

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

A NON-VOLUNTARIST THEORY: AN ALTERNATE EVANGELICAL APOLOGETIC

FOR DEALING WITH THE EUTHYPHRO DILEMMA

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A NON-VOLUNTARIST THEORY: AN ALTERNATE EVANGELICAL APOLOGETIC  
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To my wife, Leslie-Ann, my children, and my family:

There are no words that can adequately express my gratitude for your love, encouragement, and patience.

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents an alternative response to the Euthyphro dilemma that will be referred to as the Non-Voluntarist Theory. It offers a critical evaluation of contemporary evangelical divine command theories to demonstrate the inherent ambiguity as they relate to Divine Command Theory, and their lack of apologetic force for answering the Euthyphro dilemma.

To accomplish this task, it is important to understand how the Euthyphro Dilemma relates to theology and apologetics in general, and the contemporary attempts to ground objective moral values and duties in particular. The topic relates to theology, since one's response to the Euthyphro Dilemma can implicitly or explicitly speak to God's moral sovereignty. The topic relates to apologetics in two primary ways. First, the Euthyphro Dilemma is still offered by contemporary non-theists as a critique of the Christian faith. Therefore, the response one gives, and the method used, is vital to the apologetic enterprise. Second, the Euthyphro Dilemma is meant to challenge the belief that God is the explanatory ultimate for objective moral values and duties. In addition, an examination of the philosophical landscape that surrounds the relationship between the Euthyphro Dilemma and Divine Command Theory is needed. Contemporary formulations of divine command theories of ethics make a distinction between moral values and moral obligations and duties. While this is not an illicit distinction, it is a distinction that weakens the apologetic force of the argument. Therefore, it is imperative that a proposed solution to the Euthyphro Dilemma is able to explain sufficiently moral ontology, moral epistemology, and moral obligation.

Contemporary evangelical formulations of Divine Command Theory are not evangelical, *per se*. Rather, these formulations are moral theories that happen to be ones that evangelicals



tend to support. In order to critically evaluate contemporary evangelical divine command theories, one should be aware of the historical development of the Standard Divine Command Theory.

In the field of research, special attention is given to one of the most notable representatives of the Standard Divine Command Theory, William of Ockham. Thus, one must be familiar with Ockham's work. Also, one must be aware of the modifications that have been made to Divine Command Theory that depart from the Ockhamist version and frame the modern perspective. Non-theists tend to understand the Divine Command Theory in Ockhamist terms. Consequently, attempts by contemporary evangelical modified divine command theorists use divine command terminology in a non-standard way, which creates a more cumbersome apologetic.

This dissertation will advance a position that moves towards the first horn, or non-voluntarist horn, of the Euthyphro Dilemma. It is thought that those who embrace this horn commit to the existence of a moral standard "outside, or distinct, from God" that guides the divine will. For example, William Lane Craig argues that to embrace the non-voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma is to embrace atheistic moral Platonism.<sup>1</sup> Traditionally, those who affirm this horn argue for the existence of objective moral values and duties that exist independent of God's existence and are accessible independent of divine revelation or command. This position at times has been referred to as the Guided Will Theory, since God would be guided by these independent moral values and duties. This dissertation advances a Non-Voluntarist Theory of moral values, obligations, and duties by affirming that God's divine nature is the basis for morality as a whole. It will be argued that a Non-Voluntarist Theory does not

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<sup>1</sup>William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 178.

commit the theist to a standard of moral values, obligations, and duties that exist independently from God. Furthermore, if a clear methodology is employed a Non-Voluntarist Theory provides common ground with the non-theist, and provides a practical theistic framework for ethics.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Euthyphro Dilemma is an objection to Christian theism that seeks to expose an inconsistency in theism, pertaining to the theistic conception of ethics, and God's relationship to morality. The dilemma is an important challenge for two distinct reasons. First, it forces the Christian to be thoughtful about the relationship between God and morality. Second, it challenges the notion that God is necessary to explain the existence of morality. First introduced in Plato's *Euthyphro*, Socrates asks Euthyphro if "the pious is loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods?"<sup>1</sup> Philosophers have contemporized the dilemma to challenge Christian theism by asking "Does God command actions because they are morally good, or are actions morally good because God commands them?"<sup>2</sup> One horn affirms that God's commands determine the moral content of any given action. Lying, for example, would be considered morally evil simply because God prohibits lying. This horn is commonly referred to as the voluntarist horn of the dilemma. The other horn affirms that God commands certain actions because of their intrinsic moral value. In this case, God would prohibit lying because lying is morally evil in and of itself. This horn is commonly referred to as the non-voluntarist horn of the dilemma.

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<sup>1</sup>G. M. A. Grube, trans., "Euthyphro," in *Plato: Five Dialogues*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), 12.

<sup>2</sup>Theists and non-theists alike formulate the Euthyphro Dilemma in this way. Non-theists include Russ Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1986), and Scott F. Aikin and Robert B. Talisse, *Reasonable Atheism: A Moral Case for Respectful Disbelief* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2011). Theists include David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), and William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2003).

The Euthyphro Dilemma is a challenge to Christianity since affirming either horn appears to require the Christian to abandon something essential to Christian theism. If the Christian chooses the non-voluntarist horn, and affirms that God commands or prohibits actions because they are morally good or evil, it is thought that the Christian must affirm the existence of some standard of goodness logically prior to, distinct from, or “outside of” God. If, on the other hand, the Christian affirms that actions are morally good simply by God’s having commanded them, then God’s commands are thought to be arbitrary and claims of God’s goodness vacuous. It appears that embracing either horn of the dilemma requires the Christian to abandon something essential to Christian theism. Because the Euthyphro Dilemma addresses issues concerning God, morality, and the relationship between the two, it is important to consider the implications of any proposed solution.

