed, to understate the matter, make belief in God very central to any acceptance of morality. But is there such a dissolution such that belief in God has such a central place?

Suppose we try to say that it is God's commanding or ordaining something that makes something good. Without His ordaining it, it is claimed, it could not correctly be said to be good. There is no goodness without the commandments of God. Indeed it is the very reality of its being commanded by God that constitutes its goodness.

However, this plainly could not be true, because even in a Godless world kindness still would be a good thing and the torturing of little children could still be

vile. Even if we do believe in God, we would still recognize, if we will reflect on the matter and if we have any moral understanding at all, that such acts, even if God does not exist, are wrong and that kindness and decency are good. Reflective people who believe in God and have an ordinary pre-theoretical understanding of morality will come to recognize, if the matter is put to them forcefully, that even if there were no God, torturing people just for the fun of it still would be intolerable. Moreover, the religious believer himself will appreciate, if he carefully reflects, that even if that in which he places his trust and on which he sets his heart, did not exist, keeping faith with his friends would still be a good thing and caring for his children would still be something that he ought to do.

So the goodness or badness, the moral appropriateness or inappropriateness of these acts cannot be constituted by their being commanded by God or ordained by God. Certain moral realities would remain just as intact in a Godless world as in a world with God.

To the old conundrum "Is something commanded by God because it is good or is it good because God commands it?", it should be responded that whatever way the religious moralist goes, here he is in trouble. On the one hand, that God commands something doesn't *ipso facto* make it good. We can come to appreciate this, if we examine reasonably closely our own considered convictions. If God, just like that, commands us to starve our children that doesn't, just because God so commanded it, make it morally tolerable, let alone good. On the other hand, if God commands something *because* it is good, then plainly its goodness stands in logical and moral independence of God.

Have I not missed, in arguing as I have, the perfectly evident consideration that if the God of Judeo-Christianity exists, then everything is dependent on Him: He created the world and everything in it. Moral realities, like everything else, are dependent on Him.

God, let us for the moment assume, did create the world, but He could not – logically could not – create moral values. Existence is one thing; value another. And it is no contravention of God's omnipotence to point out that He cannot do what is *logically* impossible. Moreover, to try to counter by asserting that nothing would be good or bad, right or wrong, if nothing existed, is not to deny that we can come to understand, without reference to God, that it is wrong to exploit people in underdeveloped countries and that religious tolerance is a good thing. The religious moralist has not shown that such exploitation would not be wrong and that such tolerance would not be good even if the atheist were right and God did not exist.

If the stance of the religious apologist is to be made out, he must give us some reasonable grounds for believing that in a world without God nothing could be good or bad or right or wrong. If there is no reason to believe that torturing little children would cease to be bad in a Godless world, we have no reason to believe that, in any important sense, morality is dependent on religion. But God or no God, religion or no religion, it is still wrong to inflict pain on helpless infants when inflicting pain on them is without any rational point. John Locke, whatever anxieties

he may have felt about Thomas Hobbes's anthropocentric viewpoint, is mistaken: the taking away of God does not dissolve all.[3]

II

I think the above is sufficient to block the refrain: 'Without God, no morality, everything is permitted.' Still – there always seems to be a 'still' – there are those who will think, or at least ambivalently worry, that, with my appeal to considered judgments (convictions), I have exhibited no rational foundation for morality and have, in effect, left a vacuum that theology can fill. Morality, if we resist that and go my roughly Humean way, must finally rest, some believe, on commitment and thus, or so the claim goes, there is no escaping a certain arbitrariness in morality and in the living of our lives.

I think such remarks about 'arbitrariness' are in certain respects thoroughly mistaken or, at the very least, misleading.[4] Still, even if we are willing to talk that way, we can and should respond: even if morality finally rests, in some sense yet to be specified, on commitment, still not all commitments need be arbitrary or without point or rationale. Moreover, this, if such a remark about the nature of morality is correct, is as unavoidable for the religious moralist as for the secular moralist. But, in addition, we should also recall, the secular moralist need not attach to his conception of morality and the moral life a cosmology of dubious coherence and he need not crucify his intellect with an obscurantist mythology.

