

Extract 1:1

The Euthyphro Dilemma

Source: <http://www.philosophy-index.com/plato/euthyphro/dilemma/>

Euthyphro's Dilemma is a philosophical problem concerned with a view of morality related to God.

The Euthyphro Dilemma asks: do the gods love good action because it is good, or is good action good because it is loved by the gods?

The problem comes from Plato's Euthyphro, and is asked by Socrates to Euthyphro.

Euthyphro's dilemma is a challenge to the moral absolutist position of divine command theory in meta-ethics. Divine command theory, which is generally held by many monotheistic religions, holds that ethical statements such as "charity is good" obtain their truth values from attributes of God. That is, the statement "charity is good" is true if and only if God loves charity.

Euthyphro's dilemma challenges this position by questioning whether this means that what is morally correct is merely an arbitrary choice by God, or whether or not these things have objective, eternal truth. Each position has problems:

The first position is to state that God loves good things because they are good. This claim is generally a denial of divine command theory — it states that there is goodness that is determined independently of God. The major problem with this view is that it holds that there is something outside of God, over which God has no control — that is, God is not fully omnipotent. It's also worth pointing out that taking this position denies that God is necessary for morality.

The second position is to assert that what is good is good merely because God says that it is good. If God's choices are arbitrary, then morality is not objective. This view holds that anything, at any time, could become good or bad. Phrases like "murder is wrong" depend on how God feels about any particular action. For instance, if God commands a murder, then it is a just murder.

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It may be that, tomorrow, God changes the rules. If God's choices are arbitrary, then they are not rational, and there is no reason to make assumptions about what God wants. There seems to be no reason to say that it is necessary that one obey God, other than that obedience may bring reward while disobedience may bring punishment.

Under the second position, it would also be misleading to say something like "God is good". Under divine command theory, that amounts to "God loves God", which is not what is normally intended by religious claims of that nature.

Activity:

1. *What are the two horns of the dilemma?*
2. *Is there a third way out of the dilemma for someone who believes in God?*