

ETHICS: God & Morality

Lecture 23

Phil 1000, Fall 2008
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Quick Review

- What is Ethics/Morality?
- Purpose of Ethics/Morality?
- Descriptive vs. Prescriptive claims
- Moral Relativism vs. Moral Objectivism

What does moral objectivism give you?

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God & Morality

- Historically there has been a close connection between religious belief and a code of ethics.
 - Why?
- How necessary is the connection between religious belief and ethics?
 - Does it give us an objective morality?

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Divine Command Theory

- What God wills or commands is what is good or what is moral...
 - Determining what is right/wrong depends on whether God commands it
- God serves two functions for morality:
 1. God is the source or authority for morality
 2. God is the motivation or enforcer for morality

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In Support of DCT

- Religious belief and practice should coincide so it is no wonder that what God commands should be taken as what is right/wrong.
- Divine Sovereignty: God is the sovereign ruler and creator of the universe in the sense that all things depend on God or are under God's control.
- Moral Motivation: God is the ultimate arbitrator for meeting out rewards and punishments for action... Morality.
- Love: (Christian doctrine holds that divine love is needed because it is so difficult in this world).
- Accounts for the "Immoralities of the Patriarchs"

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Challenges to DCT

1. Moral Skepticism
2. Euthyphro Objection
3. Karamazov Problem
4. Moral Motivation

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1. Moral Skepticism

- We don't know if God exists
 - Obviously, if morality depends on God and we don't know if God exists, we should be skeptical about morality.
- If we did know that God exists:
 - How should we interpret God's commands?
 - Which religious view of God/gods?

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2. Euthyphro Objection

Does (A) God command the good because it is good, or (B) is it good because God commands it?

Option A

- What is moral is prior or independent of God, so God's command is unnecessary to make something moral.
- Also: limits God's omnipotence.

Option B

- Morality is arbitrary, e.g., "Immorality of the Patriarchs".
- Difficult to understand what is moral or immoral; how does it guide action if there are contradictory/arbitrary rules?
- Does it make sense that God could change his mind and thereby change the truth of moral claims?

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3. Karamazov Problem

- DCT implies "moral nihilism"
 - Moral nihilism = view that there is no right/wrong or moral value.
- Consider the following argument:
 - P1: "If there is no God, then everything is permissible."
 - P2: There is no God (or no God worth worshipping)
 - C: Therefore, everything is permissible
- Suggests such a strong connection between God and morality that without God no moral value is possible; but that is not so obvious (many atheists act morally).

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4. Moral Motivation

- DCT has a narrow and pessimistic view of moral motivation:
 - Why be moral? Because God will reward/punish!
- Suggests that the only reason to act morally is because God will get you, but doesn't suggest we should act morally because it is "the right thing to do."
- Overlooks the possibility that independent justification for moral principles might, themselves, also be motives for acting morally.

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Responses?

- Give up DCT as a serious account of morality.
- Bite the Bullet
 - Do what God says, irregardless of these challenges; because morality is entirely dependent on God's command.
- Defend against Challenges
 - Defend the rationality of morality as consistent with God's commands.
 - Modify the dependency between God and morality.

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Next Time

Utilitarianism

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