

PHIL 3600 - Philosophy of Religion

Tentative Course Outline

1. The Nature of God
2. Problems Concerning Omnipotence
3. God and Morality
4. The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge
5. Arguments for the Existence of God
 - a. Pascal's Wager
 - b. The Ontological Argument
 - c. The Design Argument
6. Arguments Against the Existence of God
 - a. No Evidence Arguments
 - b. The Problem of Evil (?)
7. Life After Death (?)
8. God, Death, and the Meaning of Life

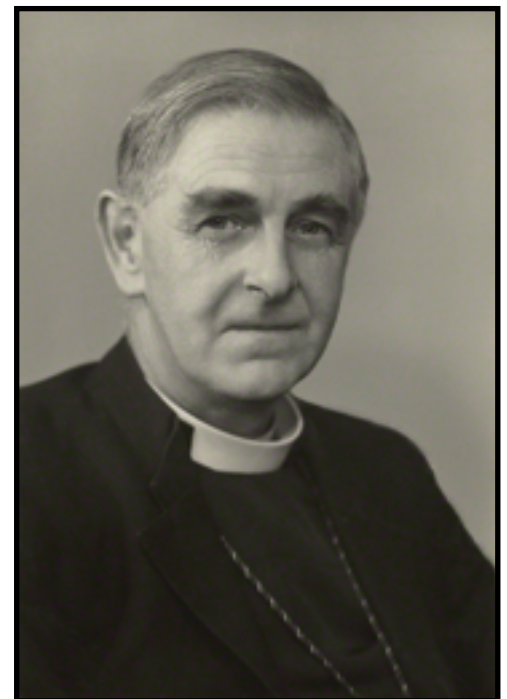
3. God and Morality

- a. Divine Command Theory
- b. Motivations for DCT
- c. DCT and Atheism
- d. Two Inconclusive Arguments against DCT
- e. The Euthyphro Problem for DCT

a. Divine Command Theory

“From the doctrine of God as the Creator and source of all that is, it follows that a thing is not right simply because we think it is, still less because it seems expedient. It is right because God commands it. This means that there is a real distinction between right and wrong that is independent of what we happen to think. It is rooted in the nature and will of God.”

— Robert C. Mortimer,
Christian Ethics (1950)



a. Divine Command Theory

“Divine Command Theory [is] the view that what is morally good is constituted by what God commands.”

— Louise M. Antony,
New York Times (2011)



a. Divine Command Theory

Divine Command Theory (DCT):

- (i) An act is morally obligatory just in case God commands it.
- (ii) An act is morally wrong just in case God forbids it.
- (iii) A state of affairs is good just in case God approves of it.
- (iv) A state of affairs is bad just in case God disapproves of it.
- (v) A person is a good person just in case God approves of him/her.
- (vi) A person is a bad person just in case God disapproves of him/her.

you get the idea ...

a. Divine Command Theory

a.k.a. Theological Voluntarism:

- (i) An act is morally obligatory just in case God commands it.
- (ii) An act is morally wrong just in case God forbids it.
- (iii) A state of affairs is good just in case God approves of it.
- (iv) A state of affairs is bad just in case God disapproves of it.
- (v) A person is a good person just in case God approves of him/her.
- (vi) A person is a bad person just in case God disapproves of him/her.

you get the idea ...

b. Motivations for DCT

“Defenders of D.C.T. will say that their theory explains a variety of things about morality that non-theistic accounts of moral value cannot, and that it should be preferred for that reason. For example, they will say that atheists cannot explain **[1] the objectivity of morality** — how there could be moral truths that are independent of any human being’s attitudes, will or knowledge, and **[2] how moral truths could hold universally**. ...

— Louise Antony, *New York Times* (2011)

b. Motivations for DCT

“It is true that D.C.T. would explain these things.

[1] If God exists, then He exists independently of human beings and their attitudes, and so His commands do, too. If we didn't invent God, then we didn't invent His commands, and hence didn't invent morality. We can be ignorant of God's will, and hence mistaken about what is morally good. [2] Because God is omnipresent, His commands apply to all people at all times and in all places.”

— Louise Antony, *New York Times* (2011)

b. Motivations for DCT

[3] A Third Possible Motivation:

Concerns over:

God's omnipotence ... God's supremacy ...

God's being the creator of everything ...

“From the doctrine of God as the Creator and source of all that is, it follows that a thing ... is right because God commands it.”

