

The Believer in God has a Dilemma regarding how Morality is truly Moral

What gives morality authority and makes it obligatory? Religion "answers" God.

This study is not concerned about what system of ethics is good - eg Utilitarianism or Situationism or whatever. These systems do not deny that morality exists but they just disagree on how to work out what is moral.

We will use good as shorthand for moral good and evil as shorthand for moral evil.

God commands good.

There are two questions that arise.

First question. Does he command it because it is good and he recognises it as good? Some say yes. That view implies that good would be good whether God recognises it as such or not and whether he commands it or not. Commonsense supports this idea. We know what is enjoyable is good. To say that you need God to decree that something is good implies that you cannot say a cake is nice unless God commands you to find it nice. That is insane.

Second question. Is good good because God commands it? Then abusing babies is bad when God does not command it and good when he does! Does something evil and cruel become right simply because God commands it? If the answer is yes then he invents good and has the power to make raping babies for no reason good. This view teaches that if God wanted a baby tortured to death for mere fun it would be right to please him and do so. That a person would even consider such a view and it is put forward for consideration by the religions speaks volumes! Anyway what is the view saying? It is saying that good has nothing to do with what is best but doing what God wants. This view, called the divine command theory, is against commonsense and if belief in God requires it, belief in God is evil.

The notion that God makes things good by commanding them is called Divine Command.

Divine command has us holding that there is no real morality but we just pretend that God's wishes are morality. This belief has been the prevailing view in Christianity. It is supported by the Bible which says God has the right to order us to stone homosexuals to death even for one harmless sin! And the Bible has Jesus being blamed by God for our sins and punished so we can go free. Many believers do not realise they accept it and others do but pretend they do not.

If God has no reason to command one to abstain from child molestation the result will be a morality that actually encourages us to abuse children.

Despite itself the doctrine of divine command makes the individual live and act as if he or she is God and then he or she blames God for the commands.

More about ought and obligation

We all feel that there is more to morality than just obligation. We do not want to help a baby because it is the law of God or anybody's law but because it is better for the baby. We may go along with a law telling us to help the baby but we are not obeying the law in the sense that we are not helping the baby just because we are told. Right and wrong are independent of God and are to be your God not him. Religion hates the notion that obligation is not everything. Why? Because it means you could have the right to disagree with its version of God. And disagree with it! So it tells us that God is everything and what he commands must be done.

So is moral moral because God says it is or moral even if he says it is wrong? That is two questions and two options!

The contrived option: the so-called "third" option

Anyway that is two. The believers claim that it is wrong to think that we have to choose one or the other. So they have come up with a third "option" which they say is the only real one.

Despite the fact that there are only two options, religion schemes to make us think that this numbering is an oversimplification. It is not.

Anyway religion says that "God is goodness itself and goodness is his character so he does not invent good but is good and God is the objective standard of right and wrong and so he doesn't need to discover it. In other words, God is the source of objective morality. Thus we should value what he values and do what he commands. God cannot make it moral to torture babies for fun for no reason. He would never advise or command us to do that. It is not a matter of command. It is a matter of character. He is not the KIND of God that destroys and wants destruction and pain. It is not about God's commands but about how God expresses what he is like by telling us what to do. The moral code he gives us communicates that kind of person God is. Without realising this we can have morality and recognise it but we cannot make sense of morality or persuade others to be moral without God."

It says this is the solution to the problem of how morality and God relate. Its true aim is to avoid a God whose rules do not fit us very well or whose moral rules are arbitrary which is just as bad.

Something being God's character does not necessarily mean it is not arbitrary in itself. His character is irrelevant to the question. The question is morality decreed as a real or is it just something to be treated as real though it is not?

This third option ignores the fact that or hypothetically we have to choose one of the other two then we must choose the independent moral standard one. It is not really a moral option when it insults that principle.

The third option is that morality is based on the way God is (page 76). Morality is God's character and it cannot change for God cannot change. To put it another way, somehow God and morality are one and the same - or morality is a person. This view contradicts the Christian idea that faith in God comes first for God alone matters because if God is morality then it follows that the atheist who behaves morally is having a relationship with God but just doesn't realise it. Faith then is not important. The doctrine that God always comes first implies the divine command theory which has caused so much hatred and division and bloodshed is true.

The idea that morality is God's character/nature or is the person of God solves nothing at all and creates a whole new factory of problems and outright evils. God's 'nature' means his characteristics, his attributes and his qualities. So it is not just love and justice and moral qualities but other things such as his intelligence etc.

Morality cannot really be a person. It is ridiculous to say that saving a baby's life is a person. It is insulting and shows no idea of what morality really is.

And if morality is God's character, then is it God that is making it so or is it an independent standard?

It still takes us back to the other two options.

Worse, in a way it is just accepting both of them at the one time and disguising this and disguising the fact that they are irreconcilable. So if each one of them is bad this mock hybrid is worse. It is based on lies. The God of Christianity and Islam is a man-made idol.

To say morality is God's nature or character is saying morality is what God's nature makes it to be even if this is not voluntary. That is back to the problem of divine command. Here we have a God who does not freely command but is forced by his nature to command. So in a way it is worse. God could not be to blame if the way he is forces him to command the slaying of babies for fun. And we would not be to blame for obeying.

Also, if God's character is good then is it good because he says so or because an independent standard says it? It takes us back to the dilemma. It does not deal with that question but ignores it which means it is not really any help to morality. It implies then that morality is an invention by God.

