

# The Aporia of Categorical Obligations and an Augustinian Teleological Way Out of It\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Starting from the 1950s, three traditions emerged in analytic philosophy, which, among other things, focus on the critical examination of categorical obligations. One of them is the analytic revival of virtue ethics. Some proponents of this new wave of virtue ethics (most famously, Anscombe 1958 and MacIntyre 1985) have claimed that it makes no sense to build morality upon the notion of categorical obligations because this notion is unintelligible without a moral system that is forgotten in the modernity. Another, more recent tradition also criticizes the notion of categorical obligations. The proponents of moral error theory (or normative eliminativism) argue that because categorical obligations and the normative properties that are too closely related to them are queer from a physicalist/naturalistic perspective, it is highly implausible to suppose that such obligations and properties exist (Husi 2013; Olson 2014; Cowie 2016; Streumer 2017; Cote-Bouchard 2017). The last tradition that I would like to mention is, in fact, not a tradition proper, but the influential work of Bernard Williams, whose moral philosophy is hard to categorize because he advocates some kind of anti-theoretical attitude toward ethics. Regardless of whether one labels his work “Nietzscheian” or with any other fancy name, he certainly believed that the notion of categorical obligation is not only harmful to personal integrity, but also nonsensical because every reason has to be internal and somehow connected to the agent’s motivations (see especially Williams 1981. 101–113.).

My problem with these challenges to categorical obligations is that in my view, the arguments in favor of them are either unnecessarily convoluted (I regard MacIntyre 1985 as such an example), or rely too heavily on some kind of

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worldview. In the case of some virtue ethicists (most notably Anscombe 1958), a Divine Command Theory about categorical obligations seems to lurk in the background. In contrast, contemporary error theorists and their arguments are heavily influenced by physicalist/naturalist ontological assumptions – it is not a coincidence that they so frequently mention the alleged ontological queerness of moral properties and facts. In proposing that the main point of talking about reasons is to *explain* actions, even Williams himself reveals the naturalist underpinnings of his philosophy.

The reason why I bring up the influence of supernatural and naturalist views on these ethical approaches is not because I suspect that they distort their criticism of categorical obligations, but because I believe that the challenge to categorical obligations is rather simple and independent of ontological and ethical frameworks.<sup>1</sup> And I think that it is rather important that this simple problem with categorical obligations arises not because one has this or that worldview (and the previous accounts may give the impression that it can be the case) but because the concepts of ‘reason’, ‘obligations’, ‘rationality’ and ‘motivational states’ are connected to each other in a way that it is hard to make sense of the notions of ‘categorical reason’ and ‘categorical obligation’. To see the gist of a conceptual problem clearly has its own value in itself, but I hope that my characterization of the problem can show why a specific – Augustinian – solution of the problem is the best if one does not take its metaphysical price into account.<sup>2</sup>

In the second section of the present paper, I outline the key concepts in a way that is helpful in posing a challenge to categorical obligations. In the third section, I use this framework and describe the aporetic challenge to categorical obligations. In the fourth section, I argue in general terms that there is a promising way out of the aporia if one accepts that not only categorical but also quasi-categorical obligations can do the job that is needed in order to have a moral system with strong normative power. In the final section, I give a general outline of a system of quasi-categorical obligations that is based on the Augustinian view of motivations.

<sup>1</sup> To my mind, the best and most worldview-independent formulation of the problem can be found in Anthony Robert Booth’s recent paper (Booth 2022). However, it is swamped with a punctual but pedantic jargon that is necessary for closely engaging with recent debates on the subject. My goal is not to defend error theory against every recent objection (as Booth attempts to do) but to outline the problem of categorical obligations *both* accurately and *simply*.

<sup>2</sup> An anonymous reviewer objected that it makes not much sense that I attempt to reconstruct the problem in a worldview-independent way if the solution implies some kind of metaphysical worldview. I beg to differ. If one has a formulation of the problem that can be accepted by every rational person regardless of their worldview, it is a great step forward because in this case they can agree that the problem is there and it is not generated only by a part of this or that worldview. Moreover, one can more clearly compare the possible solutions to the problem even if all solutions imply some worldviews.