— Robert C. Mortimer,
Christian Ethics (1950)

c. DCT and Atheism

Is the combination of DCT and atheism a coherent position?

DCT is compatible with atheism.

If there is no God, then there are no acts that are prohibited by God.

If there are no acts that are prohibited by God
and DCT is true, then ...

... no actions are wrong.

As Dostoyevsky (is said to have) said,
“If there is no God,
then all things are permitted.”



this is
sometimes
called
'nihilism'

d. Two Inconclusive Arguments against DCT


The Argument from God's Particular Alleged Commands

P1. If DCT is true, then:

- (a) slavery is sometimes ok (*Leviticus* 25: 44-45)
- (b) genocide is sometimes ok (*Deuteronomy* 7:1-2, 20:10-17)
- (c) people who have gay sex deserve to die (*Leviticus* 20:13)
- (d) people who work on Sunday deserve to die (*Exodus* 35:2)
- (e) it's ok for soldiers to rape and pillage (*Deuteronomy* 20:10-17)
- (f) wives should submit to their husbands in everything
(*Ephesians* 5:22-24)
- (g) it's wrong to eat shellfish (*Leviticus* 11:10) ...

P2. But not all of (a) – (g) are true.

C. Therefore, DCT is not true.



Theists can
plausibly
reject P1

d. Two Inconclusive Arguments against DCT

The Argument from the Difficulty of Knowing God's Commands

P1. On DCT it's hard for us to know what's right and wrong.

P2. Any ethical theory on which it's hard for us to know what's right and wrong cannot be true.

C. Therefore, DCT is not true.

Both
premises
are suspect.

e. The Euthyphro Problem for DCT

Euthyphro: “I should say that what all the gods love is pious and holy, and the opposite, which they all hate, impious.”

This should remind us of DCT:

what God commands us to do is obligatory, and the opposite, which God prohibits, wrong.

e. The Euthyphro Problem for DCT

Socrates: “The point which I should first wish to understand is whether the pious or holy is beloved by the gods because it is holy, or holy because it is beloved of the gods.”

Or, to put it in our terms:

Is an action wrong because God prohibits it or does God prohibit it because it is wrong?

e. The Euthyphro Problem for DCT

Socrates' question: Is an action wrong because God prohibits it, or does God prohibit it because it is wrong?

The proponent of DCT has two options:

Horn 1: she can say that wrong actions are wrong because God prohibits them.

- or -

Horn 2: she can say that God prohibits wrong actions because they are wrong.

e. The Euthyphro Problem for DCT

Horn 1: wrong actions are wrong because God prohibits them.

Horn 1 implies three problematic things:

- (a) that if God had commanded that we do something horrible, it would have been right to do it.
- (b) that God's prohibitions are arbitrary.
- (c) that God's goodness is cheap.

Let's look at each in turn ...

The First Implication of Horn I

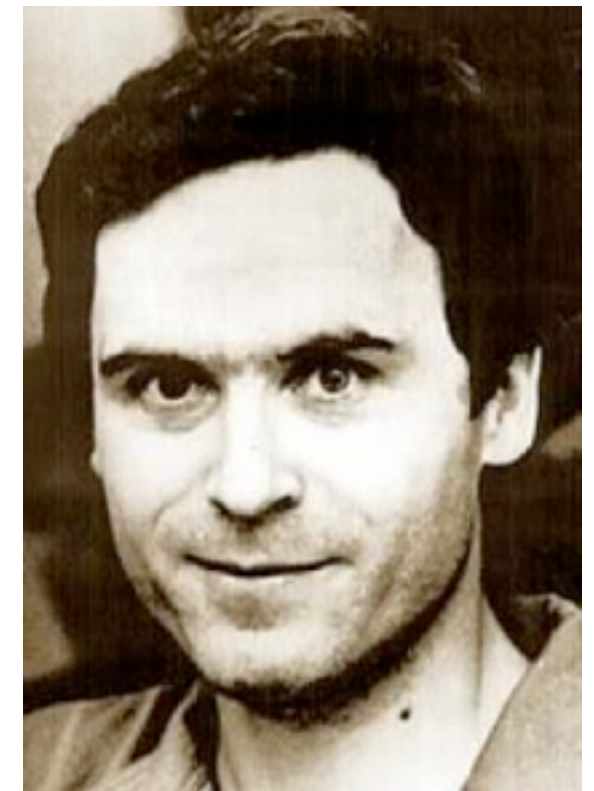
[(a) that if God had commanded that we do something horrible, it would have been right to do it]

Why is this implication a problem?