Divine Command Theory is a view that embraces the voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma, and is a dominant view held among Christian theologians and philosophers which claim that God’s commands constitute morality. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong elaborates on the general philosophical meaning of *constitute*:

As philosophers normally use this term, it signals a very strong relation. If a divine command constitutes our moral duty not to rape, for example, then what makes it morally wrong to rape is just that God commanded us not to rape. Moreover, whenever God commands us to do (or not to do) any act, we have a moral duty to do (or not to do) that act.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, to say that God’s commands constitute morality, is to say that God’s commands make an action morally good or morally right. William of Ockham is the paradigmatic example of a divine command theorist. Ockham’s Divine Command Theory affirms that “part or all of

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<sup>3</sup>Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, “Why Traditional Theism Cannot Provide an Adequate Foundation for Morality,” in *Is Goodness without God Good Enough: A Debate on Faith, Secularism, and Ethics*, ed. Robert K. Garcia and Nathan L. King (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), 106.

morality depends upon the will of God as promulgated by divine commands.”<sup>4</sup> Ockham’s theory is the standard way of understanding Divine Command Theory by theists and non-theists alike. When faced with the Euthyphro Dilemma, any formulation of Divine Command Theory must overcome two particular theological challenges. The first is the Arbitrariness Objection. The Arbitrariness Objection seeks to understand the reasons why God commands or prohibits certain actions. If God prohibits lying for some particular reason, that reason becomes the basis for lying’s moral qualities rather than God’s will being the basis. However, if God does not have prior reasons for prohibiting lying, then his command is arbitrary. Therefore, if God’s commands are arbitrary, he could have just as easily commanded lying rather than prohibiting it. James Rachels provides some insight to this objection when he claims, “You may be tempted to reply: ‘But God would never command us to be liars!’ But why not? If he did endorse lying, God would not be commanding us to do wrong, because his command would make lying right.”<sup>5</sup> The second theological objection is the Vacuity Objection. The Vacuity Objection claims that if morally good is equivalent to the claim “commanded by God,” then to claim that God is good, or that God’s commands are good is to claim that “God is commanded by God,” or “God’s commands are commanded by God.” These statements are tautologies, or, as Rachels says it, they are “empty truisms,” true by definition and not containing any real value descriptions of God or his commands.<sup>6</sup> If the Christian theist is unable to respond adequately to these objections, he must abandon voluntarism and embrace non-voluntarism.

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<sup>4</sup>Philip L. Quinn, “Divine Command Ethics” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd, ed. Robert Audi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 241.

<sup>5</sup>Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 42.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 43.

Guided Will Theory is a view that embraces the non-voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma, and is another dominant view held among Christian theologians and philosophers who claim that God's commands do not constitute morality. When faced with the Euthyphro Dilemma, the Guided Will Theory must also overcome particular theological challenges. First, if morality is grounded in something logically prior to or independent of God's commands, it is often argued that this standard of moral goodness must also be logically prior to and independent of God.<sup>7</sup> If it is true that morality exists independent of God, the Christian is forced to abandon the view that God created everything. Michael Levin notes, "The unattractiveness of the first [non-voluntarist] horn of the dilemma is more difficult to capture... God is supposed to be the ultimate ground for everything. Everything that exists does so because of him. Yet if God wills what he does *because it is antecedently right*, moral standards become independent of God."<sup>8</sup> Second, if morality exists as a standard logically prior to and independent of God, it could be accessed through reason alone. Consequently, God's commands become unnecessary in moral decision making. Obviously, the Christian theist will not be willing to make these theological compromises that appear to be natural consequences of the Guided Will Theory.

In an attempt to avoid the weaknesses associated with Ockham's Divine Command Theory without embracing Guided Will Theory, contemporary evangelical theologians and philosophers attempt to split the horns of the dilemma by providing what is thought to be a more defensible form of Divine Command Theory. This theory will be referred to as Modified Divine

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<sup>7</sup>Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, 65-66. Shafer-Landau asserts that the Guided Will Theory suggests that "God commands actions because they are right. This implies that God did not invent morality, but rather recognized an existing moral law and then commanded us to obey it."

<sup>8</sup>Michael Levin, "Understanding the Euthyphro Problem," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 25, no. 2 (1989): 83-84.

Command Theory.<sup>9</sup> The most prominent evangelical proponents of Modified Divine Command Theory are William Lane Craig, David Baggett, Jerry Walls, and Paul Copan and Matthew Flannagan. Building upon the philosophical modifications to voluntarism contributed by William P. Alston and Robert Merrihew Adams, these theorists make a legitimate distinction between moral goodness (value) and moral rightness (obligations and duties), and subsequently, use this distinction to modify the Standard Divine Command Theory. The Standard Divine Command Theory claims that God's commands constitute morality (goodness and rightness). Modified Divine Command Theory claims moral value is grounded in the divine nature, while God's commands constitute one's moral obligations and duties. Modified divine command theorists argue that this modification provides a third way, thus splitting the horns of the Euthyphro Dilemma. Craig describes his position as non-voluntarist Divine Command Theory. He does so by grounding morality in God's character, which is "expressed to us in various commands."<sup>10</sup> Similar to Craig, Baggett and Walls note that their "axiological theory (of moral goodness) is distinctly non-voluntarist, but [their] deontic theory (of moral obligation) is not."<sup>11</sup> Both Craig and Baggett and Walls attempt to salvage Divine Command Theory while avoiding Ockhamist formulations.

Since establishing and maintaining a distinction between moral values and moral obligations and duties is critical to Modified Divine Command Theory, the Christian theist must be aware of the ethical landscape that surrounds the dilemma when assessing a proposed

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<sup>9</sup>This title was coined by Robert M. Adams in Robert M. Adams, "A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness," in *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, ed. Charles Taliaferro and Paul J. Griffiths (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 462-476.

<sup>10</sup>William Lane Craig, *The Euthyphro Dilemma Once Again*, accessed, accessed July 17, 2015, URL=<<http://www.reasonablefaith.org/the-euthyphro-dilemma-once-again>>.