There is, however, among secular moralists – indeed among secular humanists – a divide between those coming out of a more broadly speaking Humean tradition and those coming out of a broadly speaking Hobbesist tradition. The Humeans are acutely aware of the Wittgensteinian *aperçu*: 'Justification must come to an end or it wouldn't be justification', 'It is difficult to realize the extent of our groundless believing', 'At the foundation of well-founded belief lies belief that is not founded', 'Not everything we reasonably believe we believe for a reason'.[5] They believe – to say they see or they acknowledge would be to beg the question – that in an important way morality, secular as well as religious, rests on commitment: rests on what Hume came to call 'the sentiment of humanity'. The Hobbesists, by contrast, are much more rationalistic: morality, in an important way, is grounded in reason. We can, if we keep our nerve and lower somewhat our expectations, clear-headedly and tough-mindedly bargain our way into morality. David Gauthier and Kurt Baier are the two leading contemporary Hobbesists.[6] I think we have much to learn from them and they go a long way toward giving us the foundations of a secular morality. I want, by stating and examining some core arguments in Kurt Baier's work, to show what some of this is and then indicate why the less rationalistic broadly Humean approach is closer to the mark, is, if you will, a better underpinning for a humanistic ethic, if indeed such an underpinning is needed.

III

Kurt Baier proceeds in a very literal and very commonsensical manner to consider some very central moral questions. In doing this, Baier has tried to bypass many of the stock questions of ethical theory and he has tried, while remaining rigorously analytical, to provide an objective and rational answer to fundamental justificatory questions in ethics. He has tried to establish that there are objective and rational principles of moral assessment – principles which can be seen to hold quite independently of the attitudes that moral agents have or the decisions of principle they are willing to make.

I shall principally examine here his 'popular' essay "Meaning and Morals".[7] There some of his central claims and assumptions stand out starkly. Baier does not maintain that he is making meta-ethical remarks about 'the logic of moral discourse'. In fact he doesn't adopt that tone of voice at all. He refers to the account of morality he is elucidating and defending as 'a humanist ethics' which he contrasts with the conventional morality embedded in a Judeo-Christian view of things. He maintains for "the ideal of morality" he has sketched that its "greatest merit" is "its capacity to generate an unchallengeable method for determining what is morally right and wrong."[8]

> Unlike other theories, this theory does not have to base its method for determining what is right and wrong on the generally accepted views of what is so. It does not have to plead for creditability by the proof that its results will be acceptable to all right-thinking men. On the contrary, it determines who the right-thinking men are, and what are sound and what are unsound moral convictions in a given community. For this theory starts from an explanation of why a certain sort of modification of the precepts of egoism is necessary for the best possible life for everyone, and why these necessary modifications must have the status of categorical imperatives, that is, of absolutely binding obligations. Such an explanation provides a justification for a system of such modifications, and so also for the precepts constituting such a system.[9]

These are indeed claims of considerable scope and while the *manner* is in certain respects, like the *manner* of Ross or Broad, the *matter* – the actual underlying claim – is, *vis-à-vis* contemporary ethical theory, as revolutionary as is Nietzsche's or Stirner's claims about morality. For a philosophical theory to generate "an unchallengeable method for determining what is morally right and wrong" so that by using it we could determine "who the right-thinking men are, and what are sound and what are unsound moral convictions in a given community" is indeed, to put it minimally, a very considerable accomplishment. And the claim that this could be achieved is a very strong claim indeed. In the face of a pervasive, though often rather inarticulate, acceptance of relativism or skepticism over values, Baier's claim is a very radical one. It would, if justified, at last provide the holy grail that moralists have long sought, and indeed would accomplish things that most contemporary moral philosophers think are beyond the competence of moral philosophy or for

that matter any discipline or cluster of disciplines to achieve. We should look upon Baier's claims both with considerable interest and with considerable suspicion.

By way of clearing the decks, Baier makes the negative point that it is theistic religious beliefs, including often a belief in a heaven of rewards and sometimes even a hell, that are the *sanctions* which *cause* many people in our culture to accept the conventional morality of our group. But such religious views are now discredited and the question immediately arises why then continue to accept the conventional morality? And indeed much of conventional morality has come under a well-grounded suspicion. Parts of it have received even an outright rejection by many people. But the very tottering quality of the pillars of conventional morality, provokes, in the absence of a clearly articulated and plausibly defended moral alternative, a characteristic, nihilistic or skeptical *malaise*. All moral claims come under suspicion. And this is just what has happened. Running against the stream, Baier wants to demonstrate that that wholesale skepticism is unjustified.

