A Consistency Challenge for Moral and Religious Beliefs

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Abstract: What should individuals do when their firmly held moral beliefs are prima facie inconsistent with their religious beliefs? In this article we outline several ways of posing such consistency challenges and offer a detailed taxonomy of the various responses available to someone facing a consistency challenge of this sort. Throughout the paper, our concerns are primarily pedagogical: how best to pose consistency challenges in the classroom, how to stimulate discussion of the various responses to them, and how to relate such consistency challenges to larger issues, such as whether scripture is, in general, a reliable guide to truth.

Philosophy professors often aspire to challenge the beliefs of their students, both in and out of class, and in a variety of ways. In perhaps the most basic kind of case we may simply inquire what the grounds are for a particular belief ("But *why* do you believe that *p* is true?"). Other times we might challenge a belief indirectly by raising questions about its evidential basis ("You believe *p* solely on the basis of *q*, but why should a reasonable person accept *q*?"). Or we might suggest that, although the student firmly believes that *p*, there seem to be good reasons for thinking that *not-p* (or else good reasons for thinking *not-q*, where *q* is the student's sole basis for believing *p*). In other cases, we might observe that while many seemingly reasonable people agree with the student in believing *p*, plenty of other seemingly reasonable people are convinced that *not-p*, and this fact about (seemingly reasonable) disagreement raises interesting questions and seems to present an important kind of challenge to the beliefs of all the parties involved in the dispute. Or—in the kind of case we would like to focus on in this paper—we might make students aware of the fact that two or more of

their beliefs are prima facie inconsistent ("How can you believe that *p* if you also hold *q*?"). If a student is firmly committed to *q*, and if the appearance of inconsistency between *q* and *p* is compelling, the student faces a strong challenge to her belief that *p*. In this paper we outline a method for challenging religious beliefs by posing such consistency challenges. (We should note at the outset that, for a number of reasons, we have chosen to focus specifically on religious beliefs derived from the Bible in the Judeo-Christian tradition.) For some of us, one part of the motivation for challenging students' religious beliefs may be irreligious (that is, the motive may be, in part, to effectively undermine the religious beliefs at issue). But the method of posing consistency challenges that we develop here can also be deployed for religiously-supportive motivations: thoughtful believers must address such challenges, and doing so may even strengthen their convictions. Furthermore, as we see it, consistency challenges can be initiated in order to motivate reflection in students who may understand some or even many of their commitments to be ones about which further reasoning is either immaterial or inappropriate. This attitude is a roadblock to inquiry, and consistency challenges will highlight the need for critical discussion and further inquiry. Our objective as philosophy professors is not to impart some particular set of beliefs to our students but to provide students with the tools to hold their own beliefs reflectively and responsibly.

In section 1, we introduce our method of posing a consistency challenge and offer illustrations of the method, all of which are articulated in simple contemporary language. In section 2, we will outline an in-class exercise to prompt the consistency challenge. In section 3, we consider the various responses available to someone who is facing such a consistency challenge, and we present some questions teachers might use to address these responses so as to further pursue the issue in classroom dialogue. Finally, in section 4, we consider the extent to which students might be pressed to revise their religious beliefs in light of these challenges and make a few brief concluding remarks.

1. Morally Disturbing Views
in the Old and New Testaments

A regular connection between religion and morality is the view that religion provides us with moral clarity. God, in his goodness, provides humans with rules to live by. This connection may be articulated in either epistemic fashion (on the basis of the thought that religion is a guide to moral truth) or in ontological fashion (religion provides a grounding for moral truth). Let us capture these two thoughts as follows:

Religious Guidance Thesis: Religion, particularly stories revealed in sacred texts, is a guide to the moral life. Religious stories, those of God's doings or the doings of God's representatives, are instructive or revelatory of correct moral principles.

Religious Grounding Thesis: Religion, particularly the accounts of God's creation and God's commands, provides grounding for the norms constituting a moral life. Moral rules are made real by divine command.

The thought behind the religious guidance thesis is that the moral life is hard, and given our track record in solving the problems on our own, we are not smart or virtuous enough to solve the problems ourselves. God, on the other hand, is very smart and virtuous, and, lucky for us, he wrote a book, namely, the Bible. In the same way that those who do not know something should consult an acknowledged expert, we should defer to God's judgment. Alternately, the thought behind the religious grounding thesis is that moral goodness would not be possible without some source—it cannot come from the natural world, so it must come from a creator and his plan for that world.

Both the religious guidance and the religious grounding theses provide the groundwork for an organizing thought bearing on morality, namely, that there is a logical and psychological priority of our religious beliefs to our moral beliefs. That is, our moral beliefs depend in some way on our religious beliefs. A further thought associated with this view is that unbelievers (those with no religious commitments at all or negative religious commitments) have no allegiance to anything other than themselves. As a consequence, unbelievers are likely to be immoral—and if they *happen to be moral*, it is only because they were lucky enough to have been exposed to plenty of religious thought and habituation at an early age. Religion and morality are entangled, and they are thought to be entangled in such a way that religious belief has priority.

For present purposes, let a *moral belief* be any belief concerning the normative status of a person's intentions, her character, her behavior, or the consequences of her behavior. And let a *religious belief* be any belief concerning God himself or God's interactions with the human or non-human world (including, for example, the creation of the world, communication with its inhabitants, miraculous interventions, and so on). For example, a student might hold the moral belief that it is wrong for a person to Φ. Or a student might hold the religious belief that God once Φ'd, or she might hold the religious belief that God commanded some group of people to Φ. The problem arises for the student who holds *both* that it is wrong for a person to Φ *and* (for example) that God commanded some group of people to Φ. Since these beliefs are

prima facie inconsistent,[1] the student faces a consistency challenge and must find some way to resolve it.

Let's consider some illustrations of this approach. We have used the first and fifth of the following cases when teaching some of Hume's essays ("Of Suicide" and "Of Polygamy and Divorces," respectively). The second case is useful when teaching Montaigne's essay on the witch trials (*Essays* III:11, "Of Cripples"), and the sixth is an organizing point when discussing the problem of hell (in Introduction to Philosophy or in Philosophy of Religion). All six cases below are presented in simple contemporary language while trying to maintain strict parallelism between the contemporary language set-up and the underlying scriptural case.