<sup>11</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 104.

solution. This is a critical distinction that is often overlooked and misapplied by theists and non-theists alike when assessing the Euthyphro Dilemma. A key point that proponents of Modified Divine Command Theory seem to overlook is the original purpose of the Euthyphro Dilemma as voiced by atheists wishing to challenge the theistic conception of ethics. Those offering the dilemma are objecting to God being the basis for morality as a whole. While normativity and practicality must be addressed, they are not directly related to the Euthyphro Dilemma. Ockham's Divine Command Theory addresses the basis for morality as a whole. By divorcing the basis of moral values from the basis of moral obligations and duties the modified divine command theorists use divine command terminology in a non-standard way, and create unnecessary ambiguity. Consequently, it is imperative to make a distinction between Ockham's standard formulation and non-standard contemporary formulations. Non-Standard Divine Command Theory makes a sharp distinction between the basis for the good and the basis for the right.<sup>12</sup> John Milliken emphasizes this oversight when he notes, "Even if it were true that God's command makes truth telling *right*, that would not tell us anything yet about what makes it *good*."<sup>13</sup> And yet, understanding what makes actions both morally good and morally right is at the heart of Divine Command Theory and the Euthyphro Dilemma in the first place. The Euthyphro Dilemma is primarily concerned with metaethics. In other words, it is concerned with discovering the grounding and nature for morality as a whole, and is formulated as an attack against a theistic conception of ethics. The dilemma is not necessarily concerned with whether or not one has a moral obligation or duty, *per se*, but rather what grounds one's moral obligations and duties. Furthermore, the dilemma is not concerned with moral decision-making or the

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<sup>12</sup>The distinction between Standard Divine Command Theory and Non-standard Divine Command Theory will be utilized throughout the dissertation, and is dealt with substantially in Chapter 3.

<sup>13</sup>John Milliken, "Euthyphro, the Good, and the Right" *Philosophia Christi* 11, no. 1(2009): 147.



practical application of morality. In *Euthyphro*, Socrates does not ask the title character why one is obliged to act piously (normativity), nor does he ask Euthyphro to provide ethical counsel for a particular situation (practicality). Rather, Socrates asks Euthyphro to explain why the pious is pious (metaethics).

Answering the Euthyphro Dilemma is not merely a theological and philosophical exercise; it is an apologetic exercise as well. The Euthyphro Dilemma is primarily put forth as a challenge to the Christian faith, and it calls for a thoroughgoing apologetic. It may not strike one as intuitive to think about the larger enterprise of Christian apologetics when considering the Euthyphro Dilemma. Nevertheless, the debate over the Euthyphro Dilemma is related to Christian apologetics in two primary ways. First, it relates to moral arguments for God's existence. Second, it seeks to provide coherent grounding for morality without abandoning essential doctrines to Christian theism.

Generally speaking, there are three types of moral arguments for God's existence: deductive arguments, inductive arguments, and abductive arguments. The leading example for a deductive moral argument for God's existence is Craig's moral argument is a deductive syllogism which takes the form of *modus tollens*:

1. If God did not exist, objective moral values and duties would not exist.
2. Objective moral values and duties do exist.
3. Therefore, God exists.<sup>14</sup>

If one wishes to deny the conclusion, she must show that one or more of the premises is false.

Premise 1 asserts that God's existence is necessary for objective moral values and duties. While divine command theories agree that God's existence is a necessary condition for the existence of objective moral values, obligations, and duties, his existence is not a sufficient condition.

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<sup>14</sup>Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 495.

According to the Standard Divine Command Theory, God's commands are necessary and sufficient for the existence of objective moral values and duties. As noted earlier, the Euthyphro Dilemma seeks to challenge this position by claiming that divine command theorists must affirm that God's commands are arbitrary and that claims to his goodness are vacuous. Otherwise, there must be some standard logically prior to or independent of God. If there is a standard of moral goodness logically prior to and independent of God, then God's existence is not necessary for objective moral values and duties.

An example of an inductive moral argument for God's existence is Thomas Aquinas' fourth way. Thomas' fourth way argues for God's existence from "gradation to be found in things."<sup>15</sup> Thomas focuses primarily on the "good, true, and noble" that can be found in creation in varying degrees. These "gradations," Thomas argues, naturally refer one to its maximum. For Thomas, the maximum for the good, true, and noble is God.<sup>16</sup> As with all inductive arguments, the conclusion is probable, but not certain. One could still propose moral Platonism as a probable maximum for the good, true and noble.

An example of an abductive moral argument for God's existence is the one developed by Baggett and Walls, which advances the claims that God is the best explanation of morality. There are many possible explanations for objective moral values and duties. Philosophical Naturalism, for example, might propose some evolutionary accounting of morality. Baggett and Walls argue that "the source of this moral obligation isn't likely to be mere matter."<sup>17</sup> Instead of structuring their argument in such a way that God's existence is necessary for objective moral

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<sup>15</sup>Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.3.1.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 11.

values, obligations, and duties, Baggett and Walls claim that God is the best or most likely explanation for obvious moral facts.<sup>18</sup>

Contrary to what some proponents of Modified Divine Command Theory assert, the Euthyphro Dilemma is a true dilemma, requiring one of two responses. The standard Euthyphro Dilemma asks whether God commands an action because it is morally good/right, or is an action morally good/right because God commands it? The dilemma seeks to explain the relationship between God's commands and an action's moral qualities. Either God's commands are the basis for the moral good/right, or God's commands are not the basis for the moral good/right. In other words, the theist cannot affirm both horns of the dilemma without contradiction. The Euthyphro Dilemma forces the theist to affirm voluntarism or non-voluntarism. The Christian may embrace the non-voluntarist horn of the dilemma by affirming the existence of a moral standard that is presumably logically prior and independent of God, or the Christian may embrace the voluntarist horn of the dilemma thereby affirming that God's commands alone constitute moral value, obligations, and duties. Since both horns appear to require the Christian to abandon something essential to Christian theism, the Christian must, as Baggett and Walls add, "abandon voluntarism altogether," or offer "a more defensible version of Divine Command Theory."<sup>19</sup> The test of defensibility for responses to the Euthyphro Dilemma will be the response's overall apologetic effectiveness. The method used for evaluating these responses will use three criteria: methodological clarity; theological strength; and explanatory scope. For a response to be methodological clear, it must use divine command terminology in a standard way and interpret the two horns of the Euthyphro Dilemma in a standard way. For a response to have theological