There are, of course, anti-skeptical moves that plainly won't wash. Baier, not atypically, regards such alleged objective standards as "the voice of conscience", "the moral sense" or the claims of intuition as only the "dressed-up demands of our society".[10] That is to say, they simply reflect the standards of our conventional morality; they do not afford a rational and objective basis for morality. They "cannot tell us what is right and what is wrong in a sense which provides an adequate reason for doing what is right and refraining from doing what is wrong."[11]

So far Baier's remarks have been negative; he has only told us how we cannot ascertain what is really right as distinct from what is mistakenly thought to be so. We want, he stresses, to be able to distinguish, what is, on the one hand, known or reasonably believed to be right from what, on the other hand, is merely *felt* to be right. Baier argues that since we cannot rely on intuition to do this and since we cannot rely on how people, neither sophisticates nor the plainest of plain people, feel, we must, to give a theoretical account of our moral knowledge, "base our knowledge of right and wrong on some form of calculation."[12] Here he, like Gauthier, shows a clear indebtedness to Hobbes.

Among the classical normative ethical accounts, egoism – that is what many contemporary philosophers have called 'ethical egoism' – and utilitarianism are both such calculative accounts. Baier rejects both and proposes an alternative calculative moral theory.

We should first see why Baier believes that egoism is, as he puts it, open to a "completely decisive objection" and how Baier's own account, keeping what is true and important in the precepts of egoism, "gives egoism a certain sort of modification which will give us the substructure of a true morality", i.e., an ideal of morality which is internally consistent, coherently elaborated and rationally validated.

To see what this 'true morality' could be, we need to see why egoism needs modification. By 'egoism' Baier means, and I shall mean, the view that "each individual can tell what it would be right for him to do by calculating what would be in his best interest".[13]

The decisive objection to this account of right and wrong, according to Baier, is that *if* everybody accepts 'ethical egoism' the result will be "wholly undesirable", yet to count as a moral ideal or even as an account of morality at all, it must be an account which "must hold for everyone". But if ethical egoism is everyone's ideal – if it is to hold for everybody and if it is to be taken to be a mandatory ideal of conduct for everybody (as it must to be a moral ideal) – then it will be a very undesirable ideal indeed and thus we have as sound a reason as we can ask for, for rejecting egoism as a candidate moral system.

Why exactly will the result be wholly undesirable, if *everybody* accepts 'ethical egoism' as an ideal of conduct? The answer is to be found in the following considerations. As a matter of fact, as things stand now and are going to stand in any even tolerably realistic social context, "the best interests of one person often conflict with the best interests of another."[14] This is not a logical necessity or some kind of conceptual necessity (assuming in an anti-Quinean spirit we go in for conceptual necessities), but it is something which will repeatedly happen in any society, though plainly more in some societies than others. So being in a situation where human interests frequently conflict, the ethical egoist has to say that each person would find out what is right for him to do by calculating what would be in his best interest and that this is something *everyone* ought to do. But since the best interests of one person often conflict with the best interests of another, if a person *succeeds* in promoting his own best interests, if he actually is able to do what, given the truth of ethical egoism, he ought to succeed in doing, he "will thereby often *prevent* another agent from promoting his (that agent's) own best interest".[15] As Baier nicely puts it:

> In such a situation, the competitors will often waste much ingenuity and effort on getting the better of each other, perhaps in the process even harm each other, without in the end being able to accomplish more than they would have accomplished if they had abandoned their efforts to gain an advantage for themselves and had settled the conflict by tossing a coin; and frequently they will accomplish less. As a universal method of determining what each person *should* do, egoism is not therefore the best policy. In social contects such a mode of behavior does not yield the results it was ostensibly designed to yield: the greatest possible good for each person.[16]

