Biography. See the printed sheet.

Does morality depend on religion? If so, in what way? Logical? Psychological? If morality depends on religion, then, “if religion were to fail, morality would fail also” (213). Compare destruction of a house’s foundation. Dostoevsky, Stace, Sartre, Kant, Washington. Another way to put it is that there are two views about the relation between morality and religion:

- According to one view, there is an essential (or necessary) connection between morality and religion. Without religion, morality is impossible.
- According to another view, there is an accidental (or contingent) connection between morality and religion. Without religion, morality is improbable.

Mavrodes thinks it’s false that “morality cannot survive psychologically without the support of religious belief” (214). “[T]here certainly seem to be people [think Hume and many contemporary philosophers, such as Peter Singer] who reject religious belief, at least in the ordinary sense, but who apparently have a concern with morality and who try to live a moral life” (214).

Mavrodes’s project. “I will outline one rather common nonreligious view of the world, calling attention to what I take to be its most relevant features. Then I shall try to portray some sense of the odd status that morality would have in a world of that sort” (215).

Concepts essential to Mavrodes’s argument:

- **Russellian world.** The “most relevant” [sic] features of a Russellian world are as follows:
  1. **Materialism.** Mental phenomena (including minds and consciousness) have material causes.
  2. **Mortality.** “[E]ach individual comes to a permanent end at his physical death” (216).
  3. **Extinction.** Human beings, as a species of organism, will eventually disappear.
- **Russellian benefit.** “A Russellian benefit [good] is one that could accrue to a person in a Russellian world” (216). Examples: a contented old age; a thrill of sexual pleasure; a good reputation. Going to heaven when one dies is not a Russellian benefit, because there is no heaven in a Russellian world.
- **Moral obligation.** “[M]orality ascribes to particular people an obligation to do a certain thing on a certain occasion” (216). Moral obligations are final (i.e., all things considered), not merely prima facie. (Explain the difference.) Those who fail to discharge their moral obligations are subject to “special adverse judgment” (217). In a Russellian world, “there are an appreciable number of cases in which fulfilling an
obligation would result in a loss of good to ourselves” (217). Discuss repayment of debt, keeping promises, refraining from stealing, &c. Morality may even require that one risk death or serious injury to oneself. Mavrodes admits that it is logically possible, though highly unlikely, for morality to pay in a Russellian world. **Key claim:** “[I]n the actual world we have some obligations that, when we fulfill them, will confer on us no net Russellian benefit—in fact, they will result in a Russellian loss” (217).

- **Queerness (strangeness, absurdity, craziness, oddity).** “[W]ere it a fact that we had such obligations, then the world that included such a fact would be absurd—we would be living in a crazy world” (218). Later, Mavrodes refers to “the queerness of morality, its absurdity in a Russellian world” (225).

**Ethical or metaethical views that would “eliminate” the queerness:**

- **Subjectivism/emotivism/projectivism.** “[J]udgments about obligations are properly to be analyzed in terms of the speaker rather than in terms of the subject [I think Mavrodes means object] of the judgment” (218). Subjectivists and emotivists will find nothing queer about a Russellian world with moral obligations, because moral obligations are not real features of the world. Note that Russell gravitated to this subjectivist view.

- **Evolutionary ethics.** “[M]orality has a survival value for a species such as ours because it makes possible continued cooperation and things of that sort” (219). Mavrodes replies that this view can explain the existence of moral feelings, but not moral obligations. “I have not suggested that the existence of moral feelings would be absurd in a Russellian world; it is rather the existence of moral obligations that is absurd” (219; italics in original).

- **Morality always pays.** “[E]very obligation yields a Russellian benefit to the one who fulfills it” (220). “[B]eing moral really is in one’s interest after all” (221). Mavrodes criticizes the arguments of people who hold this view. Morality may sometimes pay, but it doesn’t always pay.

**A view that embraces the queerness:** See pages 223-4.

**Mavrodes’s argument, reconstructed:**

1. If (a) the world is Russellian and (b) there are real moral obligations, then (c) the world is queer.
2. The world is not queer.
   Therefore,
3. It is not the case that both (a) the world is Russellian and (b) there are real moral obligations (from 1 and 2, modus tollens).
   Therefore,
4. Either the world is not Russellian or there are no real moral obligations (from 3, DeMorgan’s theorem).
5. There are real moral obligations.
Therefore,
6. The world is not Russellian (from 4 and 5, commutation, double negation, and disjunctive syllogism).

All of the inferences are valid,¹ which means that the following set of propositions is inconsistent:

a. If the world is Russellian and there are real moral obligations, then the world is queer.
   b. The world is not queer.
   c. There are real moral obligations.
   d. The world is Russellian.

Every rational person must reject at least one of the four propositions. Here are some examples:

- David Brink and other secular moral realists reject a. They say that there is nothing queer about a Russellian world with real moral obligations.
- Some people reject b. They admit that the world is queer.
- J. L. Mackie and other moral skeptics reject c. They say that there only appear to be real moral obligations; in fact, moral obligations are invented or projected onto the world.
- Mavrodes and other theists reject d. They say that the world is not Russellian; it is teleological.

¹ Here is the formalization:

1. \((R \land M) \supset Q\)
2. \(\neg Q\)

Therefore,
3. \(\neg (R \land M)\)  
   1, 2, MT

Therefore,
4. \(\neg R \lor \neg M\)  
   3, DM

Therefore,
5. \(\neg M \lor \neg R\)  
   4, Com

Therefore,
6. \(M\)

Therefore,
7. \(\neg \neg M\)  
   6, DN

Therefore,
8. \(\neg R\)  
   5, 7, DS