Are Moral Values Overriding?
How Beauty Challenges Robert Adams's Theory of Value

Martin Jakobsen

This article addresses the following metaethical question: do moral values have a special position among other values? It seems natural to think, like Robert Adams, that moral values do have a special position; they are of overriding importance. I argue that the overridingness thesis is inconsistent with Adams's value theory, the theory that only God has value in himself and all other things are valuable to the extent that they resemble God. I consider some possible ways of integrating the overridingness thesis that are latent in Adams's work and argue that neither succeeds. My main contribution is to propose a solution to the inconsistency in Adams's theory. I argue that a theological account of beauty gives us reason to reject the overridingness thesis. My position, then, is that morality overrides some other concerns but not all other concerns.

Key words: metaethics, aesthetics, Christian ethics, value theory,
divine command theory, Robert Adams

1. Adams's Problem: Integrating the Overridingness Thesis

When prudential concerns and moral concerns collide, how is it rational for a person to act? This question is frequently debated among consequentialists and deontologists and concerns the relation between the good life and the moral life (Parfit 2011, 130–149; Sidgwick 1981, 496–509; Williams 1973, 116–117). Some might hold that it is reasonable to act either way, some may hold that it is reasonable to give priority to one's own happiness, and some may hold that it is reasonable to give priority to what morality dictates. The latter position advocates the overridingness thesis – a person will always have most reason to do what morality requires (Stroud 1998, 171). Take the example of stealing. There is a strong moral reason not to steal. However, if the prudential gain for stealing is major, maybe life-changing, there will be a major prudential reason in favour of stealing. According to the overridingness thesis, the moral reason outweighs the prudential reason so that the person has the strongest reason to refrain from stealing. It is sometimes pointed out that the overridingness thesis is difficult to integrate into certain consequentialist theories of morality. I will argue that it is also difficult to integrate into the Christian moral philosopher Robert Adams's theistic value theory.

Adams embraces the overridingness thesis, which is a thesis that follows naturally from Adams's divine command theory. He defines moral wrongness as that which is contrary to the command of a loving God (Adams 1999, 281). God's command has a strong normative force; it is not a recommendation but an obligation (Adams 1999, 261). Divine commands, then, constitute moral rightness and wrongness and makes it obligatory, ensuring that a person will always have most reason to do what morality requires. Moreover, Adams is critical of theories where moral concerns have to 'compete on equal terms with the other' concerns so that morality does not always 'win' (Adams 1999, 180). However, while the overridingness thesis seems to follow from Adams's theory of morality, it is not at all clear how the overridingness thesis can be integrated into Adams's theory of value.

At the beginning of his book *Finite and Infinite Goods*, Adams lays out a theory of value where there is one intrinsic good, one prime exemplar of goodness, and this intrinsic good is God (Adams 1999, 14, 28). All particular good things derive their goodness from this prime exemplar. This means that something is good only insofar as it has a likeness to, or a resemblance to, God. For instance, it is good for humans to be compassionate because this resembles God. Adams makes clear that this theory of value concerns not only moral value but also aesthetic value. God is not only the prime exemplar of goodness but also the prime exemplar of beauty, and, accordingly, something is beautiful only insofar as it resembles God (Adams 1999, 41).

According to Adams, something is morally good because it resembles God, and something else is aesthetically good because it resembles God. But this forces the following question: Why should the moral kind of resemblance override other kinds of resemblance? For an example of how different kinds of values can conflict, consider the somewhat fictionalised painter Gaugin.[1] Gaugin can choose to live his life at home with his family, or he can choose to leave and pursue his passion for painting. If Gaugin pursues his passion for painting, he will resemble God regarding creativity, self-expression, devotion, and enjoyment and he will create works that exemplify beauty. However, he will not resemble God's faithfulness. Anyhow, the net-resemblance of the Gaugin who goes on painting seems to be higher than that of the Gaugin who does not go on to paint. The Gaugin who paints seems to realise greater value than the Gaugin who stays. This implies that Gaugin has more reason to leave and pursue painting than to stay with his family, more reason to follow the creative path than to follow the moral path, which contradicts the overridingness thesis. So, there is a tension in Adams's moral theory here. On one hand, he wants to uphold the overridingness thesis. On the other hand, it seems quite difficult to integrate this thesis into his theory of value.