If not ethical egoism, then what moral principles do count as rational principles of behavior which can justifiably *be recommended to everybody*? We need, Baier argues, a principle, or set of principles, which, if acted on, would most likely lead, of all the alternatives, to the *successful promotion* of the interests of each and "through it the best possible life for each".[17] We should adopt those principles of behavior and rules of conduct which would, if adopted, provide "*the best possible life for everyone*".[18] They are the principles and rules which can recommend themselves to all reasonable men. And it is an empirical truism "that the best possible life for everybody cannot be achieved in isolation but only in social contexts in which the pursuits of each infringe on the pursuits of others".[19]

If we carefully reflect on this empirical truism, we should come to recognize that the "single-minded pursuit of one's own best interest, irrespective of how it affects others, cannot be the supreme rational principle of behavior".[20] What should be sought instead is the achievement of the maximum satisfaction of interest for *everyone*. With this stress on the maximum satisfaction of interests we capture what is important and valuable about utilitarianism and with the stress on *everyone* being treated alike, we capture the distributive rationale of justice as fairness: something which goes beyond utilitarianism. But in accepting such a principle as the supreme rational principle of conduct, we need not and should not abandon the pursuit of self-interest – as long as it is not an exclusive pursuit of self-interest come what may – for each person is usually the best judge of his own interests and the satisfaction of the interests of everyone is best attained, Baier claims, by each person normally acting in accordance with his own rational interests. However, in those situations, where, by so acting, his behavior, more than some other alternative, would interfere with the maximum satisfaction of interest for everyone, i.e., the best possible life for everyone, then in such situations his self-interested behavior must be constrained. That is to say, egoistic behavior must – morally must – be prohibited in such circumstances. This is as true for a humanistic morality as for a religious morality.

In trying to determine what is a good reason for doing something, we should start, Baier argues, from an egoistic basis, for that something is in our interest is plainly a good reason for doing it if anything is. But while this is our starting point, it need not be, and indeed should not be, our end point, for we have seen that certain other reasons can override in certain contexts purely self-interested considerations.

In recognizing that we have to adopt general modifications of the principles of egoism for purposes "of attaining the best possible life for everybody", we need to determine what characteristics a morality so modified will have. Such a morality will have four distinctive features.

(1) Its precepts whould be capable of coming into conflict with the precepts of self-interest.
(2) Its precepts should be thought of as overriding those of self-interest.
(3) Each man should have an interest in other people being moral because other people's immorality will tend to affect the achievement of his own rational interests.
(4) Each person should have an interest in the effective enforcement of the principles and precepts of morality.

The advantage to us of restricting the general occurrence of utterly egoistic policies of action is patent. Even a tolerably reasonable group of interacting self-interested individuals can readily be brought to see that they "can improve their lives by adhering to certain restrictions on the precepts of egoism."[21] Such agents should have an interest in the effective enforcement of the principles and precepts of morality and in particular they should – even viewing the matter in a coldly

rational way – have a general interest in seeing to it that moral considerations override conflicting purely selfish considerations. To aid in the effective continuance of the institution of morality, a rational self-seeker should be prepared "to pay his share of the price of improvement in life for all, but only", Baier argues, "if the others are prepared to pay their share".[22] Still he very much needs to recognize that his "decision to curb his own egoistic behavior does not make it the case that others will act in the same way". It is, therefore, in his interest to support a social device which would ensure that his sacrifice is parallelled by that of others. The enforcement of social rules by various forms of social sanctions is such a device. If effective, such social sanctions ensure that in cases of conflict members of the social order will follow the sanctioned rules rather than the rules of self-interest. In a perfect society – a society in which the ideal of a rational morality obtained – "everyone could be sure that by following the moral principles and precepts he would contribute his necessary share of the price of the best possible life".[23]

In an ideal moral order there would be such a complete coincidence of morality and self-interest. In such an order the sanctions would be such that no one would find it worthwhile to allow selfish considerations to override moral ones. One could rest secure that by curbing one's selfish impulses, where they conflict with the dictates of morality, one was not being 'a sucker', for others would do likewise. The agent, in such an ideal order, while still acting in accordance with a morality whose principles override the principles of self-interest, could aim at the best possible life for himself; for the best possible life in such an ideal moral order would not be one in which his selfish interests were allowed to override the dictates of such a rational morality. The best possible life plainly can only be lived in society. A morally unrestrained pursuit of the best possible life for oneself, no matter what the consequences for others, leads to what Hobbes called "the war of all against all" and this state, Baier points out, falls "far short of the best possible life".[24] This can be seen even in self-interested terms.