## II. THE NOTIONS OF HYPOTHETICAL AND CATEGORICAL REASONS AND THEIR RELATION TO CATEGORICAL OBLIGATIONS

First, I would like to clarify the notion of categorical reason. Richard Rowland gives an elegant description of its content:

Categorical normative reasons are normative reasons for agents to do things or have certain attitudes irrespective of their desires, aims, wants and feelings, and the roles in which they happen to find themselves; these reasons for agents to do things are ontologically/existentially independent of these agents' desires, aims, wants, feelings and roles. In contrast, hypothetical normative reasons are reasons for agents to do things or have certain attitudes that are not independent of these agents' desires, aims or roles. For instance, if, but only if, you like blueberry muffins, there is a reason for you to buy some. (Rowland 2013. 3)

Note that in itself, this is a rather formal definition of categorical reasons because only one difference between categorical and hypothetical reasons follows from it *logically*. This difference is explicitly mentioned in the definition: categorical reasons provide a reason to act regardless of your mental states or societal roles. Strictly speaking, it does not follow from this definition that categorical reasons have stronger normative force than hypothetical ones. That is, it does not follow from it that categorical reasons necessarily outweigh hypothetical ones and provide stronger reasons to act than "If..., then..."-type reasons. For instance, it could be the case that your hypothetical reason to steal some blueberry muffins outweighs your categorical reason to not steal them because the definitions do not exclude the possibility that you like blueberry muffins so much that this fact gives rise to a super-powerful reason to neglect your categorical reason to not steal them.

Of course, this idea seems to be absurd. That a desire for blueberry muffins can override a categorical reason contradicts any interpretation of the notion of categorical reason. This is not only because the idea is implausible but because this possibility makes the notion of categorical reason useless or even empty. Insofar as a hypothetical reason can be more powerful than a categorical reason, acting upon a categorical reason can be rational only if there is no such powerful hypothetical reason in the situation. However, whether there is such a powerful hypothetical reason in the practical situation depends on what your desires/aims/wants/feelings are. That is, if hypothetical reasons could be more powerful than categorical reasons, then whether acting upon a categorical reason is rational would depend on what your desires/aims/wants/feelings are. So, in this case, even if *the existence of categorical reasons* did not depend on what your motivational states are, the *rationality* of acting upon categorical reasons in any specific situation would depend on these states.

The problem is that if (i) the rationality of acting upon categorical reasons depends on the mental states of the agent and (ii) one should do in any situation what is among the most rational options, then categorical obligations binding agents irrespectively of their desires/aims/wants/feelings are impossible. Let us suppose that John likes blueberry muffins so much that in a concrete situation the hypothetical reason to steal them outweighs his categorical reason to not do that. Now, if John did not like blueberry muffins, would the categorical reason outweigh any other reason, and would it be rational for him to act upon it? Not necessarily, if he has another powerful hypothetical reason to steal the blueberry muffins. If, let us say, he just liked to steal stuff very much, then it would still be rational for him to act against his categorical reason to not steal anything. Insofar as hypothetical reasons can, in principle, outweigh categorical reasons, it would be rational for John to act upon his categorical reason to not steal anything only if he cared enough about what his categorical reasons are. Moreover, since one should act rationally, one can say that John should act upon his categorical reason to not steal anything only if he cared enough about what his categorical reasons are. Thus, if categorical reasons can be outweighed by hypothetical reasons, then it is rational for John (or anyone) to transform the categorical reasons into the form of this hypothetical obligation: "I should act upon *R* only if I care enough, relatively to my hypothetical reasons, about my categorical reason *R*." So, in this case, it would be possible for everyone to derive only hypothetical obligations from categorical reasons every time and everywhere, and categorical obligations could not exist at all. This is because categorical obligations would be precisely those obligations upon which one should act regardless of one's desires, aims, wants and feelings, and the roles in which one happens to find oneself.