(Case 1) Suicide bombers set off bombs in many different parts of the world, killing themselves and those they regard as their enemies in a spectacular explosion. The Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka (many of whom are women) do so quite regularly, for example. This also occurs in the Middle East. And September 11 represents another case of the same kind—a suicidal attack on enemies. What do you think of the suicide bombers? Are they morally justified in what they do? Presumably the Christians and Jews should answer "yes," since Samson led the way in this regard. After praying to God for the necessary strength, Samson pushed forcefully on the two central pillars supporting the roof of a large temple in which he stood in the company of *thousands* of Philistines. He cried "Let me die with the Philistines!" and then he did, with *thousands* of them, men *and* women, clearly including many *noncombatants*. "Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived" (see Judges 16:23–31). Furthermore, in the New Testament, Paul fully endorses Samson's suicide and temple-collapse massacre by listing him in the ranks of the heroes of faith, along with Noah, Abraham, and Moses (Hebrews 11).

(Case 2) In early modern Europe large numbers of women (and some men) were subjected to torture and death as part of the witch trials. Were the witch trials morally wrong? If we could undo all the horrible pain and death resulting from the witch trials, would that be a good thing to do? Well, God might not think so. The Lord teaches us that we must "not suffer a witch to live" (Exodus 22:18 [KJV trans.]). That verse appears to place us under a moral *obligation* to execute witches. Torture was simply used to discriminate witches from non-witches. Assuming we must—per God's orders—kill all witches, how else are we to identify them? At a minimum, even if Ex. 22:18 does not prescribe torture for the purpose of witch identification, if witches were to *voluntarily announce themselves as such*, we would be obligated by Ex. 22:18 to kill them. And if you do not accept torture-induced confessions *or* voluntary announcements, how exactly do you think

God meant for us to put Ex. 22:18 into practice (which he *surely* did, if we take 22:18 and its context in Exodus seriously)?

(Case 3) Should one make a bet, the winning (or losing) of which would necessitate great harm to the physical body or legitimate possessions of someone who has in no way consented to playing such a role in your bet? For example, is it morally permissible for *me* to bet my friend *Scott* that my other friend *James* will not renounce me or revile me, even if Scott kills James's new puppy dog and leaves a note saying "I, BR, killed this dog"? Such a bet seems completely disgusting, not only in the way James's poor puppy is treated, but also in the way in which James's interests are trivialized and he is treated like a mere piece in a board game. Trouble is, all of Job's troubles started when God and Satan made a bet. Now Job was "blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil," but Satan said that was just because God had given Job a sweet life; take away the prosperity and Job would curse God. God said, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands." So Satan destroys Job's life: Job's livestock are killed or stolen, all ten of Job's children die, Job himself is covered in sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head, and so on (see Job 1–2). All so that God could win a bet with Satan. What does Job matter? Who cares about his ten dead children? After all, who is Job (father of ten dead children) to question God? God is unstoppably powerful and beyond question. "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?" God asks Job (38:4), implying that might makes right and that God can make any bet he likes, and we can all just keep quiet. Although God later makes Job prosperous again (Job 42:10–17) God does not restore Job's ten dead children.

(Case 4) Suppose you were walking down the street and some children started mocking you, calling out "Hey, fattie! Fatty-fatty-bo-batty! Big 'un. Hoss. Heavy load!" If you were accompanied on your walk by a friend who had with him a pair of attack-trained Rottweilers, would you be morally justified in asking him to give the attack signal and have the Rottweilers maul the children? I suspect we will all answer "no," but then how can we make sense of 2 Kings 2:23–25, where the prophet Elisha is "jeered at" by some (random, unidentified) youths who call him "baldhead." He responds to this jeering by "call[ing] down a curse on them in the name of the Lord" that manifests itself in the form of a pair of bears that come racing out of the woods and maul forty-two youths! Perhaps it might occur to you to defend Elisha by noting that he only asked God to curse them, without specifying the form that the curse should take, and so he is not responsible for the bear attacks and maulings. But then who *is* responsible for them? God (apparently) thinks childish mockery merits being attacked by a bear.

(Case 5) Suppose a man and a woman were married, and further suppose that the man was both regularly and violently physically abusive to his wife. He beat her terribly most every day—and twice some days. Would it be wrong for this woman to feel victimized and to feel angry at the treatment she was receiving and to feel scared (for her safety or her children's safety) and for her to get divorced from her husband? Jesus appears to think it would be wrong. Frankly, Jesus is of two minds about this: He sometimes seems to say that no one should get divorced for any reason, for man should not separate "what God has joined together" (Mark 10:1–12); other times, when he is feeling a little softer, he seems to allow one legitimate ground for a divorce: marital unfaithfulness (Matthew 5:31–32, 19:1–12). The moral lesson seems to be this: According to (Matthew's) Jesus you can properly leave a cheater but not a beater. If he beats you, just put up with it. Put on a happy face (or else he will probably beat you even worse).

(Case 6) Let's consider punishments. We all think the punishment should "fit the crime." Of course, most of us would balk at any enforcement of strict proportionality. If I recklessly caused an accident in which someone lost an eye, few would support a criminal justice statute that provided, upon conviction, for the surgical removal of my eye. That sort of "an eye for an eye" justice, which was commanded by Yahweh (via Moses) in the Old Testament (Ex. 21:23–35, Lev. 24:19–20, Deut. 19:21), was quite sensibly retracted by Jesus in the New Testament (Matt. 5:38–42) in favor of a more forgiving ethic. If, then, I recklessly caused someone to lose an eye, ought we to take *both* my eyes or an eye *and* an ear? Surely not. That would be even more severe than "an eye for an eye." And if the latter doctrine is one in which we "[s]how no pity" (Deut. 19:21), then *a fortiori* "two eyes for an eye" is a truly pitiless doctrine of punishment, right? But how is it then that Jesus repeatedly advocates everlasting torturous hell-fire for the damned, whose transgressions are *limited* but whose punishment will be without limit? Why must the damned be punished by "the fire that never goes out"—by an *unquenchable* fire (Mark 9:43, 48)? Why must it be an "eternal fire" (Matt. 18:8, 25:41)?