An underlying and very fundamental rational goal of any rational individual is to obtain the best possible life. This Baier takes to be a truism. On Baier's humanist view of morality, both the precepts of self-interest and morality are guidelines to that goal. They are rival guidelines for the individual. But, where they are construed as guidelines for the best possible life for *all*, it is a sound morality that actually is a correct rational guideline for the best possible life for every individual.

A humanistic ethic and egoism differ in that the "precepts of self-interest formulate guidelines designed in such a way that an individual following them thereby promotes his own interest, regardless of how that affects others".[25] By contrast, "the precepts of morality formulate guidelines designed in such a way that an individual following them promotes the advantage of another, and that all those governed by a given morality derive the greatest possible advantage if *all* follow these guidelines".[26] The point is that everyone will be better off, if everyone follows these moral guidelines by placing curbs on their exclusively self-interested orientations.

Beyond that, Baier claims, his humanistic account of morality can explain why

"basic moral precepts are regarded as obligatory, i.e., *absolutely* binding and why there is a telling and decisive answer, whatever one's attitude may be, to the question 'Why should one be moral?'"[27] The answer, Baier claims, is *not* that one should be moral if one happens to desire the greatest good for the greatest number or because one happens to care for others, but that one should be moral because by being moral a person "contributes his share to the best possible life for all, always including himself".[28] Certain fundamental moral precepts are taken to be obligatory because, unlike purely self-interested precepts, it is in other people's interests and not merely in the agent's interest that he act in accordance with them. If the agent allows self-love to override moral considerations, other people's interests are deeply affected and, because of this, one is justified in instituting adequate sanctions to compel the agent to act in accordance with moral precepts. Thus such basic moral precepts are rightly regarded not merely as something which it is desirable to act in accordance with, but also as precepts which are obligatory, i.e., principles which are justifiably enforced and not left to an individual's own discretion. One is not at liberty, either to act in accordance with the moral point of view or not to act in accordance with the moral point of view. For one is simply *obliged* to act in accordance with the moral point of view. One *must* do one's best to be fair and to contribute one's share to the best possible life for all. These are obligations which are *categorical* and Baier, without making a mystery, can, he claims, account for their categoricalness. They are categorical because their being generally observed is absolutely essential for the existence of a moral community and such a community is essential to prevent life from being an unbridled clash of rival egoisms in which there is a "war of all against all". People can not attain the best life for everyone unless moral precepts are taken as overriding the precepts of self-interest.

In trying to decide which principles are to be the substantive moral principles of such a morality, we should look for those principles which we would take as crucial in deciding what to do in determining the best possible life for everyone, when we are faced with situations in which success by one person in the pursuit of his interests would mean failure by another in pursuit of his.

IV

Everything, however, may not be such clear sailing. Why should a rational self-seeker be prepared, where he can rely on others acting as persons of principle, to pay his share of the price for the improvement of life when his failing to do so will be undetected and will not materially affect others continuing to pay their own share? To do so, to do one's own share, is plainly only to be fair. Morality can require no less of him. And perhaps he will, on reflection, just *want* to be fair or perhaps he will find himself *committed* to acting fairly or come to so *commit* himself. But suppose he does not. Can we show that he is thereby behaving less rationally or with less intelligence than the chaps who do? In acting so unfairly he

is clearly acting immorally. But what if he only cares about, as far as his own actions are concerned, the semblance of morality and nothing for its reality? Must he thereby be less exactly informed or make more inductive or deductive mistakes or attend less adequately to his own interests than his moralist counterpart? There is no sound argument for believing that anything like this need be so. We have no good grounds for thinking an immoralist *must* be an irrationalist or even less rational than the reflective person of moral principle.

