

Cottingham begins by outlining four ways that he understands human beings as being an *essentially incomplete being*. (pg 2)

1. The existential: our existence is something charged with anxiety.
2. The cosmological: our existence is a profound mystery that can never be solved.
3. The finitude: our existence is limited and our abilities are limited.
4. The morally inadequate: our existence is marked by moral failings.

This incompleteness of being that Cottingham outlines is no mere accidental feature of our species. It is a fundamental and inescapable aspect of what it is to be human. We seek to achieve 'ontological rootedness' and are incomplete unless we can gain it.

While Cottingham is ultimately going to argue that only a theistic view of the world can repair our incompleteness, he begins by focusing on rituals and procedures that many traditional spiritual practices which help the human to express their current place in the world in contrast to the divine. Even if you do not ascribe to such religions, the idea is that the mere *expression* of our yearning for transcendence is important. (pg 5)

Such rituals function as vehicles for the longing for the transcendent that is an inherent part of our human makeup. (pg 6)

Turning our back on such transcendent expressions, then we will be shutting down something that is part of our nature. You will, in a sense, be fighting within yourself. Cottingham views such internal struggling as resulting in your nature being unprovided for (even if the immanent sources of meaning that remain bring great satisfaction).

Any attempt to try to minimize this longing for transcendence (to either a mere expression that we would like there to be something 'out there' or merely as being a guide for altruistic behavior), it will not silence our desire for transcendence. The focus on altruism, however, is on the right path as our moral incompleteness is one of his four ways listed above.

To be human is to be uncomfortably conscious that our lives fall short of the goodness we dimly feel they ought to exemplify. Consistently with this, we may say that part of our yearning for transcendence is a yearning to align ourselves with the good, so as to bring our lives closer to how they should be. (pg 7)

We desire, in part, to be morally good because such a goal is part of how we best function. Such functional approaches to human nature (and the world) are labeled *teleological*. So, when we depart from our proper function we would *expect* a sense of incompleteness and Kierkegaardian despair. So, Cottingham appears to be taking our yearning for transcendence as evidence that we are failing to fulfill our telos.

The idea of a telos is typically associated with Aristotle (at least as the ideas originator). It is quite controversial to be an Aristotelian nowadays given how influential the Darwinian view of life's evolution due to environmental pressure(s) and random mutation has become. As evidence that the Darwinian story is unable to account for our desire for transcendence, Cottingham says the following:

...on a purely naturalistic or humanistic conception of human nature, the mere facts of evolution and biology cannot possibly furnish the idea of a way we are meant to be, a good we are meant to achieve. For the naturalist, the idea of life as an open-ended journey towards moral improvement can only be understood simply in terms of the drives, inclinations and conflicting desires we happen to have. And there is nothing in this assorted ragbag of propensities that marks out as normative a given telos for human life. The telos, the goal we are meant to strive for, has to be set, determined by or derived from something that transcends the confused catalogue of biological and historical facts concerning what human beings amount to. (pg 8)

So, for Cottingham, to embrace the naturalist's perspective is to be unable to account for moral improvement insofar as it is an expression of our egoist tendencies. The kind of objective morality that Cottingham claims is required to satisfy our human longings is impossible for the naturalist to explain.¹ So, to the degree that you want an objective morality that will allow you in some sense transcend your limitations, then Cottingham claims you are not committed to naturalism.

¹ Though, if you take Ethical Theory with me (PHIL 3050) you'll see that this claim isn't obviously true.