A few features of these six cases should be noted. We can start with a comparison case. While discussing the relative excellence of Socrates and Jesus as moral teachers, Bertrand Russell once remarked on one of Jesus's demon exorcisms (see, e.g., Luke 8:26–39): "There is the instance of the Gadarene swine, where it certainly was not very kind to the pigs to put the devils into them and make them rush down the hill to the sea. You must remember that He was omnipotent, and He could have made the devils simply go away; but He chose to send them into the pigs."[2] Though Russell doesn't mention it, the text says explicitly that the pigs rushed to their *death*, and the gospel of Mark

(5:13) tells us that there were "about two thousand" pigs that suffered that unfortunate fate! Killing two thousand pigs in one shot does seem, well, a bit flashy and overdone. But while Russell's assessment of the exorcism often scores knowing smiles with the unbelieving students, it does not seem very likely to challenge the believers. After all, the moral belief that "One ought not to treat a pig poorly (without good reason)" is, at best, a weakly held moral belief for most American students. Besides, as Russell's case concerns the mechanics of demon removal, one might think that Jesus had a good (but inscrutable) reason for his rough-handed way with the pigs. In contrast, the best cases for consistency challenges involve simple, uncomplicated, and firmly held moral beliefs. We want to avoid the morally nebulous. Being mocked for your baldness may be unpleasant, and those who so mock may be unkind, but most of us feel *fairly confident* that a bear-mauling is not their proper comeuppance. Similarly, few of us would support a legal system run on the motto "show no pity" (Deut. 19:21), and even fewer of us would support the use of prolonged public beatings as a punishment for speeding offenses. Yet a prolonged public beating is (while brutal) *limited*. It ends. Hell won't. Hell-fire, being everlasting, is *infinitely* disproportionate to any finite offense(s) or transgression(s). When you think about it that way, everlasting hell-fire seems wrong. And it seems to matter. So while Russell's case is, in spirit, similar to our approach, his case suffers from focusing on a moral belief that is (at best) weakly held by our students, and his case involves events (like demon removal) that complicate things unnecessarily.[3] It would be better by far to stick, as much as possible, to cases where religious beliefs bump up against simple, uncomplicated, and firmly held moral beliefs.

One last note on these six cases is worth making. At the rhetorical level, some of our case descriptions use dark or ironic humor to dramatize both the *importance* of the case and the *tension* between the firm moral beliefs and the religious stories. For example, we concluded our discussion of Jesus's views on divorce with these lines: "According to (Matthew's) Jesus you can properly leave a cheater but not a beater. If he beats you, just put up with it. Put on a happy face (or else he will probably beat you even worse)." Obviously this tone expresses something about our perspective. Nonetheless, when performed— *live*—in class (with the right tone and a cheery smile) those lines get a good laugh every time—and they do so in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Glasgow, Kentucky (which are not places known as strongholds of irreligious liberalism). Still, individual professors, given both their distinctive motivations and their distinctive personalities and pedagogical styles, can easily adjust and retool the case descriptions as they see fit, to get the right "tone," which we suggest you do. The objec-

tive with these exercises is to motivate critical discussion and further inquiry about moral truths, and—as we all know—humor can often be motivating and engaging for students.

2. *The Survey of Religious Morality*

In the preceding, we have run the consistency challenge in a variety of cases, each presented informally. The significance of the consistency challenge, however, may not be clear to students in introductory level classes (Introduction to Philosophy, Introduction to Ethics), and a more formal and sustained treatment of the problem may be in order for these audiences. Here, we have devised a series of handouts and in-class exercises for the presentation of the consistency challenge.

We have assembled a number of Bible verses with which most twenty-first-century Americans would see that there is substantive moral difficulty. To disguise the biblical tradition we have changed the names and references of the stories to seem as though the moral lessons are from traditions other than the Judeo-Christian. This is for two connected reasons: first, we are looking for uncluttered moral judgment, and judging a tradition to which one has no attachment will likely yield a more honest reflection of one's moral attitudes. This, in our earlier cases, was achieved by putting the cases in contemporary language, and here, we will try to achieve this by concealing the identity of the religious tradition being scrutinized. Second, if we can keep distinct moral and religious reasoning by simply changing the names in the stories, it stands to reason that the two may function independently (a topic for discussion later). In our case, we have chosen far-flung (and, in some cases, made-up) religions. Note that this works only with students generally ignorant of world religions (but it's a good bet that most students are).

From this, we have produced two handouts: Religious Morality Tests A and B. The first handout, Test A, presents the Bible stories with the names and sources changed. The second handout has the original biblical sources. (N.B.: The two handouts for the survey, Test A and Test B, are reproduced at the end of this paper as Appendices A and B, allowing readers to photocopy them for in-class use, if desired.) Distribute handout A, which looks like this:

Religious Morality Test A

1. Axltapuhapec was a military commander in Aztec Mexico, and he asked the mountain gods to grant him victory over the Setinomma, "If thou wilt deliver the Setinomma into my hands, then the first creature that comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return from them in peace shall be the mountain gods'; I will offer that as a

whole-offering" (Judiciary 11:30–31). The mountain gods granted the victory, and upon return home, Axltapuhapec's only child, his daughter, came out to welcome him home. Axltapuhapec rent his clothes, but his daughter admonished him: "Father, you made a vow to the mountain gods; do to me what you solemnly vowed." Axltapuhapec allowed her to mourn for two months; then he sacrificed her (Judiciary 11:32–39).

2. Mohammed's orders for how to deal with tribes living in the land allotted for the chosen, who resist Islam: "Go now and fall upon the Amalekites and destroy them, and put their property under ban. Spare no one: put them all to death, men and women, children and babes in arms, herds and flocks, camels and asses" (Koran, Sura 15:3).

3. The story of Chien-Shein: Xhuang-Xhu was the only righteous man in Chien-Shein. Uhrchien, the fire god, had decided to destroy the city for its wickedness. Two beautiful dragon-women were sent to Chien-Shein to warn Xhuang-Xhu to leave the city before the city was to be turned to a valley of flame. Xhuang-Xhu welcomed the dragon-women to his house, but all the men of Chien-Shein, who had seen the dragon-women arrive, gathered around the house and demanded that Xhuang-Xhu hand over the dragon-women so that they could "be close with them" (The Book of the Beginning 19:5). Chien-Shein refuses to hand over the dragon-women but instead offers his daughters. "I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly. Behold, now, I have two daughters which have not known a man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these messengers do nothing; for they came under the shadow of my roof" (The Book of the Beginning 19:7–8).

4. Buddha instructed a crowd: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Book of Sayings 14:26).

5. Hesiod on the role of women: "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Zeon was first formed, then Pandora. And Zeon was not deceitful, but the woman [Pandora] was in the transgression [of opening the box of plagues]" (Theogony 2:11–14).

6. Krishna on slavery: "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Bhagavan [the divine one], not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as slaves of Bhagavan, following the dharma [the way] from the heart" (Bhagavad Gita 6:5–6).