Why, looked at from an individual agent's point of view, would the prudent pursuit of one's own interest, when *not* many others are doing likewise, even when some considerable number of others are harmed, lead to a Hobbesian "war of all against all?" We have no good reason to believe that this would actually be the result. An individual need not, indeed should not, advocate such prudent self-seeking for everyone but, all the same, he can take it as something a reasonable, throughly self-interested person might very well do for himself, provided not too many others had adopted or would adopt that personal policy. Baier claims such a personal advocacy is mistaken, indeed even irrational. But, how can it be shown, or can it be shown, that this is so?[29]

It is, indeed, true that if we all curb self-interest in certain contexts and follow the dictates of a rational morality, then *all* (taken *collectively*) obtain a greater advantage than if we all, or even many of us, act exclusively from self-interest. But this greater advantage need not obtain for a solitary individual or individuals – that is for all taken *distributively* – for such an individual or a few individuals might very well attain the greatest possible advantage if they, in certain circumstances, prudently ignored moral considerations and if all others or most others stuck to them. Where someone could do this with sufficient discretion so as not to destabilize the extant morality, why shouldn't he so act in such circumstances? What is irrational or even unreasonable about it? Baier claims that such an individual is being irrational or unreasonable, but what are his grounds? Unless he gives 'irrational'/'rational' or 'reasonable'/'unreasonable' a question-begging moral reading, it would appear that he has no good grounds for such a claim.

V

These general conclusions are reinforced and deepened by examining Hume's remarks about justice and the 'sensible knave'.

The practices of justice, which for Hume rest on conventions, would, Hume believes, be stable if people were really guided by their overall interests. But, Hume also believes, if we look at matters from an *individual*'s point of view, we should come to recognize that "a man may often seem to be a loser by his integrity."[30] This, of course, does not gainsay the fact that for a society to exist there must be institutions of justice, and for human life to flourish these institutions must be strong. Even what Hume called a 'sensible knave', or what we would now call a thoroughly rational but unprincipled bastard, will be for the strengthening of

such moral institutions. Such institutions, he will recognize, are for our mutual benefit. But a sensible knave, "in *particular incidents*, may think that an act of iniquity or infidelity will make a considerable addition to his fortune, without causing any considerable breach in the social union."[31] "That honesty is the best policy", Hume remarks, "may be a good general rule, but is liable to many exceptions; and it may be thought, such a sensible knave conducts himself with most wisdom, if, while observing the general rule, he takes discreet advantage of all exceptions."[32] Each person, if he is thoroughly rational, prefers *universal* conformity to the dictates of justice to the expected outcome of general non-conformity to such dictates, but, at least some rational persons, i.e., sensible knaves, prefer, *in some particular situations*, not to conform to such dictates even if others conform. We can put this general point in an even stronger way, as David Gauthier does, "Each expects to benefit from the just behavior of others, but to lose from his own, hence, whenever his own injustice will neither set an example to others, nor bring punishment on himself, his interests will dictate that injustice."[33] Hume believes that there is no way of proving the sensible knave mistaken. There is no sound argument which shows that such a knave must be irrational or that he acts against reason or even, by contrast with the person of moral principle, that his rationality is diminished.

Hume, however, also believes, in a manner perfectly compatible with what I have just said, that, since the outcomes of *general* conformity are rationally preferred to the outcomes of *general* non-conformity, there is a moral obligation to conform to the dictates of justice. Looked at *not* from an individual's point of view in an *agent-relative* manner but generally in an *agent-neutral* manner, it will be evident that that is so. Experience and reflection show us the 'pernicious effects', to use Hume's words, of general or even extensive non-conformity. In this respect Hume does not differ from Hobbes and contemporary Hobbesists. A recognition of the pernicious effects of such non-conformity will check in rational people their inclination to non-conformity to the requirements of justice, where they see the possibility of that way of acting being socially catching. Indeed, they will come to see conformity in such circumstances as obligatory. Both this obligation, as well as the individual's inclination not to be just, rest on interests. The obligation is not, as Baier believes, categorical. It is not, that is, something an agent *must* will if he is rational. Yet each of us has an interest in seeing that the rules of justice are maintained. But it is also the case that each of us, *as individuals*, as the sensible knave makes evident, has an interest "in taking advantage of 'the exceptions' – in violating the rules of justice when violation would go uncopied and unpunished".[34]

What is important to recognize here is that we have reasons, as far as our individual conduct is concerned, for, in certain circumstances, engaging in a discreet neglect of what is required of us morally and that we have, as well, reasons for sticking in all circumstances with what is required of us morally. As rational agents, we will want a society in which people generally do what they acknowledge is morally required of them. But each of us, for ourselves as individuals, will see that, where we can get away with it, it very well could be the case that in certain circum-

stances it is in our rational self-interest to act, as a free-rider, against our own moral integrity. Perhaps these situations are much rarer than we at first blush are inclined to think; they may even be desert-islandish situations, but they show that there is nothing conceptually untoward about being such a sensible knave or nothing intrinsically irrational.

