The Moral Gap

John E. Hare

This book is about the gap between the moral demand on us and our natural capacities to meet it. The author starts with Kant’s statement of the moral demand and his acknowledgement of this gap. He then analyses Kant’s use of the resources of the Christian tradition to make sense of this gap, especially the notions of revelation, providence, and God’s grace. Kant reflects the traditional way of making sense of this gap, which is to invoke God’s assistance in bridging it. The author goes on to examine various contemporary philosophers who do not use these resources. He considers three main strategies: exaggerating our natural capacities, diminishing the moral demand, and finding some naturalistic substitute for God’s assistance. He argues that these strategies do not work, and that we are therefore left with the gap and with the problem that it is unreasonable to demand of ourselves — a standard that we cannot reach. In the final section of the book, the author looks in more detail at the Christian doctrines of atonement, justification, and sanctification. He discusses Kierkegaard’s account of the relation between the ethical life and the Christian life, and ends by considering human forgiveness, and the ways in which God’s forgiveness is both like and unlike our forgiveness of each other.

Introduction

JOHN E. HARE

This introductory chapter explains the coverage of this book, which is about the gap between the moral demand and man’s natural capacity...
to meet it. This book examines philosopher Immanuel Kant’s ethical theory and moral theology and evaluates various strategies proposed for dealing with the gap between the moral demand and the limits of human natural capacity. It discusses traditional Christian doctrines about God’s assistance in meeting the moral demand and provides an account of human and divine forgiveness and of the Christian doctrines of sanctification, justification, and atonement.

Kant and the Moral Demand
JOHN E. HARE

in The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance
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Item type: chapter

This chapter examines philosopher Immanuel Kant’s thoughts on moral demand. It discusses Kant's account of what morality demands and explains what he called the categorical imperative, which he believed to the supreme principle of morality. It analyses Kant’s ethical theory in the context of Kantian theory in contemporary literature and evaluates how this theory may be applied in dealing with the gap between moral demand and limitations of natural human capacity.

God’s Supplement
JOHN E. HARE

in The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance
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Item type: chapter

This chapter examines Immanuel Kant’s thoughts on the role of God in providing supplement in order to bridge the gap between moral demand and the limitations of the natural human capacity to meet it. It suggests that Kant is not deist about special revelation and that he continued to believe in the central doctrines he was brought up with. It explores his treatment of Christian doctrines about God’s work in man’s salvation and argues that his translation of these doctrines within the pure religion of reason failed to do the work that he intended it to accomplish in relation to the moral gap.
This chapter examines a strategy for bridging the moral gap that involves exaggerating man’s capacity to fit the moral demand or reducing the moral demand to fit man’s capacity. It explains that the idea behind this strategy is to concede that if the moral demand is binding upon people then they must have the capacity to live by it. This chapter argues against the claim that if all beliefs were vivid people would tend to conform to the impartial standard that utilitarian morality requires.

In God's Image and Likeness: From Reason to Revelation in Humans and Other Animals

Celia Deane-Drummond

Systematic theologian and biologist Celia Deane-Drummond elaborates on the issue of whether the human person can claim a unique status in creation, defending the idea of retaining the distinctiveness of human beings in a nuanced way. From Thomas Aquinas she borrows his interpretation of the terms “image” and “likeness”: While using the language of divine “likeness” to describe other animals, thereby expressing a sense of shared creaturely being, the term “image” referred to the distinctive character of human beings. Deane-Drummond adopts this distinction but, informed by recent ethological studies on animals, bases the image dimension on the religious capacity rather than the capacity to freedom. Moreover, she interprets this distinctiveness in terms of the performative, as presenting the particular task of humanity to recognize its divine vocation to serve God and to exist in respectful communion with other beings. Rather than to argue that animals display the divine image, the author suggests that the close relationship between humans and other animals clarifies the distinctive features of what it means to be human.