

24.02: Moral Problems and the Good Life
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Religion and Morality

Does morality depend on religion? What is the relationship between morality and religion?

1. Motivation and Guidance

Religion provides motivation to be moral. Without it, none of us would be moral.

- Empirically false: some atheists are moral; some theists are immoral.

Religion provides knowledge of morality.

- Religion is too controversial and too mysterious to be a good source of moral knowledge.

II. Divine Command Theory

A. Actions of type A are morally required if and only if God commands us to do actions of type

- Could God command *anything* to be morally required? Even torture of babies for fun? If not, this seems to place limits on God's power. If so, we get the implausible result that torturing babies for fun would be morally required.
- Suppose God commands that we not commit murder. Why does God command this? If God's command is based in the fact that murder is wrong, then God is not the source of morality; murder is wrong and for that reason God prohibits it. If God's command is not based on the fact that murder is wrong, then God's command is arbitrary. An arbitrary command should not be the basis for morality.

B. Plato's *Euthyphro*

Assumptions Socrates and Euthyphro agree on the following background principles:

1. There is a form (EIDOS) of piety that is the same in all and only pious things. (5d2-5)
2. The form of piety makes pious actions pious, i.e., it is what is responsible for their being pious, and explains why they are pious. (6d10-e1) (The form is the essence or nature of piety.)
3. The form is a standard by which to judge which things are pious and which are impious. (6e3-6)
4. This form or nature or essence of piety is what we seek in giving a definition, i.e., it will provide the correct answer to the "What is X?" question.

Corollaries:

- a. The answer to "What is X?" cannot be an individual instance of X, since it must be common to all instances.
- b. Because the form must be the standard or ideal pattern for X's, it cannot be qualified by its opposite, i.e., it cannot be not-X.
- c. Since one role of the standard is to provide a basis for recognizing instances, we can make knowledgeable claims about instances of X, only if we have a definition.

To see the importance of (2), consider Socrates' argument at: 9d1-11b1. Suppose that:

- i) What is pious (i.e., what piety is) = what is loved by (all) the Gods. (To be pious = to be loved by all the Gods)
- ii) Piety is what makes actions pious.

But:

- iii) The Gods love what is pious because it is pious,

But not:

- iv) The Gods love what is pious because it is God-loved.

Contrast:

Being pious is what makes actions God-loved.

Being God-loved is what makes actions pious.

III. Questions to consider

1. At 5d, Socrates asks Euthyphro "What is the pious?". On what basis does Socrates reject Euthyphro's answer: "...to do what I am doing now, to prosecute the wrongdoer..."?
2. Socrates continues to press the question "what is the pious?". On what basis does Socrates reject Euthyphro's answer at 7a1: "What is dear to the Gods is pious...."? Can you outline the argument precisely?
3. What is Socrates interested in finding something "the same and alike" in every pious action? Do you think there is something "the same and alike" in every pious (or just or courageous) action?
4. Do Socrates and Euthyphro reach any conclusions about piety? If so, what are the conclusions? Do they agree on a definition of piety?
5. What other concepts can you substitute for 'pious' and 'God-loved' in Socrates' arguments and have a good argument? Consider:

Outfit x is chic because Donna Karan loves it.

Setting a table with the fork on the left is proper because Amy Vanderbilt loves it.

Are there some rules that *are* just a matter of what someone or something approves of? In what ways is morality different from fashion or etiquette?