And to say God does not invent morality is to say he is the independent standard. But then it is not an independent

standard. It is confused and contradictory but is accepting both. That is why it is so jumbled up.

So religion is saying these days that when God commands us to do good, we are doing it not just because he commands it but because he is good in his character. It says God being of good character and who never does evil, has the qualities of goodness and so he is goodness itself and makes it real. Religion says God does not invent the values about what is right and wrong. Religion says something is wrong because it is wrong and not just because God says it is wrong. Religion argues then that the doctrine saves you from the notion of a God who can arbitrarily command you to do great harm and who makes evil good merely by calling it good.

But their scheme gives you a God who will not command you to torture a baby for fun and for nothing but what if there is some mysterious reason why doing this evil is unavoidable? What if God who tolerates evil is forced to command you to torment a baby for a laugh for it somehow is the best thing under the circumstances? The "morality" does not help much. It is interesting that what God commands according to religion fairly well matches what they want to believe he commands!

Why must we do what God tells us to do? Is it because he discovers what is right? Or is something right just because he says so? There is no other alternative. One must choose one of them. Christians fudge by chanting, "What God commands must be obeyed because his nature is good." That is really evasion. It is like offering two options tea or coffee and somebody pretending that vodka is an option. The evasion is very insulting and manipulative. The issue is too serious and important to be defaced by such evasion.

Their "solution" fuses two positions both of which they consider evil! Both positions are about power. Those who say that morality is whatever God wants it to be regardless of how much misery it causes are looking for power. They want to control what you consider right and wrong. The view that morality has nothing to do with anybody's views but is about facts also grants power in the sense that it opposes an arbitrary morality. The "solution" tries to say that the only real moral rules come from God and the moral rules are not arbitrary. That way it tries to grab the power that both the other views have. That is the bottom line. It is the two "bad" solutions for both are about power. If they are bad it is because of power so it makes no sense to say that a third solution which is based on their power is really a third solution. The third solution is just the other two in disguise.

It is obvious to the Christians that God either does good because it is good whether he sees it as good or not or he does what he pretends is good. They know fine well that there is nothing else on the menu but the two options. To invent a third option that doesn't exist is just vicious and underhand and insulting to atheists. And it is intolerant for it expresses the view that you need to believe in God before you can really believe in morality or in right and wrong. Nobody in their right mind would expect you to tolerate somebody that holds views that threaten the whole fabric of decency. Tolerance has to have a limit. The teaching subtly incites to hatred against atheists and doubters. Believers do say that unbelievers can be good but they deny that unbelievers are being rational or consistent when they are good. But how can your good be really good if it makes people feel accepting of your unbelief - an unbelief that endangers and undermines morality? Praising fake good is toxic for then the person becomes unable to see how bad it is. It is worse than praising evil.

Some say...

Some Christians have started to say that both of the options, "God invents morality so evil is good if he says so" or "God is subject to right and wrong and does not invent the standards but obeys them himself", are unacceptable and bad (page 76, *The Handbook of Christian Apologetics**). The first implies morality is just obedience and is nonsense in itself. Because of atheist criticism, some of the Christians have started to reject the view that the cruellest and most worthless act of hatred would be right if God commands that it be done. The second implies there is no need for God that we should care about morality more than him and can dispense with him entirely and let him worry about himself.

But if you had to choose one or the other then what? That question is a good way for weeding out the one that is less important or valuable. Obviously, it is better to adopt the view that right is right no matter about God or anybody else. Believers complain that it means dispensing with God! So what?! It is totally sick to put a religious theory and a person who might not exist above the belief that hurting a baby is just wrong no matter if there is a God or not. It is so wrong that God is irrelevant. God cannot come first because even if we are not forced to

choose one or the other the fact remains that the notion of a moral standard that is independent of God is the important one.

If the notion of an independent standard being above God is the best one then God is not the best. If it is true that God did not create his moral character or nature but just has it then whatever is behind that is better than him so we are back where we started. The independent standard option is the best one but if you bring God into it you ruin morality as much as the notion that God can invent right and wrong arbitrarily ruins it. On its own, it is a guard against people who say morality is whatever they want it to be.

Is it worth it to reject the notion that morality is independent even of God and that even God cannot create it but merely discovers it for the sake of being able to believe in a God who grounds morality? If an independent standard condemns hurting a baby for fun then it is evil to reject that standard and then reinstate it by making it depend on God. It is not really reinstating it at all but hiding your rejection of it. It is adding fuel to the fire of evil and downgrading the baby and her suffering.

God is just a brick to stop the car rolling away

The claim that the answer to the dilemma is that God's nature, the way God is, is justice and love, uses God just as a brick to stop the car rolling away forever. That is not true respect for God. You may say God is the only stop you need and there is nothing unloving or unfair about him being the stop so why not? That is admitting then that he is a brick. It is about using him to fulfil a function and that is blasphemous if he deserves pure spontaneous love and nothing else from us all.

Finally

It is evil to say that morality is just whatever God says it is no matter how much harm it does. All sane people agree. Even if God will never command genocide or mass murder, the fact remains that in principle it is being said to be okay if he does. Evil always starts small - with bad or irrational principles.

Christians hold that it is evil to say that morality is not God but above him and he cannot change it. That is ridiculous. It cannot really be called bad or evil to do that even if it is wrong. Christians call you evil for doing that so see that for the hate speech it is. For them it would be the ultimate sin for they regard failure to love God enough as the worst sin.

See morality as independent of what God wants or thinks and follow it not God.

* Handbook of Christian Apologetics, Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli, Monarch Publications, East Sussex, 1995