In what follows, I will consider some possible ways of integrating the overridingness thesis

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[1] This is Williams's Gaugin, not the historical Gaugin. See Williams (1981, 23).

into Adams's theory and argue that they are not successful. Later, I will argue that a theological account of beauty gives us reason to reject the overridingness thesis. The best option for Adams, then, is not to reconsider his theory of value but to reconsider the overridingness thesis.

2. Possible Solutions: Unification, Compensation, or Commands

One strategy for integrating the overridingness thesis could be to deny the claim that Gaugin has most reason to pursue his desire for painting, arguing that one does not have the strongest reason to pursue a course of action where there is a clear conflict of values. One could appeal to Plato's conception of a unity among the virtues, where all virtues imply each other as they are grounded in the same transcendent good (Plato 1967, 349B). The unity of virtues implies that you have the strongest reason to pursue a course of action where all the virtues are implied (or, with a weaker formulation, where there is no conflict) and that a course of action where there is a conflict of values is not really virtuous at all. One could also appeal to the theological conviction that God is our ultimate concern, that which we ought to love with all our heart and mind and strength. The ultimate concern is not certain moral concerns or prudential concerns; it is God, the one infinite good. As all values are unified and in harmony in the infinite good, we should pursue the course of action where values do not conflict but are unified. A course of action where values conflict might exemplify some resemblance to God, but it will also exemplify some anti-resemblance to God, such as faithlessness instead of faithfulness, and it can therefore not be the course of action that we have the most reason to pursue.

A solution along the lines of unification seems to be in harmony with Adams's theory, which is a platonic and theistic theory that grounds all kinds of value in God. However, Adams rejects this solution (Adams 2006, 173), which seems to be a reasonable thing to do. This solution might work in an ideal world, but our world is not ideal. Our world is not the kind of world where there is always one alternative where moral concerns, aesthetic concerns, and prudential concerns all point in the same direction. Many of us have the experience of facing hard choices where some concern has to be sacrificed, making it plausible to suggest that ethics in the real world is not the same as ethics in the ideal world so that we sometimes have to choose a course of action that is less than ideal. There are also theological reasons that suggest we live in a world where we have to accept the less than ideal – as long as this world is under the conditions of sin, heavenly order is not attainable within history, and we sometimes have to go along with a less-than-ideal course of action (Niebuhr 1954, chap. 9).

Another way of integrating the overriding thesis into Adams's theory of the good could be to appeal to the notion of God as a judge. If there is a God, and there is life after death, which Christian theism suggests, God's judgement could ensure that it will always pay off to choose

the moral life. God could reward the virtuous and even compensate for the losses that a moral life entails. So, while the moral life might conflict with happiness in this worldly life, morality and happiness will converge in the heavenly life. In the end, it will always pay off to choose the moral life, which means that the prudent thing to do is to let morality trump other concerns (Kant 2015, 5:122-124; Layman 2002, 313). However, this line of reasoning gives the impression that the moral life is a purely instrumental activity that we engage in so that we hopefully get some reward in the end. To avoid this impression, one can reason in a slightly different way: one could hold that union with God is the highest good. However, union with God is not a reward for upholding some moral rule; it is rather something that one is approaching through the formation of character. One may see the moral life as a life of resembling God and hold that the moral life facilitates union with God. Acting against moral requirements is to sin, and to sin is to alienate oneself from God. So, as sin creates a distance from God, a person will never have the strongest reason to sin and therefore never have the strongest reason to act against a moral requirement.

This line of reasoning, the connection between immoral acts and alienation from God, is also present in Adams's work (Adams 1999, 239). Therefore, Adams may propose that the moral life facilitates union with the highest good and that immoral acts alienate oneself from the highest good, which implies that moral concerns are of overriding importance. However, while this line of reasoning enables Adams to say that morality overrides prudence, it does not enable him to say that moral values override other values. If Adams is to argue that moral concerns override aesthetic concerns, he needs to give an account of why disregarding morality results in greater alienation from God than disregarding beauty and why resembling God's goodness and not God's beauty facilitates union with God. In other words, Adams still needs to explain why moral values have a higher rank than other kinds of values.

