

The Divine Command Theory

PHIL 102

Ethics, Politics, & Law

Spring Quarter 2007

Lecture Four

Plato's *Euthyphro*



- **Plato**
- ***Euthyphro***
- **The setting**
- **Meaning of piety**
- **Examples**
- **1st definition**
- **Amended definition**
- **Socrates's question**

Euthyphro Dilemma

- **Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods?”**
- **Recast in terms of divine commands**
- **Causal direction**
- **Conceptual direction**
- **God commands because it's right**
 - **Something above God?**
 - **Status of right and wrong?**
- **It's right because God commands it**
 - **Arbitrary commands?**

DIVINE COMMAND THEORY

- **Moral realism**
- **Ontological queerness**
- **Orders and commands**
- **God has the authority**
 - **Creator**
 - **Analogy with a parent**
 - **God is morally perfect**
- **Morality is a set of objective normative standards issued by God**

Euthyphro Dilemma

- **Are actions morally right/wrong because God has commanded/forbidden them, or has God commanded/forbidden them because they are morally right/wrong?**
- **Weak divine command theory**
 - God knows nature of independent standards
 - God issues moral command accordingly
 - Something above, independent of, God?
 - Limitation on omnipotence?
- **Strong divine command theory**
 - God's commands constitute the standards
 - Why these particular ones?
 - Makes divine commands seem arbitrary

Legal Positivism

- **Classical legal positivism**
 - **Commands from the sovereign**
 - **Backed by threats**
- **Hart's positivism**
 - **Primary rules from an authority**
 - **Secondary rules**
 - **Rule of recognition**
- **Questions of wise social policy**
- **Questions of validity and legal authority**

Positivism & Divine Commands

- **Primary divine commands (rules)**
- **Appeal to secondary rules?**
- **Rule of recognition**
- **Strong or weak divine commands?**
- **Strong, but ...**
- **Are the commands arbitrary?**
 - **No, God has the authority to issue them**
 - **No, they are infinitely wise moral policy**
 - **Independent standard of rationality**
 - **God's omniscience precludes divine stupidity**

***A priori* Atheism**

- **Divine command theory is incoherent**
- **There are either independent moral standards above God, or ...**
- **God's commands are arbitrary**
- **Distinguish questions of substance – wise or unwise policy, from ...**
- **Questions of authority**
- **God has the authority – strong theory**
- **His rules are wise – not arbitrary**