Now have students assess the ethical status of a moral system that takes the six divinely endorsed moral stories as guides for action. It is very important not to let your students know that handout B is coming—try to get their moral judgments of the cases independently of their own religious beliefs. Have them give reasons and explain their answers. Keep a tally on the board in the following table (we have provided some typical answers):

Case	Moral Lesson	Judgment	Why?
1. Axltapuhapec	Keeping deal (with God) is more im-portant than life of family member (or daughter or other person).	Unethical (but with some virtues)	Familial obligations —but does have the virtue of keeping one's promises at all costs. The values are out of whack: is promise-keeping more important than the life of a child? (Who makes that kind of promise? What kind of God makes him keep it?)
2. Mohammed	One must kill those from other religions.	Unethical	Religious intoler-ance, religious wars: Can't we all just get along?
3. Chien-Shein	Daughter's well-be-ing is less important than that of (divine) messengers.	Unethical	Familial obliga-tions—you don't do that to your daugh-ters. Let the fire god take care of the dragon ladies!
4. Buddha	Full commitment to religion demands re-jecting one's family.	Unethical	Religious commit-ment should make you a better family member. Religion is about community.
5. Hesiod	Women are second-class citizens (be-cause of Pandora).	Unethical	Women should be equal. Why are wom-en punished for what Pandora did?
6. Krishna	Slaves are not only to do their jobs, but must love their slavery.	Unethical	Slavery is wrong.

Once the moral reasoning for each of the cases is on the board, the reveal is with Handout B, which looks like this:

Religious Morality Test B

1. Jephthah was a military commander in ancient Israel, and he asked God to grant him victory over the Ammonites, "If thou wilt deliver the Ammonites into my hands, then the first creature that comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return from them in peace shall be the LORD's; I will offer that as a whole-offering" (Judges

11:30–31). God granted the victory, and upon return home, Jephthah's only child, his daughter, came out to welcome him home. Jephthah rent his clothes, but his daughter admonished him: "Father, you made a vow to the LORD; do to me what you solemnly vowed." Jephthah allowed her to mourn for two months, then he sacrificed her (Judges 11:32–39).

2. Samuel's orders to Saul for how to deal with tribes living in the promised land, who resist the Israelites: "Go now and fall upon the Amalekites and destroy them, and put their property under ban. Spare no one: put them all to death, men and women, children and babes in arms, herds and flocks, camels and asses" (I Samuel 15:3).

3. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah: Lot was the only righteous man in Sodom. God had decided to destroy the city because of its wickedness. Two angels were sent to Sodom to warn Lot to leave the city before the city was to be turned to brimstone. Lot welcomed the angels to his house, but all the men of Sodom, who had seen the angels arrive, gathered around the house and demanded that Lot hand over the angels so that they could "know them" (Genesis 19:5). Lot refused to hand over the angels, but instead offers his daughters. "I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly. Behold, now, I have two daughters which have not known a man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these angels do nothing; for they came under the shadow of my roof" (Genesis 19:7–8).

4. Jesus instructed a crowd: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26).

5. Paul on the role of women: "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression" (1 Timothy 2:11–14).

6. Paul on slavery: "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart" (Ephesians 6:5–6).

Inform the students that the quotations in handout A are actually quotations from the Bible's Old and New Testaments, only with the names and references changed. Handout B has the actual names and references. On the assumption that the majority of the students in the class are Jewish or Christian, this forces very clearly a difficulty for their

belief that religion, and specifically the teachings in religious texts, is a guide or ground for their moral beliefs. What are they supposed to do? Here, as with the informal cases above, students are forced to face the consistency challenge.

One worry associated with the survey as presented here is that it may not be a test for students' uncluttered moral judgments, but might instead unnecessarily clutter them by eliciting moral judgments in the context of alien cultures. Or worse, instead of being a test of moral judgment, it may simply be a test for religious or cultural bigotry. Indeed, one reaction Test A often elicits from students is disgust at how other religions and cultures treat human life. But recall that our objective is simply to *generate the consistency challenge*. If students, perhaps, hold that many other religions are backward, uncivilized, and barbaric, and they take *these moral tales* to be exemplary of these features of the religions, then when the reveal occurs with Test B, the consistency challenge is posed in a very pressing form. The labels "backward," "uncivilized," and "barbaric" have come home to roost.

Presenting Test B—as we noted earlier with our remarks about tone in the ordinary language cases—requires special care. This is because students are regularly wary of humanities professors as irreligious and as confrontational toward religious traditions. The culture wars have regular stagings, and religion is a perennial player in these dramas. This handout exercise is a case of what one might call "gotcha peda-gogy." Students have inconsistent beliefs, and the in-class exercise is one of rubbing their noses in it (more or less playfully, depending on the presentational style used). Some students, because of the broader cultural worries about academics weighing in on religious issues in the classroom, may want to check out. The reveal with handout B may be alienating for some of them. To be sure, this is a worry, but we believe the payoff with the poignancy of the reveal (with handout B) is worth the risk. The dramatic element of having a contradiction revealed and having the light of recognition dawn in students' eyes is significant. Had they known the consistency challenge was coming, they could have begged off the exercise. But they formed the moral judgments, explained and defended them, and now find those moral judgments in tension with their religious beliefs. To repeat, our principal goal is to pose the consistency challenge to our students in a dramatic, gripping form and show them that many purportedly known truths are ones that require further deliberation and scrutiny. Those professors who feel especially concerned with the "gotcha" element of the exercise could of course spend a few minutes explaining (in class) just why that approach was used.

3. Taxonomy of Possible Responses to a Consistency Challenge

Once we have successfully posed a consistency challenge, what avenues of response are available to the challenged parties? At the most abstract level, a person faced with a prima facie inconsistency can either (3.1) accept that the beliefs in question really are inconsistent and deal with the problem in light of that fact, or (3.2) deny that the appearance of inconsistency is genuine and seek to clarify how the beliefs in question are, despite initial appearances, consistent. In taxonomizing the range of possible responses to a consistency challenge we can begin with responses falling under (3.1): *acceptance replies*. Here we see three subspecies: (3.1a) resolving the inconsistency by eliminating one of your beliefs, (3.1b) resolving the inconsistency by suspending judgment about each member of the set of inconsistent beliefs, and (3.1c) boldly embracing the inconsistency.[4]

3.1 Acceptance Replies

3.1a Belief Elimination Strategies

If a student has a moral belief (MB) and a religious belief (RB) and that student accepts that MB and RB are genuinely inconsistent, he or she can resolve that inconsistency by rejecting either of these beliefs. As our commentary so far probably makes clear, we think that, generally, students should eliminate the RB to resolve the inconsistency. The main reason for this is simply that we think most students are more firmly committed to the various MBs we have addressed than they are to the various RBs with which those MBs conflict. And, *ceteris paribus*, it is a rational strategy of belief revision to reject weaker commitments in favor of firmer commitments when your commitments conflict.