Consequently, categorical obligations are possible only if there are some categorical reasons that cannot be outweighed by any hypothetical reasons. The situation, however, seems to be aporetic. One could block the transformation of categorical reasons into hypothetical obligations only in two ways. Firstly, one could deny that agents should do the most rational option or at least one of the most rational options. I do not embrace this possibility because I assume that most people would agree with this claim, and I think that practical rationality should be defined through the notion of "should". Here is one such definition. A reason is something that you can use in a reasoning to justify an action. To justify an action is to show either that you are permitted to do the action (if not doing the action can be justified, too) or that you should do the action (if not doing the action cannot be justified).<sup>3</sup> Secondly, one can deny that the rationa-

<sup>3</sup> This picture is similar to but much simpler than Derek Parfit's approach toward reasons and obligations (see Parfit 2011, 31–37). In this context, the notions of hypothetical and categorical obligations are more useful than the difference between normative and motivating

lity of acting upon any reasons depends on the agent's mental states. In the next section, I will argue that this method for blocking the transformation of categorical reasons into hypothetical obligations does not work because mere taboos do not provide any reasons, and other taboo-like reasons are, in fact, masked hypothetical reasons.

### III. THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF NON-TRANSFORMABLE CATEGORICAL REASONS AND THE APORIA OF CATEGORICAL OBLIGATIONS

To see why categorical reasons that are non-transformable into hypothetical obligations are impossible, the notion of taboo is a useful starting point. This is because taboos are those imperatives that most clearly have the form of categoricity, but it is easy to see that they cannot be transformed into categorical obligations. MacIntyre describes the notion of taboo in the following way:

Captain Cook and his sailors were told [in the Pacific Islands] that men and women could not eat together, because it was *taboo*. But when they enquired what that meant, they could learn nothing except that it was an absolute and unconditional requirement which could not be further explained. We do not take *taboo* seriously; why then should we take seriously Kant's or Prichard's *ought*?<sup>4</sup> (MacIntyre 1981. 124–125)

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reasons. The argument in the next section can be seen as one for the claim that every normative reason (reasons which *really* count in favor of doing something) is hypothetical at the end of the day because every normative reason can count in favor of doing something only if it has the appropriate relation to an actual motivational state.

<sup>4</sup> In this relatively early text, MacIntyre argues for a similar conclusion as I do in this paper. His critique of the theories of categorical reason is similar to mine. Nevertheless, I think that my argumentation is much more compact and clearer because, contrary to MacIntyre, I outline the nature of the relation between reasons and obligations. However, the main advantage of my approach can be seen in the next section in which I turn to the modal aspect of the problem. The proper differentiation between reasons and obligations opens up the possibility of quasi-categorical obligation that is a much better solution for the problem of categorical obligation than MacIntyre's early theory, in which he claims that categorical obligations arise when one is part of a wider narrative. The problem with this solution is that one can choose one's wider narrative in which one takes part; therefore, categorical obligations still do not necessarily bind the agent. An additional problem is that this solution seems to imply moral relativism in the long run. MacIntyre's early narrative theory, in a less bold form, seems to be a part and parcel of *After Virtue* as well. It is important to note that there are some who argue that this kind of narrative theory does not imply moral relativism (for example: Kuna 2005; Renani 2017). Also, it is worth mentioning that MacIntyre has developed his theory of narrativity into a more metaphysical approach that is similar to the supernaturalistic conclusion of this paper (see, for instance MacIntyre 2017. 52–59; 228–231; 314–315). Interestingly, he does not closely connect this new theory with the problem of categorical obligation. Rather, he focuses on how one can interpret one's life through exercising practical rationality.

I think that this description is a rather good characterization of the problem of *mere taboo*. We do not, and, I would say, even cannot take a *mere taboo* seriously. This is because *mere taboos* do not provide any reason for acting, as it is totally unintelligible why it would be good to act upon them. Thus, they cannot provide any categorical reasons that can be transformed into categorical obligations (because they are not reasons at all). Captain Cook and his crew regarded the imperative for women and men to eat separately as a *mere taboo*, and for them, taboos like this were not reasons that could possibly guide their actions. However, the people of the Pacific Islands in one way or another do not regard this *taboo* as a *mere taboo*. This prescription was built into the very fabric of their culture and endorsed by the authorities whose orders were relevant for them. So, members of the tribe see this prescription as a part of a reliable culture and as enjoined by a group of authorities; thus, they suppose that both their culture/authorities and the taboos serve the interests of the people. *Mere taboos* are unintelligible and do not provide any reasons at all; however, people who endorse *taboos* do not regard them as mere taboos, but rather as prescriptions that help them to achieve something valuable even if these taboos make it happen in an unknown way and the specific value of the taboos' fulfilling their purpose is not so well-defined.