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<sup>18</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 9.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 37.

strength, it must adequately respond to the Arbitrariness Objection and the Vacuity Objection without requiring the theist to abandon something essential to Christian theism. For a response to have adequate explanatory scope, it must be able to answer the Epistemic Objection, Moral Authority Objection, Moral Autonomy Objection, and Abhorrent Command Objection.<sup>20</sup>

### Statement of Purpose and Thesis

Evangelical divine command theorists seek to salvage Divine Command Theory, by modifying its aim in order to provide a more defensible version of the Standard Divine Command Theory.<sup>21</sup> However, this project will argue that even with this modification, a divine command conception of ethics is not able to withstand the weight of the objections associated with the Euthyphro Dilemma. Consequently, this project seeks to persuade the Christian theist to abandon Divine Command Theory altogether. By abandoning all forms of Divine Command Theory and embracing a non-voluntarist theory of morality, the Christian can provide a stronger apologetic and clarify unnecessary ambiguity without abandoning essential doctrines of Christian theism.

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<sup>20</sup>The apologetic effectiveness of both the Modified Divine Command Theory and the Non-Voluntarist Theory will be assessed by assessing their methodological clarity, theological strength, and explanatory scope. The former will be assessed in Chapter 4 and the latter in Chapter 5.

<sup>21</sup>For the most significant attempts to offer a more defensible version of Divine Command Theory, in addition to Craig, and Baggett and Walls, see: William P. Alston, "Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists," in *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy*, ed. Michael D. Beatty (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 303-326; William P. Alston, "What Euthyphro Should Have Said," in *Philosophy of Religion: A Reader and Guide*, ed. William Lane Craig (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 283-298; Adams, "A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness," 462-476; Robert M. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework of Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); John E. Hare, *God's Call: Moral Realism, God's Commands, and Human Autonomy* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001); and John Milliken, "Euthyphro, the Good, and the Right," 145-155.

While each theorist varies in his theological perspective, philosophical nuances, and apologetic methods, each has all four of the following features in common. First, they affirm that God is the ultimate good.<sup>22</sup> Second, they deny that God's commands constitute moral values<sup>23</sup> Third, they affirm that God's commands constitute at least some moral obligations and duties. Fourth, they refer to themselves as divine command theorists.<sup>24</sup> At best, these four affirmations appear to pose a conflict. At worst, they expose a serious misinterpretation of the Euthyphro Dilemma and the Standard Divine Command Theory.

Contemporary evangelical modified divine command theorists have attempted to provide a more defensible version of the Standard Divine Command Theory by making a distinction between the basis for moral values and the basis for moral obligations and duties. Craig, for example, argues for a non-voluntarist view of Divine Command Theory. In others words, Craig promotes the view that "God's will expresses his essential properties...so the moral good is not something based on God's will, but his nature."<sup>25</sup> Baggett and Walls have made a similar

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<sup>22</sup>See Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 84-101; Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for A Christian Worldview*, 529-532; Paul Copan, "Morality and Meaning without God: Another Failed Attempt," *Philosophia Christi* 6, no. 2 (2004): 295-304. Although each author has a unique way of explaining this position, each will affirm that if God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist. Each author has been clear to note that being moral does not require *belief* in God's existence, but they do argue that being moral does require that God exists.

<sup>23</sup>See Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 104; Craig, *The Euthyphro Dilemma Once Again*, accessed July 27, 2015, URL=<<http://www.reasonablefaith.org/the-euthyphro-dilemma-once-again>>. Each author, especially Baggett and Walls, goes to great lengths to distinguish between axiology (the good) and deontology (the right). It is this distinction, they claim, that allows them to remain "Divine Command theorists."

<sup>24</sup>See Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 104; Craig, *The Euthyphro Dilemma Once Again*, accessed July 27, 2015, URL=<<http://www.reasonablefaith.org/the-euthyphro-dilemma-once-again>>. Each author, especially Baggett and Walls, goes to great lengths to distinguish between axiology (the good) and deontology (the right). It is this distinction, they claim, that allows them to remain divine command theorists.

<sup>25</sup>William Lane Craig, *The Euthyphro Dilemma Once Again*, accessed July 27, 2015, URL=<<http://www.reasonablefaith.org/the-euthyphro-dilemma-once-again>>.

distinction. They note, “Our axiological theory (of moral goodness) is distinctly non-voluntarist, but our deontic theory (of moral obligation) is not.”<sup>26</sup> Craig, Baggett, and Walls call themselves divine command theorists, but only as it relates to one’s moral obligations and duties. Therefore, according to these theories, the theologian can remain a divine command theorist and not fall prey to the Vacuity Objection and Arbitrariness Objection.

These attempts to salvage the Standard Divine Command Theory—by offering a more defensible version—have the following negative effects in apologetics. First, Standard Divine Command Theory is not a theory of the morally obligation and duties alone, but of moral values, obligations, and duties. Moral goodness is a *sine qua non* of Standard Divine Command Theory. Therefore, modified divine command theorists are using “divine command” terminology in a non-standard way and requiring the theist and non-theist to do the same. For example, Rachels clearly understands the Divine Command Theory in a way that does not make the distinction between moral values and moral obligations and duties when he describes the Standard Divine Command Theory as meaning, “that conduct is right *because God commands it*. For example, according to Exodus 20:16, God commands us to be truthful. On this option, the *reason* we should be truthful is simply that God requires it. Apart from the divine command, truth telling is neither good nor bad. It is God’s command that makes truthfulness right.”<sup>27</sup> Moreover, other contemporary non-theistic perspectives do not make a distinction between the basis of moral values and the basis of moral obligations and duties, but understand the Standard Divine Command Theory as an explanation of the basis for morality as a whole. Louise Antony notes, “Good for the Divine Command theorist is *synonymous* with ‘commanded by God’; we are

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<sup>26</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 104.