It has been argued that in spite of this it is Hume's considered belief that a thoroughly rational agent will stick with the moral point of view – will endeavor to do what morality requires of him. Whatever Hume may have thought, it is my belief that this is a comforting tale moral philosophers tell themselves. I do not think that Hume or anyone else has shown the Hume's sensible knave must suffer from a rational defect. That he suffers from a *moral* defect is perhaps tautological, but tautological or not, it is certainly evident enough. But his suffering from a moral defect is one thing, his suffering from a rational defect is another. My point is that he need not be irrational. It may be that "a moral system, being an ideal of conduct, is based on principles that must be accepted by reason...".[35] That would only warrant the claim that these principles are *consistent* with reason. Still, if we will reflect on how our sensible knave might act, we will come to see that these principles are not, for an individual in certain circumstances, *required* by reason. Immorality need not be a species of irrationality.

VI

I think we can see here an important way in which the Humean wins over the Hobbesist as well as over the Kantian. When looked at from the point of view of an individual agent deliberating about how she/he is to live, reason does not require morality, though this is not to say that to choose morality – to seek to be and remain a person of moral principle – is in any way irrational or rationally untoward, requiring someone to be a knight of faith. Morality is *compatible* with reason even though it is not *required* by it. An unprincipled person, as we have seen, need not be irrational. Moreover, sentiment *need* not conflict with reason. A 'rational sentiment' is not a contradiction in terms and an 'irrational sentiment' is not a pleonasm. But this, broadly speaking, Humean view does show that a secular morality should, in setting itself against religious obscurantism, not try to root itself in an ethical rationalism. But a recognition of this should not lead us to a disdain of reason or to a general setting of reason and sentiment into dubious battle. They can conflict but they need not and they do not in any general, conceptually required way. We can see, from following out Baier's argument, how far a conception of the function of morality, plus a clear, cold conception of rationality as calculation, can carry us in rationalizing life: in making sense of our commitment to morality. But we can also see how, finally, morality does rest on a commitment, but this is no less so for the religious person than the secular. There are no axioms of pure practical reason on which to ground morality. Such a Kantian project is not in the cards. There is no overall normative ethical system with derived middle

level rules for practical life that is required by reason. But a non-evasive reflection on that should not drive us to religion to make sense of morality, of our moral commitments and of our tangled lives.

VII

Nothing that I have argued previously should be taken to gainsay the fact that religious moralities with their linked cosmologies do give us a comprehensive picture – some might even call it a theory – about the way the world is and a connected set of moral recipes for living our lives, definite rules for what to do and what not to do, nicely arranged in a hierarchy. Catholic and Anglican doctrines of the natural moral law are paradigmatic here. Such a theory of morality undergirding what was once a shared common morality has long, at least among the educated elites (both non-religious and religious), been on the decline. And, across almost all sectors of the society, there is a slow but steady falling apart of a once-common morality wedded to a cluster of sister religions, i.e. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, where authority was once pervasively acknowledged. This erosion has left a cultural void, and, with some people, including not a few philosophers, a nostalgia for the Absolute.