One illustration: the case of Ted Bundy and Joni Lenz.

About this case, Horn I implies this:

that if God had decided not to prohibit rape and assault, then there would have been nothing wrong with what Ted Bundy did to Joni Lenz.



The First Implication of Horn I

[(a) that if God had commanded that we do something horrible, it would have been right to do it]

A popular reply to this objection:

God would never have failed to prohibit rape and assault.

Two problems with this reply:

i. it's truth is not inconsistent with the point it is supposed to be attacking

ii. on what grounds can an advocate of DCT claim that God would never do this?

The Second Implication of Horn I

[(b) that God's prohibitions are arbitrary]

What does this mean?

It means that God has no good reason for prohibiting what He prohibits.

Why does it follow from Horn I?

What reason can God give? Not: "my reason is that the acts are wrong." What else can he say?

The Second Implication of Horn I

[(b) that God's prohibitions are arbitrary]

Why is arbitrariness a problem?

It undermines the “authority of morality.”

That is, if God's prohibitions are arbitrary, we have no moral reason to obey them.

We should thus say *either* that these arbitrary prohibitions couldn't really make an act morally wrong *or* that moral rightness and wrongness would no longer matter.

The Third Implication of Horn I

[(c) that God's goodness is cheap.]

Why does this follow from Horn I?

Because God's goodness would consist merely in the fact that he approves of himself.

Why is this a problem?

God's being good no longer seems to make him worthy of praise or worship.

e. The Euthyphro Problem for DCT

(this is
an earlier
slide)

Socrates' question: Is an action wrong because God prohibits it, or does God prohibit it because it is wrong?

The proponent of DCT has two options:

~~Horn 1~~: she can say that wrong actions are wrong because God prohibits them.

- or -

Horn 2: she can say that God prohibits wrong actions because they are wrong.

e. The Euthyphro Problem for DCT

Horn 2: God prohibits wrong actions because they are wrong.

Why Horn 2 avoids the problems of Horn 1:

Does Horn 2 imply that if God failed to prohibit something horrible, it would be ok to do it? No.

Does Horn 2 imply that God's prohibitions are arbitrary? No.

Does Horn 2 imply that God's goodness is cheap? No.

So what is the problem with Horn 2? ...

e. The Euthyphro Problem for DCT

The problem with Horn 2 is that it abandons the Divine Command Theory of morality!

On Horn 2, right and wrong are no longer based in God, but in some standard independent of God.

e. The Euthyphro Problem for DCT

(this is
an earlier
slide)

Socrates' question: Is an action wrong because God prohibits it or does God prohibit it because it is wrong?

The proponent of DCT has two options:

~~Horn 1~~: she can say that wrong actions are wrong because God prohibits them.

- or -

~~Horn 2~~: she can say that God prohibits wrong actions because they are wrong.

An Overview of the Euthyphro Problem

EITHER

Horn 1: wrong
acts are wrong
because God
prohibits them



(a) if God commanded
something horrible,
doing it would be right
&

(b) God's prohibitions
are arbitrary
&

(c) God's goodness is
cheap

Horn 2: God
prohibits wrong
acts because they
are wrong



morality is no longer
ultimately based on God's
commands
(DCT has been abandoned)

The Euthyphro Problem

(in the form of a valid argument)

P1. If DCT is true, then either Horn 1 or Horn 2 is true.

P2. Horn 1 is not true.

P3. If Horn 2 is true, then DCT is not true.

C. Therefore, DCT is not true.

Make sure you would be able to give the rationale for each of the three premises.

Many famous theists reject the Divine Command Theory for just these reasons:

“In saying... that things are not good according to any standard of goodness, but simply by the will of God, it seems to me that one destroys, without realizing it, all the love of God and all his glory; for why praise him for what he has done, if he would be equally praiseworthy in doing the contrary? Where will be his justice and his wisdom if he has only a certain despotic power, if arbitrary will takes the place of reasonableness, and if in accord with the definition of tyrants, justice consists in that which is pleasing to the most powerful? Besides it seems that every act of willing supposes some reason for the willing and this reason, of course, must precede the act.”

- G.W. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics* (1686)

e. The Euthyphro Problem for DCT

Some final questions regarding the rejection of the Divine Command Theory:

- (i) Does rejecting the DCT, and so holding that morality is independent of God, threaten God's omnipotence?*
- (ii) How objective would morality actually be if the DCT were true?*