The problem is that if we transform a mere taboo into a reason by adding either a clear or a vague goal to it, the result will be no more than a hypothetical reason. If the taboo serves the needs of, let us say, the people of the Pacific Islands, then the taboo gives only a hypothetical reason: "If you care enough about the needs of the people of the Pacific Island, it is reasonable for you to do *A*". It is not clear how we could transform a mere taboo into a reason in another way.

The issue is independent of the ontological status of the *taboo*. Let us suppose that there is a platonic state of affairs, namely that men and women could not eat together, a kind of platonic *taboo*.<sup>5</sup> Still, it does not qualify as a reason because it is unintelligible why one should act on the basis of this platonic state of affairs. Why is it better if this taboo is written in the sky rather than the dirt? Of course, if one likes to act in a way that one's actions fit this platonic state of affairs, then it is not a mere taboo any more, and, for one, the existence of this platonic fact serves as a reason, but it is still nothing more than a hypothetical reason. Such platonic entities can at best provide a hypothetical reason rather than a categorical one. Moreover, we are not better off if we refer to an Aristotelian fact that has something to do with objective teleology, which is independent from what our motivational states are. The mere fact, for example, that our body serves the goal of sustaining our life gives us a reason to not commit suicide only if we care about the existence of such an Aristotelian fact.

<sup>5</sup> This part of the text is inspired by Erik J. Wielenberg's metaethical views (especially Wielenberg 2009), but I do not pretend that I can refute his complex views in one paragraph. Nonetheless, I would go in a similar direction if my aim were to criticize him.

The problem does not relate to the question whether it is reasonable to accept a *mere taboo* as a law. It seems to me that it is reasonable for everyone to accept the imperative “Do not steal for fun!” as a law for the society because if too many people stole stuffs, no one’s property would be in safety, not to mention the potential consequence that the institution of property would cease to exist.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, it does not follow from the foregoing that it is rational for the agent to act upon this accepted law. From the perspective of a clever but very selfish person, the most rational thing for them to do in order to serve their selfish needs is to publicly endorse the laws against stealing, but steal things whenever it fulfills their desires and there is only a negligible chance of getting caught. The mere fact that you have accepted a law or should accept a taboo as a law implies at best only that you have a hypothetical reason to act upon a taboo. This hypothetical reason goes like this: “If you care enough to act in accordance with the law, it is worthwhile for you to obey the law”. The reason remains hypothetical even if you would like to follow the law not because you obey the law out of your pure respect of it, but because you believe that the law, in general, helps to actualize some values.

It seems that anything can be a reason for anyone to do *A* (or not to do *A*) only if it can, in principle, make it intelligible why doing *A* is good in some way. However, if one regards doing *A* as worthwhile to do because it is good in some way, then if one does not care enough about the kind of good cited in our explanation, it will be rational for one to not try to achieve the kind of good in question. This means that we are in an *aporia*, because it seems that moral obligations are categorical obligations (they bind the agents regardless of what their motivations are), but reasons can only be hypothetical. What is more, hypothetical reasons cannot form the ground of categorical obligations. Or can they? Perhaps the way out of the *aporia* lies in this unexpected direction.

<sup>6</sup> I cannot hide the fact that this paragraph goes against the contractualist/constructivist tradition on morality. Once again, I know too well that it would be futile trying to refute such an influential tradition in one paragraph. It would be too lightweight even to nudge Kant’s philosophy because Kantian constructivism (and other types of constructivism, too) has a specific view on practical reason; namely, that practical reason is, first and foremost, a law-making faculty. I do not try to argue against this approach because I have other goals, and I hope that this concept of practical reason is implausible for most readers. In my view, the (constructivist) theory that practical reason is primarily a law-making faculty is constructivist in the additional sense that it is a construction by philosophers trying to achieve philosophical goals.

#### IV. THE POINT OF CATEGORICAL OBLIGATIONS AND WHY (QUASI-)CATEGORICAL OBLIGATIONS CAN BE BASED ON HYPOTHETICAL REASONS

The aporia of categorical obligations emerges for two reasons. First, we rationally and consciously act always in order to achieve some goals, some values; thus, a reason for doing *A* has to refer to some value. Second, any reason for doing *A* which refers to some value as a desirable goal can have any normative power only if the agent cares enough about achieving the value in question. That is, all reasons have to be hypothetical.<sup>7</sup> And if a reason is hypothetical, it can be a source only of hypothetical obligations, because if it counts as a reason only if the agent has some specific mental states, then it cannot be a basis for an obligation to do *A* that binds agents irrespectively of their mental states.