Ethical rationalism, even if it could somehow be defended intellectually, cannot fill that void. There is something rather pitiful in the naive otherworldly utopianism of the moral philosopher who thinks we can develop a systematic moral theory in which, without a sociology with an empirically grounded theory of human nature, the moral precepts do all the work. Without such a set of background beliefs, giving them content and placement, even the systematic arrangement of such precepts does not provide such a grounding for the moral life. Moreover, it is a dream of an otherworldly spirit-seer to think that a theory of morality can be constituted and rationally defended in which we have a system of moral laws and precepts, binding on all rational creatures, with a form and a content that all normal humans, if only they will study it closely, will acknowledge is simply required by reason. A secular morality need not and should not seek to ground itself in such a pale imitation of the old religious moralities. With the death of God, we should not, seeking a substitute, make a God of a reified conception of Reason. We neither can get nor do we need such systems of general principles and truths as ethical rationalism tenders. We do not need, and indeed cannot have, such an appeal to pure practical reason to back up morality or to reconstitute something of a lost shared morality. Our social world would have to change rather extensively for a shared morality to extend much beyond a few moral truisms – truisms that it could nonetheless be worthwhile to assert in certain social contexts.[36]

I have argued that to make sense of our moral lives we do not need to try to make reason, divorced from sentiment and an appeal to our considered judgments in wide reflective equilibrium, authoritative for morality. If we are informed about our social world – if we have some sense of who we are, how we got to be who we are

and some reasonable understanding of the options for our collective future – and if we are cool-headed, and if we exercise our capacities for impartial reflection, we can trust our moral sentiments perfectly well in the absence of such grandiose normative ethical theories. None of us are quite such paragons of reflective intelligence as was described above, but we can, in varying degrees, approximate that condition. We need neither God nor moral theory to make sense of our lives. We can have a sensible morality without moral philosophy. That the making sense of our lives eludes so many of us is not because God is dead and we are without a systematic ethical theory of the Kant/Sidgwick variety. Our *malaise* has to do not with that, but essentially with the condition of our lives as social beings: it essentially has to do with the kind of society in which we live. Our condition is such that, except for a lucky few of us, no sober education is available to us and the lives of the great masses of people are lives which are very bleak indeed and, to add to the horror of it, unnecessarily so. That, in such circumstances, nostrums abound is hardly surprising.

NOTES

1. John Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*. Quoted by David Gauthier in his "Why Ought One Obey God? Reflections on Hobbes and Locke," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. VII, No. 3 (September, 1977), p. 425.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 425-426.
3. Kai Nielsen, *Ethics Without God* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1973).
4. J.N. Findlay, "The Justification of Attitudes" in his *Language, Mind and Value* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1963).
5. Kai Nielsen, "On the Rationality of Groundless Believing," *Idealistic Studies*, Vol. XI, No. 3 (September, 1981), pp. 217-229.
6. David Gauthier, "Bargaining Our Way Into Morality," *Philosophic Exchange*, Vol. 2, No. 5 (Summer, 1979), pp. 15-27 and Kurt Baier, "Meaning and Morals" in Paul Kurtz (ed.), *Moral Problems in Contemporary Society* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1969), pp. 33-47.
7. Baier, "Meaning and Morals". This essay should be supplemented by a study of a cluster of Baier's related recent articles. See the following: "The Social Source of Reason," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, Vol. 51 (1978); "Moral Reasons and Reasons to be Moral" in A.I. Goldman and J. Kim (eds.), *Values and Morals* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1978); "Defining Morality Without Prejudice", *The Monist*, Vol. 64 (1981); "Moral Reasons," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. III (1978); and "The Conceptual Link Between Morality and Rationality," *Nous*, Vol. XVI, No. 1 (March, 1982).
8. Baier, "Meaning and Morals," p. 46.
9. *Ibid.* See also Kurt Baier, "Moral Obligations," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (July, 1966).
10. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Baier attempts rigorously to demonstrate this in his "The Conceptual Link Between Morality and Rationality," *Nous*, Vol. XVI, No. 1 (March, 1982)., pp. 77-88. See, in response, my "Baier on the Link Between Immorality and Irrationality," *Nous*, Vol. XVI, No. 1 (March, 1982), pp. 91-92.
30. David Hume, *Enquiry into Morals*, Section II, Pt. III.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. David Gauthier, "David Hume, Contractarian," *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. LXXXVIII, No. 1 (January, 1979), p. 26.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
35. Ruth MacKlin, "Moral Progress," *Ethics*, Vol. 87, No. 3 (July, 1977), p. 377.
36. See my "On Needing a Moral Theory," *Metaphilosophy* (1982) and my "Grounding Rights and a Method of Reflective Equilibrium," *Inquiry* (1982).