One resource that Adams might draw attention to in order to explain why moral concerns rank above other concerns is God's command.[2] Adams is a divine command theorist, holding that it is God's command that makes some act required or forbidden (Adams 1979, 76; 1999, 281). Furthermore, he holds that God issues moral obligations and religious obligation (which is a type of moral obligation) but that God does not issue aesthetic obligations (Adams 1999, 232). So, since God only issues moral obligations, and we always have most reason to do what God commands, we would always have most reason to do that which morality requires. By this line of reasoning, Adams could secure the overridingness thesis. However, there is a problem here. Why should one suppose that God only issues commands concerning morality? One could imagine that God issues commands on, for instance, how to build and decorate God's temple, build it so that it bears a resemblance to the divine – and such commands would qualify as aesthetic rather than moral. So, to ground the overridingness thesis in God's command, Adams needs to support the claim that God only issues commands

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[2] This has at least been suggested by others. See for instance Metz (2008, 210).

regarding morality. He needs to explain what it is that distinguishes moral value from aesthetic value so that God only issues commands concerning the former.

According to Adams's divine command theory, God's command transforms an act from being merely valuable to being both valuable and required. That some act is good does not entail that it is required; it only becomes required if God commands it (Adams 1999, 367). A question for Adams, then, is why God chooses to transform some good things and not others into requirements. Does God issue the commands he does simply because that is what he wants to do? If this is the case, then one runs the risk of having a theory where moral obligations become arbitrary, as is a common danger in the field of divine command theories. Adams argues that God does not issue commands based on an arbitrary will but based on a will that follows from God's nature (Adams 1999, 250, 255). As God's commands are based on God's nature, they are not arbitrary, and they are always good. However, the view that the commands are based on God's nature seems to suggest that God could issue commands regarding both morality and aesthetics. After all, God's nature is both good and beautiful.

Adams might argue that a certain feature is needed for something to be a requirement – in other words, that God only commands actions that share a certain feature – and that only moral concerns share this feature. When laying out his theory of the obligatory, he argues that obligations are always relational, that they only exist in a social context (Adams 1999, 241). He might argue that only moral concerns share this social aspect, that this social element distinguishes moral concerns from aesthetic concerns so that only morality can amount to obligations. However, aesthetics also seems to have a social component (Finnis 2011, 87–88). Aesthetics seem to play a large part in the life of a community. There are some activities – such as play or dance – where two or more parties actively engage with each other in a beautiful manner, or other activities – such as a concert or theatre – where the one party is more on the receiving end. Aesthetics, then, just as morality, fulfils the criteria that obligations have to be relational.

Adams might also argue that a command brings with it certain features that are only fitting for moral concerns, which could explain why God only transforms moral values into obligations. When Adams opposes perfectionism, the view that God's commands aim at maximising the achievement of human good, he states that 'I must think of God's decisions in commanding as guided less directly by the question, What actions would it be good for people to perform? than by the question, What behaviour would it be good to oppose with sanctions of punishment, anger, or feelings of guilt?' (Adams 1999, 321). If it is the case that God decides to issue commands in cases where punishment, anger, and guilt is appropriate, Adams could explain why God only issue commands concerning morality given that these features only fit moral concerns. And Adams does argue that guilt, anger, and punishment are only appropriate when acting contrary to a moral obligation (Adams 1999, 238–41). Now,

I do not think that Adams's line of reasoning concerning perfectionism can be used as an explanation of why God only issue commands regarding moral concerns. First of all, it is somewhat circular to assume that God only issues moral commands because God thinks in moral terms when deciding which commands to issue. Second, for the argument to work, Adams must make the case that guilt and anger are tied to moral values and not other kinds of values; that anger is appropriate when neglecting a moral value but not when neglecting an aesthetic value. But Adams does not make this case. In Adams theory, guilt and anger do not mark the distinction between moral and non-moral value; but the obligatory from the non-obligatory; it marks 'the distinctiveness of obligation' (Adams 1999, 246). As guilt and anger do not mark a distinction between moral values and other values, these features do not explain why God would only issue moral commands.