At this point, it is worth asking why categorical obligations are so important anyway. The tripartite answer to this question is that firstly, they are important because insofar as there were only hypothetical obligations, we should confess that it is perfectly okay and rational for one to do the most abhorrent things if one's desires and goals are sufficiently twisted and one is powerful enough. If moral obligations, let us say, bind one only if one cares enough, then they will have no normative grip on those who just do not care. Secondly, if there are no categorical obligations, then moral progress is optional for the individual. If moral obligations are hypothetical, then to develop moral skills that make one able to fulfill them is just an option among many. If you are a liar who does not tell the truth in some situations, it is perfectly okay if you do not change, just as it is perfectly okay if you do not train yourself to be a better tennis player (see Wittgenstein 1965. 5). Thirdly, the non-existence of categorical obligations would make self-loathing perfectly rational for morally good people. This is because fulfilling moral obligations frequently includes self-sacrifice. However, self-sacrifice is painful, and if it is only an option among many, then morally good persons who are hypothetically obligated to make these painful sacrifices can reasonably say to themselves that it would be better if their goals and desires were different, because they would suffer much less.

All of these problems (and potential further ones) make it clear that categorical obligations are important because only they can bind agents *necessarily* (irrespectively of their desires, goals, etc.). So, if hypothetical reasons could necessarily bind agents, then they could give rise to categorical obligations or quasi-categorical obligations.

<sup>7</sup> In contrast with Williams's argumentation (Williams 1981), the outlined reasoning does not rely on the presupposition that the main function of reasons is to explain actions. Rather, it is based on the rather basic assumption of most theories of action that rational and conscious actions are intrinsically goal-directed.

I talk about quasi-categorical obligations because it is hard to see how obligations that are completely independent of the agents' mental states are possible (and the notion of categoricity is historically tainted with this aspect) if they are based on hypothetical reasons. It is much easier to show how hypothetical reasons can bind agents *necessarily*, irrespectively of *some features* of their *mental states*.

Let us focus on the modal aspect of the problem. "If you are a human, it is worthwhile for you to learn literature". This is a quasi-hypothetical reason because not all agents are human, but they are the only ones for whom it is good to learn literature (even though this reason has nothing to do with mental states). Nevertheless, it is a necessarily binding reason for each human agent if each of them is necessarily human (if, let us say, being human is an essential property of all humans). To put it in metaphysical jargon: If an agent  $S$  is human in all possible worlds, and if  $S$  has a reason to learn literature provided that  $S$  is a human, then  $S$  has a reason to learn literature in all possible worlds in which  $S$  exists; that is,  $S$  necessarily has a reason to learn literature. Thus, this case of a hypothetical reason shows that such a reason can *necessarily* be a reason for an agent if it offers a reason in relation to a necessary property of the agent.

Now, the problem is that morally relevant properties seem to be contingent in the above metaphysical sense, since all of the agents' desires, goals, feelings, aims, wants etc. seem to be contingent. I think that it is plausible to assume that agents necessarily have desires/goals/aims (even at those moments when they do not have phenomenal consciousness), but still, the desire for any particular object is contingent. This is a serious problem because, as I argued, our reasons for acting cannot be conceived without pointing toward something as a possible object of our desires/aims/goals etc. Each full and real (hypothetical) reason to act has to be formulated in a way like this: "If you desire enough to know literature, it is worthwhile for you to learn literature".

There is a strong argument for the case that no object of any desire/goal/aim can be a necessary object of these attitudes. This is because every possible object of our desires/goals/aims was rejected by someone somewhere. Most people desire to live, yet, some desire to not, most desire pleasure, yet, some desire pain, most desire good for their children, yet, some desire that horrible things happen to their children, most desire to go to heaven, yet, some prefer to go to hell instead. Presumably, if other people lack an object corresponding to that of my desire/aim/goal, it is not metaphysically necessary that my desire/aim/goal has this object.