<sup>27</sup>Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 42.

supposed to lack any conception of what it would be for an act to be good or bad that's independent of our knowledge of what God has commanded."<sup>28</sup> In these cases, neither perspective treats the Standard Divine Command Theory purely as a theory of moral rightness. While the distinction between the morally good and the morally right is a legitimate distinction, the way it is employed by modified divine command theorists removes the very reason for referring to them as "divine command" theories. This requirement by the modified divine command theorist to move beyond the standard terminology weakens the persuasiveness of the theory and requires extensive clarification and qualification.

Second, when compared to the broad scope of literature on the topic, especially non-theistic accounts of Standard Divine Command Theory, modified formulations offered by self-identified divine command theorists seem to misinterpret the force of the Euthyphro Dilemma. The dilemma is a challenge aimed at morality as a whole, not moral value alone. Therefore, to simply say that one is a non-voluntarist in terms of moral value is to admit that one embraces the non-voluntarist horn of the dilemma. In other words, if it is not God's commands that make an action morally good, then there must be some other grounding. Since the dilemma addresses the basis for moral value and moral obligations and duties, modifying the Standard Divine Command Theory to address moral obligations and duties misses the challenge of the dilemma. In addition, the modified divine command theorists view the Euthyphro Dilemma as a false dilemma. They claim that the non-voluntarist horn commits the theist to affirming a standard for morality that is independent of God. For example, Craig argues that the Euthyphro Dilemma requires one of two responses. Either the theist must affirm that morality is grounded in God's

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<sup>28</sup>Louis Antony, "Atheism as Perfect Piety," in *Is Goodness without God Good Enough? A Debate on Faith, Secularism, and Ethics*, ed. Robert K. Garcia and Nathan L. King (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), 72.

commands, or in something independent of God. For Craig, the conclusion is clear. He notes, “the Euthyphro Dilemma can thus be construed as an argument for Atheistic Moral Platonism.”<sup>29</sup> Contrary to Craig, the Euthyphro Dilemma is a true dilemma. The non-voluntarist horn does not commit the theist to a standard of morality independent of God. The non-voluntarist horn merely commits the theist to affirm a basis for morality that is independent of God’s command. Consequently, when the modified divine command theorist claims to split the horns of the dilemma, he does so based on a misconstrual of the non-voluntarist horn, thus missing the challenge inherent to the Euthyphro Dilemma.

Modified Divine Command Theory not only appears to miss the force of the Euthyphro Dilemma; it seems to be a more cumbersome approach. Instead of the Modified Divine Command Theory, the Christian theist should embrace the non-voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma. Non-voluntarism suggests that one affirms the notion that God’s commands do not *constitute* moral values or moral obligations and duties. Rather, God’s commands are right-indicating, not right-making. In other words, God’s commands paly an epistemic role in morality. However, embracing this horn of the dilemma commits the theist to the view that God commands certain actions because those actions have moral value. It is presumed that by embracing this horn, the Christian is obligated to concede an ultimate grounding for morality that is logically prior to or independent of God. Furthermore, divine command theorists appear to agree with this conclusion.<sup>30</sup> However, contrary to that view, the non-voluntarist horn commits the theist only to a moral standard logically prior to or independent of *God’s commands*. But of course, a standard distinct from God’s commands need not be distinct from God himself. It

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<sup>29</sup>Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 181.

<sup>30</sup>Antony, “Atheism as Perfect Piety,” 67-84, Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, and Aikin and Talisse, *Reasonable Atheism*.



seems obvious that God himself is the basis for the moral value and moral obligations and duties. Therefore, the theist embracing this horn of the dilemma loses nothing essential to her theism.

This approach is a less cumbersome apologetic because it keeps the actual challenge of the Euthyphro Dilemma in view. Non-voluntarism attempts to explain the existence of moral goodness and moral rightness without God's commands as the metaethical starting point. By focusing on metaethics, non-voluntarism does not require an extensive explanation for clarification and qualification. Furthermore, this approach accomplishes the ultimate goal of Modified Divine Command Theory. It agrees with the Modified Divine Command Theorists that the moral goodness is grounded in the character of God; that God's character is often expressed with divine commands. However, it argues that God's commands do not constitute one's moral obligations and duties, but rather that they indicate one's obligations and duties.

Finally, non-voluntarism requires less concession on the part of the non-theist theologian. Instead of forcing one to redefine Standard Divine Command Theory and the Euthyphro Dilemma, non-voluntarism merely requires one to admit that God is distinct from his commands. This approach enables the theist to provide a theistic ethic, without creating unnecessary ambiguity or requiring the Christian to abandon something essential to Christian theism. Furthermore, non-voluntarism is a preferred apologetic method since it is the presumed path of least resistance for the non-theist.<sup>31</sup>

### Definitions

Emphasis is placed on a clear understanding of shared concepts and terms, rather than superficial agreement. Modified divine command theorists have used divine command

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<sup>31</sup>Rachels, *Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 44. Rachels suggests that the most intuitive move, on the part of the theist, is to affirm some formulation of natural law rather than embrace what he sees as absurdity associated with Divine Command Theory.

terminology in a non-standard way and consequently sacrificed clarity in their attempt to find agreement. The following section seeks to provide a theological and philosophical point of reference for the reader. This is certainly not an exhaustive list of terms associated with the topic, but it does represent the most salient features.