Another solution that might fit with Adams's work is the view that God's commands transform any obligation into a moral obligation. Adams has written that he is sceptical of drawing sharp lines between moral values and other kinds of value (Adams 2006, 19). Given these fuzzy lines between moral values and other kinds of values, one could go on arguing that God's commands can cross the lines. God might command something for aesthetic reasons, but the act of commanding would generate a moral obligation. As God's command creates overriding reasons, as well as giving the act a moral character, a person will always have the most reason to do what morality requires – thus the overridingness thesis is secured. Adams himself does not seem to endorse this solution as he says he does not believe that God issues aesthetic obligations (Adams 1999, 232) – but it is a solution that fits quite well with Adams's theory.

A problem with this solution is that it makes Adams's theory vulnerable to a classic problem for divine command theories as it muddles the distinction between Adams's theory of value and theory of obligation. Let's grant that if God commands some act for aesthetic reasons, the act becomes a moral obligation. Presumably, as this act has been given a moral character, it has also been given moral value. But that would bring quite serious problems into Adams's value theory. Adams makes clear that there is a distinction between his theory of value and theory of obligation. Arguing that God's command can give an act moral value will challenge this distinction. It will follow that whatever God commands will be morally good. A problem with this view has been formulated the following way (Morriston 2009): what if God commanded something terrible? If God's command generates value, whatever God commands will be good – be that gossip or genocide.[3] Adams's solution to this problem is to make a distinction between value and obligation – value comes from God's nature, while

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[3] Another problem is that it contradicts the supervenience thesis, which is generally taken to be uncontroversial (McPherson 2015). The supervenience thesis says that there can be no ethical difference between two acts without there being some natural or non-ethical difference between them. But if moral goodness is constituted solely by God's command, the supervenience thesis no longer holds. For a discussion of this, see Jakobsen (2020, 169–73).

obligations are generated by God's command – where God only generates obligations where there is value (Adams 1979). If Adams is to uphold his distinction between what constitutes value and what constitutes obligation, he cannot at the same time say that God's command transforms any obligation into a moral obligation.

Adams might respond by arguing that the lines between different kinds of values are not only fuzzy but that different kinds of values have considerable overlap. He could argue that moral value is an overarching value and that other kinds of value have some share in it. If this is the case, God could command something for aesthetic reasons, making it a moral obligation, and do so without *making* it morally valuable as it already has some degree of moral value. This response is not present in Adams's *Finite and Infinite Value*. Here, he presents 'goodness' or 'excellence' as the overarching category and states that values such as morality and beauty are both 'species of the good' (Adams 1999, 13–14). But things are different in his *A Theory of Virtue*, where Adams presents what he calls a broad conception of moral virtue (Adams 2006, 19). 'The good' is still the overarching category, but Adams gives such a broad definition of morality that any pro-attitude towards good things becomes moral. As a result, goodness is moralised. A pro-attitude towards anything valuable – such as religious value, aesthetic value, intellectual value, or pleasure – is considered morally virtuous.[4]

By holding that a pro-attitude towards any good is a moral virtue, Adams could argue that anything God commands is what you have the strongest reason to do as well as what you morally ought to do, thereby upholding the overridingness thesis. However, this suggestion comes with a cost. First, intuition seems to count against the moralising of goodness. People's intuitions might of course differ, but Adams admits that there is something implausible in the view that a pro-attitude towards any good is a moral virtue as it implies that, for instance, good taste in aesthetic matters is a moral virtue in the same sense as kindness and honesty (Adams 2006, 20).

