

The euthyphro dilemma essay



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This paper will explain the Euthyphro Dilemma basing the argument on where Plato's stand is in the history of philosophy and then explain the argument based on Euthyphro Dilemma.

Plato was a Greek philosopher who was Socrates' student and was a writer of many philosophical dialogues with Socrates including Euthyphro Dilemma.

The dilemma had a major philosophical effect on faith of religions in the form, " Is what is morally good commanded by God because it is morally good, or is it morally good because it is commanded by God?". The philosopher's stand is that God is identical to the definitive measure of goodness.

Euthyphro first comes to the fore, when he is met by Socrates around the court of Athens. Euthyphro was at the court to prosecute his own father, who had killed, albeit accidentally, a murderer. Socrates had summoned to the court for committing impiety as charged by Meletus. Socrates is shocked by Euthyphro's actions. From the outset, it comes out that Euthyphro was such a religious man and a great defender of the religious doctrines. He boasts to Socrates that he knows everything about the holiness. Therefore, Socrates feels that he can be taught by his counterpart about the aspects touching the holiness, so that he can defend himself in the court (SparkNotes Editors).

Holiness, according to Euthyphro, is persecuting those, who go against the religious doctrines; a description that is very unsatisfactory to Socrates. Socrates thinks that there exist holy actions, which are not necessarily geared towards persecuting the religious rebels. Thus, he urges Euthyphro to expound on what holiness is. Euthyphro next says that a holy deed is one

that is acceptable to the gods. However, Socrates still finds this unsatisfactory. This is because sometimes the gods quarrel amongst each other. Therefore, while one god may find a deed agreeable, it may be unacceptable to the other gods (SparkNotes Editors).

Euthyphro retreats to the definition that a holy deed is one that is acceptable to all the gods. Socrates still finds this unsatisfactory. He argues that a holy deed is acceptable to the gods because the deed is indeed holy. Hence, the deed will determine the approval by the gods. He goes on to say that what is accepted by the gods will determine what is agreeable to the gods.

Euthyphro's next suggestion is that holiness is the arm of justice, charged with taking care of the gods. This definition again fails to satisfy Socrates as the gods do not require any kind of help, especially from humans (SparkNotes Editors).

On his last attempt, Euthyphro suggests that holiness is like a form of trade. In this case, the humans offer sacrifices as gods in turn grant the humans their wishes. He argues that the gods actually do not need the sacrifices; rather, the sacrifices gratify them. This last definition again fails to satisfy Socrates. He links his argument to the previous suggestion that what is holy is what is agreeable to the gods. Euthyphro is cornered again; he decides to leave (SparkNotes Editors).

From the conversation, we at first have the feeling that Euthyphro must have been a holy man. How many can go ahead and prosecute their own fathers? However, once Euthyphro is confronted by Socrates, we come to realize that he even doesn't know what holiness is. From The Euthyphro, it comes out

clear that ancient Greeks probably were bent in pleasing the gods and their leaders at the expense of their own beliefs. From the conversation, there arises a great debate that has spanned generations: The Euthyphro Dilemma.

The Euthyphro Dilemma

The Euthyphro dilemma has been translated many times to reflect the religious beliefs of the eras. This paper will use the definition that reflects today's religious beliefs: Are holy deeds willed by God because they are good, or are the deeds good because they are willed by God? (Slick) This does not differ much with the original dilemma: "Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods?" (SparkNotes Editors). The Greeks at the time worshipped many gods.

The Euthyphro dilemma brings forth a debate that has lasted for a long time. One has to choose a side, although each side has its own shortcomings. This paper looks at both options and then will give its stand.

The First Option

This horn can be loosely translated to imply that moral acts are acceptable to God because they are moral. This view suggests that there are actions that may be right or wrong on their own. In this case, these actions are totally independent of God's commandments. Euthyphro and Socrates settled on this view. However, the suggestion that indeed there exist good deeds that are independent of God's commandments, questions the sovereignty of God. This horn implies that God is also bound by these rules

of holiness and morality rather than being the one, who established them. Additionally, it suggests that God is so good that he can accept a moral standard established by someone else (Debating Christianity).

This horn also suggests that God's power will be limited by this moral code. The standard restricts Him as He cannot impose His will freely. Also, God has no powers to oppose the moral standard (Debating Christianity).

The horn also suggests that God won't have the freedom to impose His will as He wouldn't have command over anyone, who disobeys the established moral code. It can be concluded that probably He would be obligated to command as stipulated in the moral standard. Therefore, this view suggests that moral standards had already been established, even before God had willed them (Debating Christianity).

Lastly, this view suggests that since moral actions are not dependent on God, then they would still have authority had God existed or not. This is because God is viewed as playing no part in laying down the moral standards. Morality in itself is independent of God in totality (Debating Christianity).

From the arguments above, it is clear that taking the first option is misleading. Thus, the answer to the question ' Are holy deeds willed by God because they are good?' is ' no'.

The Second Horn

This horn implies that a moral action is indeed moral because it is acceptable and commanded by God Himself. It is often referred to as the divine

command theory. This horn suggests that moral codes exist because they were imposed by God. Therefore, without God's will, there would be no right or wrong actions. This view is also flawed. This is because if the moral code depended entirely on the God's will, then morality won't be necessary after all. Any action deemed moral could easily become immoral if God decides so. Thus, actions could be right and wrong interchangeably according to the decisions of God. This view goes against the moral supervenience (Debating Christianity).

This horn also suggests that since morality is solely God's will, then it won't have existed in the situation, where God had not existed. Thus, in this situation, everything would have been permitted. This scenario seems very unlikely to have happened (Debating Christianity).

This view brings forth another debate; if morality is indeed wholly dependent on God's will then what about the morality of God? From this viewpoint, it can be concluded that since God is moral, by the fact that He sets the moral standards, He abides by His own commandments. He has to follow all the commands that He Himself has set. This horn diminishes the goodness and morality of God Himself. What He commands He follows. This is totally not true (Debating Christianity).

From the arguments, it becomes clear that this horn is also flawed. It can be concluded that deeds are not just good because they are willed by God.

The Euthyphro dilemma has been argued ever since it was first brought forward. Different philosophers have taken different stands regarding the dilemma but as we have seen, each horn has its own shortcomings, as this

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paper has argued out. Rather than just having two horns, perhaps the dilemma should have introduced a third horn. This paper suggests the following; are holy deeds willed by God because they are good, are the deeds good because they are willed by God, or are the deeds good based on God's nature? This paper takes the imaginary third horn.

The third horn suggests that God is just good by nature and, therefore, all deeds that are good to him are also good to mankind. This is essentially true because He sets the moral standard to mankind that appealed to Him. If the code was indeed immoral to Him, He wouldn't have imposed it to humans in the first place. This horn is very consistent to what we have come to know of God, as His commands have never changed since they were willed to mankind. Right from the beginning, actions that are wrong to God are also wrong to mankind.

One instance where we find God's good nature in The Bible is in the book of Titus, chapter one, the first verse. It reads explicitly that God does not lie. Humans have all along known that lying is immoral. God did not find lying immoral before commanding mankind not to lie. It was within His nature not to lie. This simply means that other evil deeds are evil in His eyes, through his nature of being good (Slick).

Conclusion

This imaginary horn as introduced in this paper addresses all the shortcomings that the original dilemma had. Therefore, had it been there in the first place, perhaps the debate won't have lasted for so long; Euthyphro wouldn't have had such a rough time answering the questions; the

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Euthyphro would have been longer and perhaps Socrates would have defended himself better.