### *Divine Aseity*

Divine aseity refers to God's self-existence. Divine aseity advances the notion that God is self-existent, which means that he does not depend on another for his existence. Christian theism holds that God does not exist contingently, but necessarily. Divine aseity is particularly related to the Euthyphro Dilemma since the dilemma forces one to choose between God's commands as the grounding for objective moral values and duties, or some other grounding distinct from or logically prior to God's commands. The classical Christian perspective on the existence of God affirms that God is the only necessary entity that exists and that all other concrete and abstract entities are contingent upon God for existence. Platonism, on the other hand, affirms the necessary existence of abstract entities. Platonism affirms that moral propositions are included in the realm of necessary abstract entities. It is clear that how one views God's existence, and more importantly, whether abstract entities exist necessarily or not, will influence the way one approaches the Euthyphro Dilemma.

### *Divine Goodness*

The Christian scriptures teach that God is good (Psa. 107:1, 119:68, 145:9; Matt. 19:16-17). To be more precise, they teach that God is morally perfect or excellent (Jam. 1:13). How one responds to the Euthyphro Dilemma directly affects how one explains moral perfection. For example, if one asserts that God's commands constitute moral values, obligations, and duties, it

is important to explain what it means to claim that God is good. This would simply mean that God acts in ways that are consistent with his commands. However, if one claims that all goodness is grounded in some abstract principle distinct from or logically prior to God, one must redefine God's goodness as being consistent with those abstract moral principles.

### *Sovereignty*

God's sovereignty is typically thought to relate to God's overall governance of creation. While there are various theological perspectives on interpreting the nature of God's sovereignty, evangelical Christians generally agree that God is in some way sovereign over creation in virtue of his divine aseity and role as creator. The issue of God's sovereignty over the moral realm is called into question if a more platonic understanding of morality is true. For example, if the abstract moral principle "Murder is bad" exists logically prior to or independent of God, it would be an aspect of reality that God was not in control of, but subject to.

### *Divine Will*

Orthodox Christian theology views God not as an impersonal force, but rather a personal being. To say that God is personal, can require a nuanced use of the word "person" so as to avoid confusion between the three persons of the Godhead and the personal nature of God. To say that God is a person is not to propose that there is a fourth person in the Godhead, but rather a quality or attribute of God. A traditional view of personhood often entails the quality of self-determination, intentionality or volition.<sup>32</sup> As John Feinberg notes, "Self-determination refers to the ability to make decisions and carry them out."<sup>33</sup> If it can be said that God is personal, it

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<sup>32</sup>Edward Johnson, "Personhood," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert Audi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 662.

<sup>33</sup>John Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 228.

would include self-determination and intentionality. Intentionality, or the coupling of belief and desire, is often described as the volition or will.<sup>34</sup> If God is personal, and if God's sovereignty implies that he governs some or all of the created order, then it is reasonable to assume that God might have some intention for creation. This intention can be broadly defined as God's divine will. God's divine will must be consistent with his moral character (divine goodness) and his existence (divine aseity). The content of God's divine will is a different question. While the entire content of God's will is inaccessible, Christian theology affirms that some of God's will is expressed through divine commands.

### *Divine Command*

In *Divine Discourse*, Nicholas Wolterstorff notes, "Let us assume that among the things that scriptures got right about that being [God], is their presumption that God is personal: a center of consciousness who forms and acts on intentions and has knowledge of entities other than Godself. Can that doing what's necessary for speaking?"<sup>35</sup> Wolterstorff goes on to defend the notion that not only does God have what is necessary for speaking; he also enters into speech acts in a variety of ways. Classical theism holds that God's commands are the means (or a means) by which God enters into speech acts. God's commands are often thought of as prescriptive propositions found within Scripture that express God's intention or desire. Furthermore, these commands are thought to either be right-making or right-indicating of one's moral obligations. The primary concern addressed by the Euthyphro Dilemma is the relationship between God's commands and morality.

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<sup>34</sup>Myles Brad, "Volition," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert Audi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 963.

<sup>35</sup>Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 95.

## *Ethics*

The philosophical study of morality is perhaps the broadest definition of ethics. More specifically, John Deigh notes, “Ethics, along with logic, metaphysics, and epistemology, is one of the main branches of philosophy...it can in turn be divided into the general study of goodness, the general study of right action, applied ethics, moral psychology, and the metaphysics of moral responsibility.”<sup>36</sup> Moral philosophy seeks to examine the rational justification for moral rules and evaluates theories of moral conduct. Christian ethics, in particular, attempts to address these various issues from a theistic worldview. One such issue is metaethics or the grounding question for morality. Metaethics is where Christian ethics and the Euthyphro Dilemma converge.

### *Moral Value (Moral Goodness)*

A theory of moral value is one that explains the basis of moral goodness. It is a branch of moral philosophy that answers questions such as, “What makes murder bad?” Some theories propose that moral value is based on the intrinsic nature of a thing. Some theories propose that moral value is based on individual pleasure. Still, others propose that moral value is based on an abstract moral entity or form. Classical Christianity affirms that either God or God’s commands are the basis for moral value.

### *Moral Obligations and Duties (Moral Rightness)*

A theory of moral obligations and duties is one that explains the basis for moral obligations and duties. It answers questions such as, “What makes murder wrong?” According to Deigh a theory of moral rightness, “concerns the principles of right and wrong that govern our

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<sup>36</sup>John Deigh, “Ethics,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert Audi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 284.

choices and pursuits.”<sup>37</sup> Classical Christianity affirms that humanity has an obligation to obey God’s commands. Similarly, Greek polytheists affirmed that humanity had an obligation to obey the gods’ law. However, there is a distinction between *that* one has an obligation, and *how* that obligation is grounded. Unfortunately, this distinction is often overlooked, and the two can easily be conflated. In *Euthyphro*, Socrates makes it abundantly clear that his primary concern is one of grounding.