So, for example, most students are presumably more certain that slavery is morally wrong than they are that Paul—or Ephesians 6—offers us insight into the mind/will of God or that God himself endorses slavery. Thus, such students should retain the MB that slavery is wrong and reject the RB that Paul knew the mind/will of God, or the RB that what Paul expresses in Ephesians 6 reflects the mind/will of God, or the RB that God himself endorses slavery. Once the scriptural slavery endorsements are rejected, the student then needs a story about how such rejections make sense. Did Paul write what he knew to be false, or only what he (falsely) believed to be true? In either case, why did God not intervene to prevent this error from intruding into scripture? Or to take a different case, can one hold that God ordered the slaughter of all the non-Jews in the Promised Land, but think that God was wrong? Can one hold that the slaughter was ordered by Saul, but it was not what God wanted? In making these moves with the religious texts, a

student might hold that there are some moral principles we just know independently of God's revelation. This may be so because God made us, and we know his will intrinsically, so when we hear "tellings" in some story and they contradict our intrinsic knowledge, we should reject that story. This may open a discussion of natural law: How, without the help of the Ten Commandments, did the Romans, Greeks, and lots of other folk know that murder was wrong? Alternately, we may need no religious account (from scripture) of how these moral truths are true. In fact, a number of Christian traditions recognize the plural avenues to moral knowledge, where reason may work independently of the revelations of scripture. For example, Anglicanism (and American Episcopalianism) recognizes three separate sources of moral knowledge: scripture, reason, and tradition.[5] The upshot here is that moral epistemology might be separate from scriptural revelation. As a consequence, a student might reject the priority of religion thesis.

There are, then, a variety of routes to rejecting RB in favor of MB for students. Nonetheless, while some students might reject biblical inerrancy vis-à-vis the details of the scriptural stories, they might remain committed to a more holistic view of scripture and its ethical significance. They may adopt a kind of holistic view of scriptural moral teaching according to which the Bible may not be correct in many of its specific details, but to focus on this is to—as some students may say—miss the forest for the trees. There may be a broader ethic proffered by scripture, one characterized as *Shalom*,[6] or peace, or a kind of commitment to the sanctity of life and the value of justice.[7]

This move reduces the conflict between the students' first-order RBs and their MBs, where the specific RBs are replaced by more general and more morally acceptable RBs. But a holistic strategy of rejecting the piecemeal moral teaching of the Bible in favor of the holistic vision still requires that the holistic vision would be one that we would accept—instead of an ethic of kindness and peace, it could be an ethic of random violence or pointless silliness. So even at the level of the holistic ethic, it seems we are granting priority to our independent moral judgment.

More provocatively, a student could retain his or her (specific) RB on some topic and reject the MB with which it conflicts. For example, a student might say that, while we have firm moral intuitions about suicide bombers, these intuitions may nonetheless be mistaken. Here, an instructor can propose that perhaps the graphic nature of the event, or the mere thought of dead children, actually overloads our moral sensibility, lessening our moral acuity. Since scripture is the word of God, and God knows better than us (and is much brighter than us), we ought to take him at his word. So, if what Samson did was essentially a kind of suicide-crushing (cf. suicide-bombing) and if God

approves of it, then *suicide-crushing is good after all*. In short, when *you* disagree with God, who should back down? As a consequence, our moral beliefs must be revised in light of the teachings from the sacred texts. So perhaps we *really should* hate our families in order to follow Christ; perhaps we are *truly obliged* to kill non-believers; and perhaps we not only are *actually entitled* to own slaves, but they should *be genuinely focused on serving us*. These attitudes may sound morally counter-intuitive, but our moral intuitions may be wrong. We are sinful and need correction. (The professor may need to do at least some of the work in articulating this position in a clear form for sub-sequent discussion.)

One thing to say for students who have the temerity to espouse this position publicly is that they have the courage of their convictions. But a worry to pose for these sorts of positions is that they make modern life particularly difficult. One would, if taking on this view, have to forgo a number of the benefits and tolerances of contemporary society. No shrimp (Leviticus 11:9–12). No polyester-cotton fabric (Leviticus 19:19). No shaving (Leviticus 19:27). No bacon cheeseburgers (Exodus 23:19; Leviticus 11:3–8). No work on Sunday (Exodus 31:14). Death for children who have premarital sex (Deuteronomy 22:20), for adulter-ers (22:22), and for people who work on Sunday (Exodus 35:2). And no cursing your parents, no matter how bad they are (Leviticus 20:9). One response may be that these injunctions must be accepted and that contemporary life is a legitimate target for religious criticism. But a further worry to pose for this approach is that, if broadly applied, it seems to suggest that we are simply incapable of moral perception or moral reasoning at all. If even our firmest moral intuitions should be swept aside by contrary scriptural winds, scripture's moral sway is absolute. A final concern to pose for discussion is that if our moral reasoning, even in cases where we have a good deal of confidence in our conclusions, is wrong, then it seems we cannot trust our reasoning when we must extend it beyond the dictates of scriptural principles. That is, if we get it so very wrong with the issue of suicide-bombing and killing non-believers, then how are we to reason confidently in cases where the Bible *has nothing to say*?[8]

3.1b Suspending Judgment

If a student has an MB and an RB and accepts that MB and RB are genuinely inconsistent, the student could resolve the inconsistency by suspending judgment about each of the inconsistent beliefs. Rather than choosing MB over RB, or vice versa, a student may feel unable to judge which to accept and which to reject. She may feel more or less equally attracted to both MB and RB. So, if the student clearly sees and accepts the inconsistency of MB and RB and is more or less

equally committed to both MB and RB, then it may be appropriate for her to suspend judgment about both MB and RB, pending further evidence or reflection. Of course, if the commitments to MB and RB are firm, it may be that the student finds it impossible to suspend judgment, even when thinking about the inconsistency. Importantly, in light of the suspension of judgment, the religious guidance and grounding theses are re-evaluated—if RBs and MBs yield intellectual stalemate and consequent suspension of judgment, RBs no longer have priority to MBs.

3.1c Paradoxical Theism

If a student has an MB and an RB and accepts that MB and RB are genuinely inconsistent, the student might simply and boldly embrace the inconsistency! To be honest, neither of the authors is convinced that this is a real possibility, but some theists do report embracing outright contradictions. And some particularly venturesome students may try out this position. Professors can inform them that the motto "Credo quia absurdum" is often associated with the early Christian apologist Tertullian—"I believe because it is absurd."[9] And Kierkegaard revels in the moral paradox with his discussion of Abraham and the knight of faith in *Fear and Trembling*.[10] The question to pose for students is, are these really possibilities? Can a person believe that (p) physical abuse is a morally legitimate basis for divorce, (q) Jesus said that there is one and only one morally legitimate basis for divorce, namely marital unfaithfulness, and (r) Jesus is never wrong? That triad is inconsistent: any two of the beliefs entails the negation of the third. If p & q, *not-r*. If p & r, *not-q*. If q & r, *not-p*. Certainly someone who claimed to assent to all three propositions might be either confused or disingenuous. Others may be merely inattentive, failing to think about the logical relations between these three propositions. After all, most of us presumably hold at least some inconsistent beliefs, but we haven't "put two and two together" and noticed it. If we *did* notice the inconsistency, could we then still maintain the inconsistent beliefs? This isn't at all clear, but the possibility cannot be ruled out.