Second, theoretical clarity counts against the moralising of goodness. In *Finite and Infinite Goods* – where moral, aesthetical, and religious value are species of the good – Adams is able to make some useful conceptual distinctions. He makes a distinction between devotion to God (which God has commanded) and being moral. While there is some overlap between the two categories, he states that religious devotion is 'larger than morality' (Adams 1999, 181). Not all religious concerns are strictly moral concerns. He also makes a distinction between moral obligations and a person's vocation. Adams understands vocation in a comprehensive manner. It is not a matter of what one is to do in a particular situation but a matter of who and what one is called to be (Adams 1999, 301). Generally speaking, a

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[4] Adams excludes some things of instrumental value. A pro-attitude towards money is not morally virtuous. Other things of instrumental value, such as a pro-attitude towards securing for people an adequate income, are considered a moral virtue (Adams 2006, 22).

vocation is God specifying 'what goods are given to us to love' (Adams 1999, 302). It can include one's work, spouse, political activity, volunteer work, or intellectual pursuit; it includes both moral and religious concerns but is larger than both. Moreover, a vocation is either something God has commanded or something God has invited a person into. As such, it can have the normative weight of an obligation. So, in *Finite and Infinite Goods*, Adams is able to distinguish between different kinds of normativity, all of which can take the form of an obligation as it is commanded by God. In *A Theory of Virtue*, Adams cannot make such a distinction as the pursuit of any goods is a moral matter. The vocation to do artwork or to study philosophy is a moral matter – it is a pro-attitude towards a good that might even have the form of a command. The same goes for devotion to God and religious practices such as worship, communion, and catechesis. These are all moral matters that constitute a person's moral character.

Not being able to distinguish between different kinds of normativity brings a lack of clarity into Adams's theory. On one hand, goodness is moralised so that a pro-attitude towards any goods is a moral matter that constitutes moral character. On the other, Adams seems to hold that a pro-attitude towards some goods is necessary in order to have a moral character, while a pro-attitude towards others is optional. For instance, he states that a person can have great moral virtue on the whole with no love for aesthetics or philosophy or can have exquisite aesthetic taste but a bad moral character. Caring for the good of other people, however, is necessary for a moral character (Adams 2006, 36). The line he draws between necessary and optional pro-attitudes seems to mirror the line commonly drawn between moral and non-moral goodness. The lack of clarity in Adams's theory, then, concerns how he erases the line between moral values and non-moral values while at the same time maintaining that only traditional moral concerns are necessary for moral virtue.

Adams might defend himself by pointing out that he treats what is commonly regarded as cases of moral and non-moral goodness as instances of moral excellence in the same sense though not necessarily to the same degree (Adams 2006, 22). Good aesthetic taste, for instance, is a moral virtue but a relatively minor one. But this kind of answer only takes us back to the original problem concerning overridingness: why is it that some values, some kind of resemblance to God, rank above others?

So, it is not clear, in Adams's theory, why typical moral concerns rank above other normative concerns. While Adams supports the overridingness thesis, the thesis does not cohere very well with Adams's theory; it is not clear why resembling God's justice or faithfulness overrides resembling God's beauty, and it is not clear why divine commands based on God's nature – which is both good and beautiful – only amount to moral obligations.

3. A Final Possible Solution: Imitate it All

Let me suggest a possible way of resolving the tension between a monistic theory of value, where both moral value and aesthetic value are grounded in the one intrinsic value, and the overridingness thesis, which implies that morality has greater weight than other kinds of values. First, let's weigh moral concerns against prudential concerns. Like Adams, I hold that God is the supreme good, and all other things are good insofar as they resemble God. Consequently, the moral life is a life of resembling God as much as humanly possible. In Christian terms, one could say that the moral life consists of imitating Christ, sharing the attitudes and actions of Christ (Zagzebski 2004, 233). So, the moral life directs one towards unity with the supreme good, while the immoral life consists in alienating oneself from the supreme good. Union with the supreme good, namely God, would be good for us. If it can be attained, it must be seen as the most fulfilling way of life and as something supremely desirable. Consequently, we have most reason to imitate God even if this conflicts with present prudential concerns, which is to say that moral concerns override prudential concerns.[5]

When this line of reasoning was suggested above, an objection was raised, namely that if a person has the most reason to imitate God, and God's nature is both good and beautiful, it is hard to see how moral concerns can override aesthetic concerns. So, let's turn to the case of weighing moral concerns against aesthetic concerns. Consider for instance a case where you have a large sum of money, and you can either donate it to a foundation for famine relief or to a foundation for making some beautiful building, such as a cathedral. In this case, you have both the means and the opportunity to help the poor. It seems plausible to say that in such a situation, you ought to help the poor; your moral reasons for giving to the poor outweigh your aesthetic reasons for building something beautiful. However, if humans ought to imitate both God's goodness and God's beauty, it is hard to see why the one should automatically outweigh the other. On this point, I suggest that the theist should bite the bullet and say that if God's nature is both good and beautiful, we ought to imitate it all, thereby not letting morality automatically override beauty.