### *Voluntarism*

Voluntarism holds that the moral status of an action is determined solely by the command of some deity. As an example, the voluntarist would claim that murder is morally bad in virtue of God forbidding it. Conversely, if God were to command murder, it would in virtue of his command be morally good. Mark Murphy makes the distinction between metaethical voluntarism and normative voluntarism.<sup>38</sup> Metaethical voluntarism refers to questions regarding moral grounding, and normative voluntarism refers to questions regarding moral obligation and right action.

### *Non-voluntarism*

Non-voluntarism, also known as essentialism, holds that the moral status of an action is determined by something logically prior to or independent of God’s commands. There are two primary ways in which to ground morality as a non-voluntarist. First, one may ground goodness

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<sup>37</sup>Deigh, “Ethics,” 286.

<sup>38</sup>Murphy, Mark, "Theological Voluntarism", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), accessed October 23, 2015, URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/voluntarism-theological/>>.

in the very nature of God. This view is known as divine essentialism. Second, one may ground goodness in abstract moral principles. This view is known as Platonic essentialism.

### Summary and Content Outline of the Dissertation

The primary aim of this study is two-fold. First, it will demonstrate that contemporary evangelical reformulations of Modified Divine Command Theory fail to respond adequately to the Euthyphro Dilemma, create unnecessary ambiguity, and require the Christian to abandon something essential to Christian theism. Second, it will argue that abandoning contemporary evangelical reformulations of Modified Divine Command Theory and embracing non-voluntarism provides stronger apologetic force and clarifies unnecessary ambiguity in divine command theorists' response to the Euthyphro Dilemma without requiring the Christian to abandon something essential to Christian theism. The method and approach used in this study will rely heavily upon accurately exposing the weaknesses of Modified Divine Command Theory, and demonstrating the strengths of non-voluntarism. Consequently, this study is divided into five major chapters.

This chapter has provided a brief introduction to the Euthyphro Dilemma and clear statement of purpose for the remaining chapters. Also, this chapter has provided the methodology employed to accomplish its end goal. To provide clarity for the overall argument, this chapter has briefly addressed common terminology that will be used throughout the study. Chapter 2 provides an exegesis of *Euthyphro* and concludes with a brief analysis of the exact issues addressed by Euthyphro's dilemma. It frames the debate by clearly presenting its two horns, thus establishing a broader framework by which to assess modified divine command theories. It is disputed as to whether Euthyphro's dilemma is actually a true dilemma. Some modern reformulations attempt to split the horns of the dilemma, while others insist that these

attempts merely extend the dilemma altogether.<sup>39</sup> Clearly outlining the two horns of the Euthyphro Dilemma will assist in evaluating contemporary evangelical reformulations of Modified Divine Command Theory, and provide a path forward for this dissertation's proposed solution. Modified Divine Command Theory suffers from unnecessary ambiguity. This ambiguity begins with a misinterpretation of the point and force of the Euthyphro Dilemma. To provide evidence for this assertion, it is necessary to demonstrate that modified divine command theorists have first misinterpreted the Euthyphro Dilemma and that this misinterpretation has informed their theory. This requires a critical explanation of Plato's *Euthyphro* and the philosophical challenge it presents. Chapter 2 will begin by providing this critical explanation. Also, Chapter 2 will be dedicated to establishing a proper understanding of Divine Command Theory and Guided Will Theory and how each theory relates to moral philosophy.

Chapter 3 will be devoted to framing the historical debate by examining selected expressions of Divine Command Theory in conjunction with opposing views. These views range from early Greek thought to the modern era. The most notable divine command theorist in history is William of Ockham. Ockham will serve as the paradigm for future formulations of would-be divine command theories. This chapter will demonstrate that there have been subtle and consistent shifts in evangelical theology towards grounding morality in the character of God while still affirming elements of Ockham's theory. These historical modifications and distinctions are precursors to contemporary evangelical reformulations of Modified Divine Command Theory. Modern and contemporary theorists seek to qualify their position as divine

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<sup>39</sup>This challenge has been raised on several occasions by various individuals, see: Jeremy Koons, "Can God's Goodness Avenge the Divine Command Theory from Euthyphro?" *European Journal of Philosophy of Religion* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 177-195; Wes Morriston, "Must There Be a Standard of Moral Goodness Apart from God?" *Philosophia Christi* 3, no. 2 (2001): 127-138; and John Milliken, "Euthyphro, the Good, and the Right," 145-155.



command theorists while the non-theistic perspective continues to understand Divine Command Theory through an Ockhamist framework.<sup>40</sup> In the process of attempting to salvage God's sovereignty and goodness, modified divine command theorists have sacrificed accuracy and effectiveness in the eyes of their non-theistic counterparts. This historical review will show that both proponents and opponents have understood Standard Divine Command Theory as a theory of moral value, obligations, and duties. This historical review will serve to highlight the discrepancies between Standard Divine Command Theory and Modified Divine Command Theory.

Chapter 4 critically evaluates of the most prominent expressions of Modified Divine Command Theory by contemporary evangelical theologians and philosophers. This section will highlight the overall apologetic effectiveness of the theories by assessing their methodological clarity, theological strength, and explanatory scope. Principally, the works for Craig,<sup>41</sup> Baggett and Walls,<sup>42</sup> and Copan and Flannagan<sup>43</sup> will be evaluated. These theorists are not only informed by their philosophical predecessors; they also continue to use divine command language in a

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<sup>40</sup>Non-theists such as Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 41; Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, 65; and Aikin and Talisse, *Reasonable Atheism*, 103 clearly understand Divine Command Theory to mean that the good is the same as saying "commanded by God."