One strategy to propose for the consideration of would-be paradoxical theists is the view that once one is in the right relationship with the divine, these contradictions no longer matter. There are higher truths on the table, and the contradictions are markers of the significance of the situation. Perhaps one may say that the logical hygiene of one's views is insignificant when compared to the personal connection one has to Christ. The contradictories, from the paradoxical-religious perspective, are actually the same. Of course, with these sorts of views, intellectual criticism usually does not make much headway. However, one concern may be captured by conceding (for the sake of argument) that if one

has a personal relationship with Christ, one is in a position where contradictories are the same. But if that is so, then being in a relationship with Christ is not so different from *not* being in that relationship (since contradictories are the same). And if that's so, the question to pose is "Why does being in a relationship with Christ make a difference?"

Things might be even more complicated. Consider tragic choice circumstances, where an agent is caught between two equally compelling obligations (e.g., Sartre's student who must stay home to care for his ailing mother yet also must join the Free French Army). Maybe both sides of a moral contradiction can be true, and perhaps paradoxical theism could be defended by embracing some form of "moral dialethism."[11] However, it is worth noting about tragic choices that the two choices are *independently normative*. That is, each of the two sides of the tragic choice is appealing in its own right. As such, even in accepting the contradictions, the paradoxical theist nevertheless rejects the priority of religion to morality. As a consequence, moral epistemology has at least some measure of independence from religious belief.

3.2 Denial Replies

It is now time to consider our second branch of responses, those that deny that the appearance of inconsistency is genuine and seek to clarify how the beliefs in question are, despite initial appearances, consistent. We could label these responses denial replies (since they deny there is any inconsistency). Here again we see three subspecies: (3.2a) intratextual contextualization, (3.2b) extratextual contextualization, and (3.2c) hermeneutic mysterianism.

3.2a Intratextual Contextualization

Suppose a student thinks that it is morally appropriate to love his family members, and he *also* thinks that Jesus says that he cannot be Jesus's disciple unless he hates his family. Since (presumably) Jesus thinks we all ought to become his disciples and that this would be *good*, it must also be good for that student to hate his family (since that is a *requirement* of the student becoming Jesus's disciple). But what should the student do, love his family or hate them? One suggestion for consideration would be that perhaps we need to look into Jesus's other pronouncements on the matter, using them as interpretive guides to understanding what Jesus means by saying I must "hate" my family. Jesus's proclamation that we have to *hate* (in Greek, it is *miseo*) our families in order to follow him may be reinterpreted in light of a similar passage in Matthew 10:37, where he says we should not love our parents or children "more than" (in Greek, it is *hyper phileo*) him. Perhaps, Jesus, in the Luke passage, is hyperbolizing. But in response to this line of reply, it is important to note that the two passages are

not inconsistent: one can *hate* one's family and thereby *love Jesus more than* them. All you need to do is just love Jesus a little bit. Given the independent demands of textual interpretation, minimally mutilating the texts (and allowing the demands of inerrancy), this might even seem as if it ought to be the preferred view—one that maintains that we should hate our families. So far, Matthew 10:37 is not a reason to "correct" Luke 14:26. Only if we allow our own *independent moral judgment* to direct the reinterpretations do they come out looking reasonable—in other words, Matthew 10:37 is a corrective to the Luke passage only if the moral demands of loving one's family are already in place. These demands are not articulated in these passages, but the passages rely on them for their reasonable interpretation. So, again, the lesson is that the priority of the religious to the moral is turned on its head. We use our MBs to determine the proper interpretation of the texts to derive our RBs.

3.2b Extratextual Contextualization

Suppose a student thinks that a military directive like "kill everything (including women and children)" is barbaric, and yet she also thinks that God issued such a directive to the Israelites on more than one occasion (according to scripture). But if God commands us to do only good, what should that student think about the "kill everything" directive? Is it good or barbaric? One kind of response might hold that while it is *normally* (or even *almost always*) barbaric, there can be particular socio-historical contexts when it is morally legitimate to "kill everything." In our current socio-historical circumstances, it is true that the "kill everything" directive is barbaric, but in days long past when things were not as they are now, perhaps that directive was (always, sometimes, a few times) morally legitimate. We may have *misread* the passage in question as offering ahistorical moral guidance. Perhaps the "kill everything" story reveals only the correctness of one individual's actions, but no general moral principles—it may be that God makes exceptions under very specific sorts of circumstances. Samuel's orders to Saul to slaughter the non-Jews might have been appropriate because Israel was only just getting started, and the Israelites had a bad habit of falling into idolatry. While the tradition was still in its formative stages, its practitioners needed to keep everyone else away. Now that the tradition is up and running, we can be more tolerant. But it is important to note, as a topic for class discussion, that in these cases of *corrective extratextual interpretation*, we are first signaled to reinterpret because of a conflict with our own firm moral beliefs; moreover, we are directed in our interpretations to find accounts that fit with reasonable moral directives. When we correctively reinterpret, we do not make the story *morally worse* by our own lights. For example, we

do not revise the lesson of the Axltapuhapec/Jephthah case to run that we should *have more and more children* so that we can make lucrative deals with God. Thus it again seems that the priority of religious belief to moral belief is overturned.

Or to take another example for discussion, maybe we are correct in believing that (for us, here, now) slavery is morally wrong, and yet at the time and in the place where God condoned it, slavery was, if not good, at least morally neutral. But it is important to highlight a problem with this reply for students who are adherents to the Judeo-Christian tradition, which is that whatever the merits of this view as a general moral view, it sits ill with a Judeo-Christian religious view. After all, if slavery is wrong *now* but was right *back then*, what could have changed? It cannot be just that God has changed his commands, since on the matter of slavery, he has not. Also, this form of socio-historical moral relativism counts against using scripture as a source of moral guidance, since our awareness that slavery is (for us, here, now) wrong is independent of scripture. On the present view, what relevance could those old scriptural stories have for us, here, now? Socio-historical moral relativism would turn scripture into a set of mere stories (of things long ago and far away), the moral features of which would be of no obvious relevance to the lives of current believers. As such, the extratextual interpretation strategy abandons the primacy of RBs to MBs.

