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# Euthyphro's Dilemma

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What could (a) god have  
to do with morality?

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# The Moral Foundation of the Law?

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- ❖ A supremely confident radio talk show host upbraids us all for failing to realize that:
  - ❖ morality is objective;
  - ❖ morality could not be objective were there no God;
    - ❖ (Fortunately, he maintained with the same supreme confidence, there is a God; so, no worries on that score.)
  - ❖ morality is made objective by—and only by—God's commands.
- ❖ In this, our on-air authority agrees with former Alabama supreme court Judge Roy Moore:
  - ❖ 'As Chief Justice of the State of Alabama, it is my duty to administer the justice system of our state, not to destroy it. I have no intention of removing the monument of the Ten Commandments and the moral foundation of our law. To do so would, in effect, result in the disestablishment of our system of justice in this State. This I cannot and will not do!' (14 August 2003)

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# One of the Commandments

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- ❖ Thou shalt not kill. (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17)
  - ❖ Interpretive question: Never? Never ever? Is this—as it initially seems to be—a blanket prohibition?
    - ❖ Or is killing sometimes permitted, in special circumstances? If so, what might those be? When you are trying to kill me? When you are trying to kill my neighbour?
      - ❖ *‘Caedite eos. Novit enim Dominus qui sunt eius.’*
  - ❖ Justificatory question: Why not? On what basis is this commandment binding—if indeed it is binding?
    - ❖ Is killing prohibited by God because killing is wrong, or is it wrong because God prohibits it? That is to ask: does God’s prohibition *make* killing wrong?
      - ❖ If not, what does make it wrong?
      - ❖ If so, why? Simply because God says so (or, rather, is reported to have said so)?

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# Some Socratic Questions

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- ❖ What (if anything) *makes* right / wrong actions right / wrong?
  - ❖ Does, e.g., the fact that God commands / prohibits an action make it right / wrong?
    - ❖ Or does God command / prohibit an action because it is right / wrong?
      - ❖ If the latter, then, again, what (if anything) makes right / wrong actions right / wrong?
        - ❖ If the former, could God's commanding just any action make that action right?
          - ❖ If not, then why not?
          - ❖ If so, then, *really*?

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# What Socrates Wants

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- ❖ Socrates wants to know what makes certain actions right / wrong.
- ❖ Consider piety (or, holiness; τὸ ὅσιον). Is piety in every action always the same? And impiety, in turn—is it not always the opposite of piety, and also the same as itself, having, as impiety, one idea in accordance with which anything which is to be impious is impious?
- ❖ To be sure, Socrates.
- ❖ And what is piety, and what is impiety? (5d)

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# An Assumption and a Question

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- ❖ The assumption: univocity.
  - ❖ All  $\phi$  things are  $\phi$  in the same way.
- ❖ The question: what is the correct *analysis* of  $\phi$ -ness?

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# What Socrates Gets

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- ❖ Piety is doing as I am doing; that is to say, prosecuting anyone who is guilty of murder, sacrilege, or of any similar crime—whether he be your father or mother, or whoever it may be—that makes no difference; and not to prosecute them is impiety. (5d-e)

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# What Socrates Really Wants

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- ❖ Remember that I did not exhort you to show me two or three among the many instances of piety, but rather that form itself, in terms of which all pious things are pious. Did you not say somewhere that it was in terms of one idea that impious things are impious and pious things pious—or don't you recall? (6d)
- ❖ Show me this idea: show me what it is, so that by focusing on it and using it as a paradigm, when you or someone else does something of this sort, I may affirm that it is pious and, and when it is not of this sort that I may deny it. (6e)



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# Adequacy Constraints

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- ❖ Fully Univocal
- ❖ More than Extensionally Adequate
- ❖ Epistemically Serviceable

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# Better

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- ❖ For my part, I would say that what all the gods love is pious and holy, and the opposite which they all hate, impious.
- ❖ Ought we to enquire into the truth of this, Euthyphro, or simply to accept the mere statement on our own authority and that of others? What do you say?
- ❖ We should enquire; and I believe that the statement will stand the test of enquiry. (9d-e)

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# The DCTM

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- ❖ If we generalize from the case of piety (or holiness), we can appreciate that Euthyphro expresses a form of the Divine Command Theory of Morality (DCTM):
  - ❖ DCTM: an action  $a$  is right (wrong) =  $a$  is commanded (or forbidden) by God.

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# One Little Problem

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- ❖ We shall soon know better my good man. I should first wish to understand this: is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or pious because it is loved by the gods? (*Euthyphro*, 10a)

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# The General Problem for DCTM

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1. Either God exists or God does not exist.
2. If God does not exist, then God's commands have nothing to do with the foundations of morality.
3. If God exists, then God's commands have nothing to do with the foundations of morality.
4. Therefore, God's commands have nothing to do with the foundations of morality

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## On Behalf of (3): Euthyphro's Dilemma

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1. Suppose that what is moral is what is commanded by God.
2. If so, then (a) what is moral is moral because it is commanded by God or (b) God commands what is moral because it is moral.
3. If (2b), then what is moral is moral independently of God's commanding it and God has nothing to do with the foundations of morality.
4. If (2a), then whatever is commanded by God is moral.
5. It is not the case that whatever is commanded by God is moral (e.g. God could command something atrocious).
6. Therefore, (2b).
7. Therefore, what is moral is moral independently of God's commanding it and God's commands have nothing to do with the foundations of morality.
8. Therefore, if God exists, then God's commands have nothing to do with the foundations of morality.

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# So much for the DCTM?

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1. Either God exists or God does not exist.
2. If God does not exist, then (obviously) God's commands have nothing to do with the foundations of morality (because there aren't any).
3. If God does exist, then God's commands have nothing to do with the foundations of morality (as is shown by Euthypro's dilemma).
4. If (1), (2) and (3), then the DCTM is false.
5. So, the DCTM is false.