

Morality and Justice

Lecture 2.2

Divine Command Theory

2 Common Assumptions

1. God's command makes an action morally right or wrong
2. religious belief is necessary for motivation to (consistently) do the right thing

The Euthyphro Question

Is x pious because the gods love it, or do the gods love x because it is pious?

The **Modified** Euthyphro Question

Does God command us to do x because it is right, or is doing x right because God commands us to do it?

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Divine Command Theory (DCT)

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Suppose God did not exist. According to DCT, would it be morally wrong to torture innocent children?

a. yes

b. no

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Suppose God did not exist. According to DCT, would it be morally wrong to torture innocent children?

a. yes

b. no

Reason for holding DCT

- God created everything, and so must have created morality
- morality depends on God

Suppose God did not exist. Would $2 + 3 = 5$?

a. yes

b. no

Suppose God did not exist. Would $2 + 3 = 5$?

A “yes” answer implies:

- the truth of “ $2 + 3 = 5$ ” does not depend on God
- God did not create everything

Suppose God willed that $2 + 3 = 6$. Would it be true that “ $2 + 3 = 6$ ”?

a. yes

b. no

Suppose God willed that $2 + 3 = 6$. Would it be true that “ $2 + 3 = 6$ ”?

A “no” answer implies:

- it is necessary that $2 + 3 = 5$
- mathematics does **not** depend on God’s will

Suppose God willed that $2 + 3 = 6$. Would it be true that “ $2 + 3 = 6$ ”?

A “yes” answer implies:

- mathematics depends on God’s will
- it is not necessary that $2 + 3 = 5$

What should we say about math?

- mathematics is necessary
- God did not create mathematics
- so mathematics is independent of God's will

Suppose God commanded us to torture innocent children. Would it be **morally right** to torture innocent children?

a. yes

b. no

Suppose God commanded us to torture innocent children. Would it be **morally right** to torture innocent children?

A “yes” answer implies

- morality depends on God’s will
- God could have made morality very different than it is

A “no” answer implies

- morality does NOT depend on God’s will
- God could NOT have made morality different than it is

Mathematics

- God does not make mathematical truths true
- God, being omnipotent, knows all truths of mathematics

Can we say the same thing about morality?

- God does not make moral truths true
- God, being omnipotent, knows all truths of morality

Suppose God exists and commands us to do x.
Does God **have a reason** to command us to x?

a. yes

b. no

Dilemma for DCT

Does God have a reason to command us to x?

Suppose God does **not** have a reason. This implies

- God's commands are arbitrary
- so morality is arbitrary

Dilemma for DCT

Does God have a reason to command us to x?

Suppose God **does** have a reason. This implies

- there would be reasons to x independent of God's commands
- those reasons to x determine that x is morally right (not God's will)

Dilemma for DCT

Does God have a reason to command us to x?

- if yes, then then DCT is false
- if not, then morality is arbitrary (which seems wrong)

So we should reject DCT

- it is NOT the case that x is right because God commands it
- morality is independent of God's commands

The Modified Euthyphro Question

Does God command us to do x **because** it is right, or is doing x right **because** God commands us to do it?

2 Common Assumptions

1. God's command makes an action morally ~~right or wrong~~
2. religious belief is necessary for motivation to (consistently) do the right thing

Religious Motivation Thesis (RMT)

- religious belief is necessary for motivation to (consistently) do the right thing

Reasons for holding the (RMT)

- if God will those who act morally and punish those who do not, there are strong reasons for acting morally
- atheists do not believe in rewards and punishments in an afterlife, and so they do not have strong reasons for acting morally

2 Objections

1. religion does not always motivate people to act morally
2. concerns about the afterlife may encourage people to do the right thing for the wrong reason

Examples of people motivated by religion

- the Inquisition
- 9/11

Religious motivation is good only when it motivates people to do things we believe are morally good.

Which of the following is doing the right thing for the right reason?

- a. helping an old lady because she might give you money
- b. helping an old lady because if you don't others will think poorly of you
- c. helping an old lady because she needs help
- d. all of the above

Which of the following is doing the right thing for the right reason?

- a. helping an old lady because if you do so then God will reward you in the afterlife
- b. helping an old lady because if you do not then God will punish you in the afterlife
- c. helping an old lady because she needs help
- d. all of the above

Shafer-Landau

imagine a person who does her duty, but only because she thinks that God punishes those who misbehave and rewards those who act morally... Such a person is **unreliably moral**, for if she came to believe that God really didn't offer the expected rewards and punishments, then she would see no reason to be moral.

...But when [religious motivation] is effective, it **undermines moral character**, rather than supports it. People who deserve our praise and admiration are those who do their duty for its own sake. Rather than acting from ulterior, self-interested motives, they do what is right **because it is right**. Agnostics and atheists have just as much reason to adopt this attitude as theists do.

2 Common Assumptions

- ~~1. God's command makes an action morally right or wrong~~
- ~~2. religious belief is necessary for motivation to (consistently) do the right thing~~

But morality does not depend on religion

- 1` God commands x because it is morally right
- 2` religious belief is **not** necessary for motivation to (consistently) do the right thing