Lastly, students may invoke a set of distinctions between civil, ceremonial, and moral commands to mitigate our moral outrage at some set of scriptural injunctions. It may be said that some of the supposed inconsistencies derive from a misunderstanding of the context of Jesus's prohibitions against divorce—this is a *ceremonial* prohibition, one that is about maintaining purity, not about the morality or even lawfulness of the demand. Or perhaps the case with Lot and the angels is a case of civic-mindedness, where a man asks his family to make a sacrifice for the good of God's messengers. Either way, students appealing to this strategy seek to reduce the conflict between RBs and MBs by placing the RBs in their proper (extratextual) context. But, of course, the question to raise for discussion is how one determines which category (civil, ceremonial, or moral) to place the RBs in. It seems clear that the answer has to be that we must go by our best moral lights.[12] That is, if the command is obviously immoral, then we classify it as a ceremonial command or as a civic command that has no moral implications. This, of course, requires that we engage in independent moral reflection.

3.2c Hermeneutic Mysterianism

A student facing the consistency challenge may grant that some MB of hers and some RB of hers are prima facie inconsistent and yet deny that they are in reality inconsistent as follows: Scripture cannot be in

contradiction to any known truth (including moral truths known to us). Our student might reply, "I think I know MB, and I think that my RB must be consistent with MB, *though the way in which that consistency is to be understood or shown may be inscrutable to me*. If you ask me whether MB and RB *appear* inconsistent I will agree that they do, but I am confident that in some way I cannot fathom they are in fact consistent. After all, God gave me my moral compass and he gave me scripture. So in some way, they fit together, but I couldn't say how."[13] In our experience the mysterianism provoked by consistency challenges and then expressed in class is almost always what we might call *faux mysterianism*, rather than a sincerely avowed view. We sometimes challenge our students to "search their hearts" and ask themselves whether they really accept the mysterian view clearheadedly and sincerely or whether they are simply trying to beg off responding to the challenge. That response opens the door to further conversation and reflection, thereby avoiding the impasse that mysterianism otherwise threatens to impose. Further, note that the strategy of hermeneutic mysterianism evacuates religious teachings of any moral guidance. The mysterian retains both her independent moral judgment and her religious belief. She merely adds that these are (in a way inscrutable to her) consistent. That means that her RBs never serve to correct her MBs, which means that RBs do not have priority over MBs.

4. Concluding Remarks

Suppose that when your students are presented with consistency challenges of the sort described above, many of them are (strongly) disinclined to give up their moral beliefs (which means they are not interested in 3.1b). Suppose further that they see little hope of dissolving the appearance of inconsistency through contextualization (3.2a, 3.2b) and that they are little attracted to the paradoxical (3.1c) or mysterian (3.2c) versions of theism. If all this were true, the only option for those students would be to reject the offending religious beliefs (i.e., a version of 3.1a). How significantly would they be led to alter religious beliefs in doing so? Well, if there were only one or two such cases, they might skate by and simply reject the doctrine of biblical inerrancy (i.e., the Bible contains no false statements). But as we have seen, morally disturbing cases abound in scripture (and in both the Old and New Testaments), generating numerous consistency challenges. (And we have limited ourselves to an even dozen cases out of *restraint*, not necessity.)[14]

But could this approach accomplish more than undermining the doctrine of biblical inerrancy and suggesting the view that scripture contains some—or many—false statements? Perhaps so. After all,

such challenges might be seen as undermining the general authority of scripture as a reliable source of information. In other words, the challenges might be seen as undermining the general *trustworthiness* of scripture. To the extent that many of a believer's beliefs may rest upon a (purely or largely) scriptural basis, such a believer might naturally come to wonder whether scripture can or should be trusted as a basis for those other beliefs, when in so many cases where an examination is possible (via comparison to that believer's own firm moral beliefs), scripture seems mistaken (by the believer's own lights).

We might see these possible revisions as coming in waves of increasing strength. First, with the acceptance of even one case of scriptural error, the believer must reject the doctrine of inerrancy. Next, as the believer comes to accept the existence of more and more scriptural errors about moral matters, the view that scripture is a reliable source of *moral guidance* must be set aside. After all, even in the cases where the believer thinks scripture has things morally right, this is decided by comparing scripture to the believer's *independent* and *uncluttered* moral judgment, the same type of independent moral judgment that can require the believer to acknowledge scriptural moral *errors*. Thus, such a believer has not only rejected the religious grounding thesis, but the religious guidance thesis as well. Finally, as the sense of independent judgment grows and as the acknowledged errors accumulate, the believer may consider more radical revisions. In Plato's *Euthyphro* (6a–6d), Socrates tells Euthyphro that it was precisely the morally disturbing stories about the traditional Greek gods (for example, Cronus eating his own children [*Euth*. 6a]) that led him to reject the traditional beliefs about the gods. Note that Socrates does not say that he came to reject Homer's or Hesiod's particular account of the activities of the gods, or that he came to acknowledge that these writers had been mistaken about some (moral) matters; rather he seems to be justifying himself in regard to the charge that he is facing of denying the existence of the old (traditional) gods (*Euth*. 3b). He *does* deny their existence, on the basis of the fact that the stories about them can be known—via independent moral judgment—to be so untrustworthy as to be entirely beyond reasonable belief.

Whether students will or should take that course when faced with these consistency challenges or whether they will instead make and seek to clarify and defend one of the many other responses described in Section 3 should be a matter of relatively little concern to us as teachers of philosophy. What is more important is that students are challenged to articulate and defend their beliefs, and we believe the method proposed in this paper for challenging some of their most important beliefs is an effective and enjoyable way of stimulating them to begin the lifelong process of doing so.

Appendix A

Religious Morality Test A

1. Axltapuhapec was a military commander in Aztec Mexico, and he asked the mountain gods to grant him victory over the Setinomma, "If thou wilt deliver the Setinomma into my hands, then the first creature that comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return from them in peace shall be the mountain gods'; I will offer that as a whole-offering" (Judiciary 11:30–31). The mountain gods granted the victory, and upon return home, Axltapuhapec's only child, his daughter, came out to welcome him home. Axltapuhapec rent his clothes, but his daughter admonished him: "Father, you made a vow to the mountain gods; do to me what you solemnly vowed." Axltapuhapec allowed her to mourn for two months; then he sacrificed her (Judiciary 11:32–39).

2. Mohammed's orders for how to deal with tribes living in the land allotted for the chosen, who resist Islam: "Go now and fall upon the Amalekites and destroy them, and put their property under ban. Spare no one: put them all to death, men and women, children and babes in arms, herds and flocks, camels and asses" (Koran, Sura 15:3).