What I suggest is that the tension between Adams's theistic theory of value and the overridingness thesis is best solved by rejecting the overridingness thesis. Adams's value theory seems to imply that beauty should be placed on par with morality. Some might think that this is an exaggeration of the importance of beauty, so let me point to a few thinkers who have stressed the importance of beauty, both how beauty is important in connection with

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[5] While a saint might agree that union with God is the highest good, a foolish sinner might not. A sinner might not find the moral life attractive, nor find heaven desirable, and therefore think that sinning is more in his prudential interest than imitating God. Pascal, among others, points out in his essay 'On the Conversion of the Sinner' that there is a connection between character formation and the perception of value, writing that when the sinner receives grace, his orientation towards the world and towards values changes (Wood 2013, 215).

other values and how it ought to be pursued as an end in itself. Philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer describes beauty as the radiance that immediately attracts the desire of the human soul (Gadamer 2013, 498). It draws us towards the good and towards (textual) meaning (Gadamer 2013, 37, 506). Nevertheless, beauty is not merely something that serves an instrumental purpose. It is desirable for its own sake, says Gadamer, and lays out Plato's close connection between the good and the beautiful (Gadamer 2013, 493). The Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar also puts great emphasis on beauty. Beauty is ontologically connected with truth and goodness, so that if our regard for beauty diminishes, so will our regard for the two others.[6] Additionally, beauty draws us towards the good and the true. A person might stand before the good, says Balthasar, and ask himself why the good must be done and not its alternative, evil. Might it not be more exciting to investigate Satan's depths? What attracts us towards the good, as well as towards the truth, is beauty (Balthasar 2009, 19).[7] But beauty is not just a means. We should have just as high a regard for beauty as for her two sisters, truth and goodness. When he starts off his seven-volume work on theological aesthetics, he gives structural priority to aesthetics by saying that when we start talking about God, 'beauty is the word that shall be our first' (Balthasar 2009, 18).

While the notion of beauty has been widely neglected in the Protestant tradition (Balthasar 2009, 52; Barth 1957, 650) – just think of the place of aesthetics in Catholic or Orthodox worship compared to Protestant worship – there is a theological emphasis on beauty by the Protestant theologian Karl Barth. According to Balthasar, Barth is the first in the history of Protestant theology to restore the attribute of God's beauty (Balthasar 2009, 52). Barth treats God's beauty as an indispensable part of God's glory. God's radiant beauty is what enlightens and convinces and persuades us. If the beauty of God is neglected, God might well be conceived of as joyless. Additionally, such neglect renders the Christian message tedious, without sparkle or humour, and neither persuasive nor convincing (Barth 1957, 655).

So, there are a few thinkers that have emphasised beauty as an important normative notion. While Adams operates with a tight connection between morality and beauty, a connection secured by God being the prime exemplar of both these normative notions, he does not share Balthasar's emphasis on our strong reasons for pursuing beauty (Adams 1999, 4, 37). Concerning morality, Adams holds that certain actions are *right*, actions we have such a strong reason to do that we simply '*have* to do' (Adams 1999, 232). But this, he says, holds only for morality and not for aesthetics (Adams 1999, 232). Now, let me draw upon a couple of episodes reported in the Gospels and argue that a theological case can be made for the claim that aesthetics can provide strong reasons for action, strong enough so that moral

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[6] 'We can be sure that whoever sneers at her [beauty's] name … can no longer pray and soon will no longer be able to love' (Balthasar 2009, 18).
[7] See also Pascal's similar view in Wood (2013, 38–39, 132).

reasons do not override them.

