

Reply to Blackburn

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1) Whether God has issued a command to do or not do some action is as much a contingent truth as whether the action has had a certain effect. Hence God can change the moral status of various particular actions either by bringing it about that they have a different effect from their normal effect, or by issuing a command. (2) If God issues a command to do some action and thereby makes it obligatory to do that action, it doesn't follow that it was not already very good to do that action. It may previously have been supererogatorily good. Supererogatory good actions (e.g. giving your own life in order to save someone else's life) are often the very best of actions. But for the reasons stated in my paper it may sometimes be good for God to make some supererogatory actions obligatory. (3) The example of stoning an adulteress is indeed "tendentious"; no Christian could regard that as a good thing to do – see John 7:53 – 8:11. (4) I did not say that "without relying on miracles there would not even be [a] little niche for God among the human attitudes and institutions of morality." I said that we could not know the moral status of those actions which he has commanded (or commended) us to do or not to do without relying on miracles. But I claimed that we have a duty, if God exists, to give him grateful worship, whether or not he has given us any further commands. I have argued at length elsewhere that natural theology (cosmological, teleological etc. arguments) makes it significantly more probable than not that there is a God with the traditional divine properties without needing any help from miracles; and that Hume's arguments to the contrary have no force.