## V. THE AUGUSTINIAN MODEL OF MOTIVATIONS AND MORALITY

As far as I can tell, there is only one way to make sense of the claim that agents' desires/aims/goals are necessarily directed toward something. One has to say that agents have some desires/aims/goals that are directed toward more than

one thing. Of course, they are contingently directed toward some objects, but their direction transcends their objects and is necessarily aimed at an objective beyond them. I call this the Augustinian model of motivational states.<sup>8</sup>

The Augustinian model claims that we desire more than we are aware of.<sup>9</sup> All (or at least, some of) our desires (or other motivational mental states) have a dual structure. On the surface, one desires to achieve an object, say, one desires to make more money. However, it is a rather common experience that achieving the object of our desire does not satisfy the desire in question. It happens many times when agents achieve the object of their desire that the desire does not disappear and the promised happiness does not come. In many cases, there is even a bit of disappointment over the lack of perfect satisfaction. What is more, the lack of perfect satisfaction and this bit of disappointment give rise to a different object of desire, because the desire is still there. Nevertheless, changing the object of the desire – let us say, starting to desire for traveling rather than for making more money – does not solve the problem, and one cannot get perfect satisfaction by achieving the new goal. This is because the desire is directed not only toward its object but also to its objective. The objective has a far greater value than the object of the desire, and the Augustinian insists that this fact explains why achieving the object of the desire does not perfectly satisfy the agent.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, even though such desires are metaphysically contingently directed toward their objects, they are metaphysically necessarily directed toward the objective that has more value from the agent's perspective than any object.

<sup>8</sup> I do not claim that no one before Augustine of Hippo held that view. Personally, I think that Plato entertained this picture of motivation in some of his dialogues (in my view, *Symposium* is one of them). Nonetheless, I believe that the most memorable description of the dual nature of our motivational system can be found in Augustine's *Confessions*.

<sup>9</sup> I believe that the unique feature of the Augustinian model compared to other teleological models is making the analysis of motivational states of the center of the investigation of human nature. This is not a stark contrast, but it is notable that the Aristotelian approach is more focused on the analysis of rationality and other abilities. If one accepts that there can be only hypothetical reasons for acting, then a motivation-centered approach comes handy for answering the challenge that is posed by the acceptance of this thesis. It is worth to note that, in my view, MacIntyre's approach in *After Virtue* is clearly an Aristotelian one due to its focus on rationality and (context-relevant) moral virtues whereas his later work, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning and Narrative*, has much stronger Augustinian tendencies.

<sup>10</sup> As an anonymous reviewer of the paper pointed out, not the Augustinian explanation of the lack of perfect satisfaction is the only possible explanation. Another well-known tradition explains the lack of perfect satisfaction not by an objective of the desire but by the human nature which makes perfectly fulfilling its desires impossible (I think Schopenhauer can be interpreted in such a way). I agree with that there is a plurality of possible explanations in this regard. However, I investigate the possible explanations of the lack of perfect satisfaction from the perspective of solving the problem of the categorical obligations. And it seems to be the case, as far as I can tell, only the Augustinian explanation of this fact (or something very similar) provides an explanation that can help in solving the problem of categorical obligations.

In fact, such desires of all humans are *primarily* directed toward their objective *through* their objects that are not the ultimate goals of these desires, but attempts to approximate their ultimate goal.

For the purposes of the present paper, it is not relevant which motivational states are at the center of the Augustinian model (although I think that desires are the best candidates). Instead, what is important is that (a) (some of)<sup>11</sup> our *actual motivational states* are, in the metaphysical sense, necessarily directed toward this ultimate value and (b) we – as humans – necessarily have such motivational states; and, last but not least, (c) since the relevant motivational states are all directed toward this ultimate value, it cannot be the case that we as agents do not care enough about achieving this ultimate value. If one necessarily wants this ultimate value without the possibility of changing the objective/losing the motivational state all together/being overridden by another motivation, then this motivational mental state can form the basis of morality's special normative power. In this case, the hypothetical reason "If you care enough about the ultimate value, then you should do *A*" can be transformed into the quasi-categorical obligation "You should do *A* (regardless of what the objects of your motivations are)". It is only quasi-categorical because the fact that the relevant *motivational states* are directed toward an ultimate goal makes it possible for the hypothetical reason to generate an obligation which binds agents irrespectively of what their projects are. So, this obligation is not totally independent of motivational mental states. If it were, it would be a mere taboo, and it would instantly devolve into a hypothetical obligation. Thus, this solution finds a way out of the original aporia by denying the need for categorical reasons and obligations to ground morality, and by providing a combination of hypothetical reasons, quasi-categorical obligations and a philosophical anthropology that can make the existence of necessarily binding obligations intelligible.

