

Key concepts:

- **Divine Command theory** is usually associated with religious traditions that see morality as part of divine revelation.
- God establishes a **moral order** as an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being for the good of humanity.
- Divine Command Theory followers associate the sense of 'right' and 'wrong' as something given by God and directly related to teachings of scripture.
- For example, the **10 commandments** or the revelations found in the Qur'an. From this, human beings are directed to right behaviour.
- **Strong** Divine Command Theory sees all scripture as detailing behaviour; **weak** Divine Command Theory argues that God gives commands that determine the boundaries and content of one's decision making e.g. the general moral duties extracted from teachings such as the Sermon on the Mount.

- The traditional challenge to Divine Command theory is **Euthyphro dilemma**.
- Plato's historical character Socrates raises an important question for the character Euthyphro about the foundation of 'goodness'.
- Is the **holy** approved by the Gods because it is holy or is it holy because it is approved by the Gods? (holy refers to ethical goodness).
- This has two important implications for the omnipotence and omnibenevolence of God:
 - 1. If God commands something because it is morally right then this means morality is independent of God and is something God neither created nor **controls**. Therefore God is not **omnipotent**.
 - 2. If something is good because God says it is then this means that the 'objectivity' of morality is dependent upon God. This means that it is arbitrary in theory since God could will genocide to be good. The **arbitrariness** problem begs the question of God's **omnibenevolence**.

- Other challenges have been raised including:
 - There is too much **variation** within and between religions to take Divine Command theory seriously.
 - Divine Command Theory seemingly promotes **injustices** against women, homosexuality and accepts the existence of slavery.
 - Jesus demonstrated the internal **conflict** between the old laws and the new kingdom he was establishing suggesting that some Divine Command theory rules can be dispensed with or at best reinterpreted.

- The philosopher Robert **Adams modified Divine Command theory** to meet the Euthyphro challenge, specifically the second criticism.
 - Adams proposed that goodness is part of God's being and as such cannot be arbitrary since goodness dictates that God would never command anything beyond this.
 - Julian **Baggini** responded by pointing out that this just raises another question: is God's nature good because it is God's or because it is good?

Key quotes:

"...if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples." (Exodus 19:5)

"There are some whose killing God orders, either by law, or by an express command to a particular person at a particular time." (Augustine)

"If I am liable to be sent to hell for not doing what God commands, I am thereby provided with a corrupting...motive for serving the good." (A. McIntyre)

"God, if he exists, is the greatest relativist of them all." (J. Baggini)

Issues for analysis and evaluation:

Key arguments/debates

The main debate is that some philosophers see morality as something external to God and there are many different non-theistic explanations for morality.

Others would argue that if morality had a divine source there would be similar moral systems between religions.

Key questions

Does Adams solve the Euthyphro dilemma?

Are there better alternatives to Divine Command theory?

Key words:

Divine Command
Euthyphro dilemma
arbitrariness
benevolent nature

revelation
omnipotence
injustices
Baggini

strong
omnibenevolence
Adams
another question

weak
modified