Above, we considered the imagined case of how a large sum of money should be donated. A quite similar deliberation is reported in Matthew 26. Here, a woman has an alabaster box of very precious ointment and pours it on the head of Jesus. The disciples see this as a morally disgraceful act of waste – the ointment is expensive and should rather be sold and the money given to the poor! Jesus tells them not to bother the woman as she had done 'a beautiful thing to me' (Matt 26:10, NIV). Now, the disciples seem to think that a moral reason (helping the poor) overrides whatever reason the woman may have for anointing Jesus. This might seem like a good judgement, especially given how Jesus tells people to 'not store up for yourselves treasures on earth' (Matthew 6:19) but rather 'sell everything you have and give to the poor … Then come, follow me' (Mark 10:21). However, Jesus corrects them, stating that they are wrong in thinking so. I take Jesus' reaction to imply that beauty does not fall lower down the scale of normativity than morality. On the contrary, beauty has a vital and non-negotiable place in life (Cottingham 2008, 265).

It also seems plausible that beauty provides a strong reason for action when considering how various biblical texts describe responses to a glimpse of the highest beauty. We have prophets seeing the glory of God, Paul being struck by it, and disciples seeing the glory of Jesus (Ezekiel 3:23, Acts 9, Mark 9). Being faced with such radiant beauty clearly merits some kind of response, and the proper response is to devote oneself to it.[8] Matthew 13:46 speaks of a precious pearl – when we recognise its great value, we sell everything we have to acquire it. When finding this precious pearl, when seeing the attractiveness of the divine glory, one recognises that this radiant beauty gives a reason to lay down all of one's possessions and devote ourselves to it (Balthasar 2009, 26, 33).

My position here is identical to that of Balthasar – the normativity of beauty is on par with her two sisters, truth and goodness. First, this is to say, contrary to Adams, that it is not just morality that provides decisive reasons for actions. Beauty can provide such strong reasons as well, as in the case of encountering the radiant pearl. Second, this is to say that beauty can, in fact, override otherwise strong moral reasons. As beauty is not to be pushed further down the normative ladder than goodness, moral reasons do not automatically override aesthetic reasons. Moral reasons may sometimes – as in the case of the woman anointing Jesus – themselves be overridden. However, it should be pointed out that the moral reason in question here – a general obligation to help the poor – is what Kant calls an 'imperfect moral duty' (Kant 2012, 4:421).[9] A perfect duty, such as the duty not to steal, provides a stronger moral reason, and I do not think that Jesus would support the woman anointing him if she had overridden a perfect duty – for example, if the woman had stolen or killed to get the

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[8] As seen in Mark 9:5, it is not always obvious what this proper response is.
[9] Kant holds that these imperfect duties are, despite their name, perfectly genuine duties (Kagan 2008, 128).

perfume.[10]

When this high theological regard for beauty is combined with the thought of *imitatio Dei,* beauty attains a non-negotiable place in life. If humans ought to imitate the divine, they ought to embrace both God's goodness and beauty. In a sense, this seems quite life-affirming – aesthetic experiences, many forms of play, game, dance, music, and so on, can be seen as constitutive parts of a flourishing human life (Finnis 2011, 77–78) and can even be treated as an analogy for the heavenly life (Lewis 2002, 92–93). Therefore, I suggest that a Christian theory of normativity should not accept the overridingness thesis. That is, one could hold that morality overrides prudence but reject a general rule saying that goodness overrides beauty.

4. Conclusion

According to Adams, something is morally good because it resembles God, and something else is aesthetically good because it resembles God. This theory of value fits poorly with the overridingness thesis, for why should the moral kind of resemblance override other kinds of resemblance? I argue that a theological account of beauty places the normativity of beauty on par with truth and goodness and that aesthetic considerations can sometimes outweigh moral considerations. The tension in Adams's theory is solved, then, by saying that one kind of resemblance should not override another. Humans ought to imitate not only parts of God's nature but rather imitate it all, beauty included.

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[10] Consequently, I think Gaugin's duty to stay faithful to his family is stronger than his reasons for leaving.

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