The Augustinian thesis that humans have an essential property of desiring for some ultimate value has another advantage, namely that it can explain why one's trying to be a morally better person is not simply one of those difficult and admirable possible enterprises that are optional to pursue. This is because ever-

<sup>11</sup> The Augustinian does not need to claim that every motivational state has a dual structure. As far as I am concerned, it would be implausible to say that the urge to scratch my back has a dual structure because this kind of motivation can lead to sufficient satisfaction without giving rise to a new motivation. The urge to scratch does not even seem to be formed in a rational and conscious way to any extent; on the contrary, its origin can be found solely in the irrational unconscious region of my mind. In contrast with the case of the urge to scratch my back, if I consciously decide to aim at creating itching in order to get satisfaction from getting relief, then I have a desire for scratching my back, and this desire has a dual structure. Even if I successfully cause – somehow – the feeling of itching and scratch my back, the relief does not bring perfect satisfaction, and a new object of my desire emerges. Nonetheless, urges seem to be irrelevant with regard to the problem of categorical obligations, so the Augustinian can focus only on the relevant motivational states such as desires.

yone is condemned to pursue this ultimate value, and in part, *this is what makes everyone human*. Even if one does something that pushes achieving the ultimate value further away, one does so because one is acting upon a desire that is directed toward the same ultimate goal. In this Augustinian picture, morality is a guideline about how to achieve this ultimate goal toward which every relevant desire is directed, and *failing to achieve this ultimate goal is absolute failure* because it is the failure to achieve the objective of *every relevant motivational state*.

Of course, the above makes it intelligible why literal or non-literal self-sacrifice can be a moral obligation. There can be situations in which our attempts to achieve any actual objects of our desires take us further from the ultimate value, and in these situations, we must do what we need to do in order to get closer to the ultimate value even if it means that we have to sacrifice our way of life or, in extreme cases, our life itself. If the Augustinian picture is correct, the morally good persons' self-loathing is inappropriate and, in the final analysis, irrational because their sacrifice serves their ultimate need besides that of other people. It is true even if the need in question has a very different nature than all the other needs that are sacrificed in the act of a perfect self-sacrifice.

The desire for the ultimate value has a different nature than other desires for two interconnected reasons. Firstly, it is not simply an additional one to all the other desires. Rather, the desire for the ultimate value pervades every relevant desire, similarly to the way God is not a being among many beings but Being itself, in whom everything lives, moves and has its being. Secondly, whatever the ultimate value may be, it should be something that is greater than the content of any concept, because any possible content of our concepts can be an object of our desire, and it is plausible to assume that nothing can provide perfect satisfaction if it does not contain something more than the content of any of our concepts, and therefore is not directed toward the goal toward which every relevant desire of ours is ultimately directed. Thus, the ultimate value should be supernatural because no science or philosophy can grasp it perfectly. It follows that contrary to the aspects of object-directed desires, the aspect of all relevant desires directed toward the ultimate value is supernatural in this sense.

The above means that the Augustinian interpretation of morality has an ontological price. The Augustinian picture regards the moral system of quasi-categorical obligations as that of imperatives pointing out to agents with great normative force what they must do in order to gradually approximate the ultimate value. However, were the ultimate value not to exist, our motivational states could not ultimately be satisfied, and they would not be directed toward anything that goes beyond their objects. In this case, morality would not tell us how to approximate the ultimate value, which would remain unintelligible, and the Augustinian picture of morality would fail. Thus, those accepting the Augustinian interpretation of morality have to posit the existence of an ultimate and supernatural value.

I leave it to the reader to decide whether the Augustinian answer to the challenge to categorial obligations is a good one. I believe that whether one considers it appropriate depends on one's other philosophical convictions. Nevertheless, the cost-benefit analysis of this view is simple. On the one hand, as I already noted, it has a non-negligible metaphysical price. On the other hand, it draws on a plausible picture of practical reasoning and motivations to explain how morality can have unmatched normative power that necessarily binds each individual.

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