3. The story of Chien-Shein: Xhuang-Xhu was the only righteous man in Chien-Shein. Uhrchien, the fire god, had decided to destroy the city for its wickedness. Two beautiful dragon-women were sent to Chien-Shein to warn Xhuang-Xhu to leave the city before the city was to be turned to a valley of flame. Xhuang-Xhu welcomed the dragon-women to his house, but all the men of Chien-Shein, who had seen the dragon-women arrive, gathered around the house and demanded that Xhuang-Xhu hand over the dragon-women so that they could "be close with them" (The Book of the Beginning 19:5). Chien-Shein refuses to hand over the dragon-women but instead offers his daughters. "I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly. Behold, now, I have two daughters which have not known a man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these messengers do nothing; for they came under the shadow of my roof" (The Book of the Beginning 19:7–8).

4. Buddha instructed a crowd: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Book of Sayings 14:26).

5. Hesiod on the role of women: "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Zeon was first formed, then Pandora. And Zeon was not deceitful, but the woman [Pandora] was in the transgression [of opening the box of plagues]" (Theogony 2:11–14).

6. Krishna on slavery: "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Bhagavan [the divine one], not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as slaves of Bhagavan, following the dharma [the way] from the heart" (Bhagavad Gita 6:5–6).

Appendix B

Religious Morality Test B

1. Jephthah was a military commander in ancient Israel, and he asked God to grant him victory over the Ammonites, "If thou wilt deliver the Ammonites into my hands, then the first creature that comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return from them in peace shall be the LORD's; I will offer that as a whole-offering" (Judges 11:30–31). God granted the victory, and upon return home, Jephthah's only child, his daughter, came out to welcome him home. Jephthah rent his clothes, but his daughter admonished him: "Father, you made a vow to the LORD; do to me what you solemnly vowed." Jephthah allowed her to mourn for two months, then he sacrificed her (Judges 11:32–39).

2. Samuel's orders to Saul for how to deal with tribes living in the promised land, who resist the Israelites: "Go now and fall upon the Amalekites and destroy them, and put their property under ban. Spare no one: put them all to death, men and women, children and babes in arms, herds and flocks, camels and asses" (I Samuel 15:3).

3. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah: Lot was the only righteous man in Sodom. God had decided to destroy the city because of its wickedness. Two angels were sent to Sodom to warn Lot to leave the city before the city was to be turned to brimstone. Lot welcomed the angels to his house, but all the men of Sodom, who had seen the angels arrive, gathered around the house and demanded that Lot hand over the angels so that they could "know them" (Genesis 19:5). Lot refused to hand over the angels, but instead offers his daughters. "I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly. Behold, now, I have two daughters which have not known a man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these angels do nothing; for they came under the shadow of my roof" (Genesis 19:7–8).

4. Jesus instructed a crowd: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26).

5. Paul on the role of women: "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression" (1 Timothy 2:11–14).

6. Paul on slavery: "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart" (Ephesians 6:5–6).

Notes

1. The prima facie inconsistency in this case between (*p*) it is wrong for a person to Φ and (*q*) God commanded some group of people to Φ is not fully explicit and presupposes at least one background (or auxiliary) belief, namely the belief that (*r*) God does not command people to perform wrongful actions. So while the simplest case of a consistency challenge would involve only two beliefs (*p* and *not-p*), many consistency challenges will actually involve three or more beliefs that together form an inconsistent set, such as the set (*p* & *q* & *r*). We will not always complicate the main text by stressing the role played by these background beliefs, but our references to inconsistency should be seen in this light and we will return to the issue in section 3 when discussing modes of response to a consistency challenge.

2. Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1957): 18–19.

3. Russell also (ibid., 19) chastises Jesus for his mistreatment of a fig tree (Mark 11:12–14, 20–21), but we can hardly imagine that students have warmer or stronger feelings for fig trees than for pigs. In Russell's defense, these are not the only cases he discusses. He also covers the problem of hell as it applies to the teaching of Jesus (ibid., 17–18). The point in presenting Russell's pig case is simply to illustrate that there are stronger and weaker, clearer and less clear cases.

4. Anthony Ellis has also presented a taxonomy of responses to tensions between religious and moral belief in "Morality and Scripture," *Teaching Philosophy* 19 (1996): 234–47. Ellis's three types of scriptural interpretation—the simple view, the interpretive view, and the holistic view—will receive some attention below as versions of what we see as contextualization replies.

5. For an account of the three sources of moral knowledge in the Anglican-Episcopal tradition, see Richard Hooker's *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, ed. R. W. Church and F. Paget (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888). These three sources of knowledge are commonly referred to as "the three-legged stool." Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this pointer.

6. For example, see Nicholas Wolterstorff's *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1984).

7. Ellis presents what he calls "the holistic view" as a strategy for responding to the consistency problem. As Ellis sees, for the holistic view, these consistency challenges serve to highlight the requirement of further moral reasoning and inquiry. See Ellis, "Morality and Scripture," 240–41.

8. Even if scripture were ever so clear on many moral issues and taken to be authoritative in those cases, scripture leaves many moral questions not only unanswered but *unasked*. Hence, a full morality will require us to rely on our own moral resources sooner or later in deciding the matters scripture does not (adequately) address. Ellis notes this and provides abortion as an example ("Morality and Scripture," 236).

9. Though apparently this famous motto is more like a paraphrase than a direct quotation. In *De Carne Christi* (V.4) Tertullian writes, "Crucifixus est dei filius: non pudet, quia pudendum est. Et mortuus est dei filius: prorsus credibile est, quia ineptum est. Et sepultus resurrexit: certum est, quia impossibile" (The Son of God was crucified: I am

not ashamed—because it is shameful. The Son of God died: it is immediately credible—because it is silly. He was buried, and rose again: it is certain—because it is impossible). The full text of *De Carne Christi* (in Latin and English) is available electronically at http://www.tertullian.org/works/de_carne_christi.htm.

10.   *Fear and Trembling*, ed. and trans. H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983): III, 159. Kierkegaard has other articulations of moral-paradoxical theism in *Philosophical Fragments*, ed. and trans. H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985): IV, 224.

11.   See J. Cogburn's case for "moral dialethism" in "The Philosophical Basis of What? The Anti-Realist Case for Dialethism," in *The Law of Non-Contradiction*, ed. Graham Priest, J. C. Beall, and Bradley Armour-Garb (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

12.   Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this point.

13.   This reply may be connected to the view of the so-called skeptical theists in contemporary philosophy of religion. The classic paper for skeptical theism is Stephen Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of 'Appearance,'" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 16 (1984): 73–93.

14.   For many more cases, see Ellis's "Appendix" ("Morality and Scripture," 243–45).

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