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?

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?

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

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”

Challenges to DCT

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

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?

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 worshiping)
  - 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).

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.

Responses?

- Give up DCT as a serious account of morality.
- Bite the Bullet
  - Do what God says, regardless 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.

Next Time

Utilitarianism