<sup>41</sup>Three key sources for Craig's argument will be used. The first is William Lane Craig, "The Kurtz/Craig Debate: Is Goodness without God Good Enough?" in *Is Goodness without God Good Enough?* ed. Robert K. Garcia and Nathan L. King (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 25-48. The second is William Lane Craig, "This Most Gruesome of Guests" in *Is Goodness without God Good Enough?* ed. Robert K. Garcia and Nathan L. King (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 167-188. The third is, William Lane Craig, "The Indispensability of Theological Metaethical Foundations for Morality," *Foundations*, 5 (1997): 9-12.

<sup>42</sup>Two key sources for Baggett and Walls argument will be used. The first is Baggett and Walls, *Good God*. The second is Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>43</sup>Two key sources for Copan's argument will be used. The first is Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster: Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011). The second is Copan, "Morality and Meaning Without God," 295-304.

non-standard way. In their attempt to answer the challenge to theistic ethics in general, and the moral argument in particular, they offer a theory that ultimately fails. Understanding that this is no insignificant claim, these models' overall apologetic effectiveness will be analyzed from three distinct perspectives that will speak to their overall success.

First, each formulation will be evaluated based on their methodological clarity. There appears to be some ambiguity in contemporary models as to the distinction between God's commands and God himself. It is commonly argued by theists and non-theists alike that the non-voluntarist horn of the dilemma commits the theist to grounding morality in something distinct from God. In response, some theists retreat to a modified version of the Standard Divine Command Theory. This dissertation will argue that the theist is not required to move in this direction. Second, each formulation will be evaluated based on their theological strength. Ultimately, this dissertation will agree with the position that God is the appropriate grounding for morality. While modified divine command theorists adequately address the Arbitrariness and Vacuity Objection as applied to moral value, they are not able to escape these objections when applied to moral obligations and duties. Consequently, the third evaluation of each formulation will be performed based on their explanatory scope. In addition to making the case that God is the best explanation for morality, the Modified Divine Command Theory must address various objections associated with explaining the salient features of morality. Ultimately, Chapter 4 argues that a misconstrued understanding of the non-voluntarist horn, and the resulting retreat to a Modified Divine Command Theory only serves to deepen the breach between theist and non-theist rather than repairing it.

Chapter 5 proposes that the methodological, theological, and apologetic weaknesses of divine command theories can be avoided. Consequently, Chapter 5 will advance a

position that moves towards the first horn, or non-voluntarist horn, of the Euthyphro Dilemma. It is presumed that those who embrace this horn commit to a standard logically prior to or independent of God. Traditionally, those who affirm non-voluntarism affirm the existence of a standard of objective moral values, obligations, and duties that is independent of God and independent of God's commands. Theories that are consistent with this conception include the Guided Will Theory, Divine Independence Theory, and Atheistic Moral Platonism. These require the Christian to abandon something essential to Christian theism. However, these are not the only valid conceptions of non-voluntarism. This dissertation advances the Non-Voluntarist Theory by affirming that God's nature is the basis for moral value, obligations, and duties. It will be argued that non-voluntarism does not necessarily sacrifice the sovereignty of God, but can be reconciled with Christian orthodoxy. Furthermore, if methodological clarity is employed, a non-voluntarism provides common ground with the non-theist and provides a practical theistic framework for ethics. Ultimately, the aim is to demonstrate that non-voluntarism avoids the pitfalls that a Modified Divine Command Theory cannot. What is more, non-voluntarism accomplishes the ultimate goal that Modified Divine Command Theory attempts to accomplish, but in a less cumbersome way.

## CHAPTER 2: THE EUTHYPHRO DILEMMA AND MORAL PHILOSOPHY

### The Euthyphro Dilemma

The importance of the Euthyphro Dilemma for a theistic conception of ethics cannot be overstated. Its modern formulations serve as a challenge to the view that God is either the best explanation of, or a necessary condition for moral values, obligations, and duties. The Euthyphro Dilemma requires a defensive apologetic since those who employ the dilemma assert that it exposes some inconsistency or incoherence in Christian theism. The challenge is particularly theological since embracing either horn appears to require the Christian to abandon something essential to Christian theism. Also, the dilemma has philosophical significance since it attempts to explain the existence of and grounding for moral values, obligations, and duties. Antony Flew once suggested that “one good test of a person’s aptitude for philosophy is to discover whether he can grasp its [Euthyphro Dilemma] force and point.”<sup>1</sup>

Ironically, Flew’s observation is often cited in defense of many proposed solutions to the dilemma. The Standard Divine Command Theory and the Euthyphro Dilemma seek to explain the basis for morality as a whole. Modified Divine Command Theory seeks to explain the basis for moral obligations and duties alone. Thus it uses divine command terminology in a non-standard way. Using divine command terminology in a non-standard way creates unnecessary ambiguity, which serves to weaken the modified divine command theorist’s apologetic. To assess contemporary evangelical reformulations of Modified Divine Command Theory, one must begin with a contextual, theological, and philosophical exegesis of the Euthyphro Dilemma.

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<sup>1</sup>Antony Flew, *God and Philosophy* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2005), 116.

## *A Summary of Euthyphro*

Plato's *Euthyphro* begins with a chance encounter between Socrates and Euthyphro by the porch of the King Archon. Upon hearing that Euthyphro was prosecuting his father for murder, Socrates inquires as to the details of the case. Without prompting, Euthyphro adds that his family is displeased with him for prosecuting his father, as they think it impious to do so. However, Euthyphro notes that his family's "ideas of the divine attitude to piety and impiety are wrong."<sup>2</sup> This claim initiates Socrates' line of questioning regarding the definition of and grounding for piety and impiety.

Socrates simply begins by asking, "Tell me then, what is the pious, and what is the impious, do you say?"<sup>3</sup> To which, Euthyphro claims that the act of prosecuting wrongdoers is piety, and to not prosecute wrongdoers is impiety. Socrates is dissatisfied with this response as it merely provides an example of a pious act and not a proper definition for piety itself. Euthyphro responds, "What is dear to the gods is pious, what is not is impious."<sup>4</sup> Socrates adds, however, that one man or action can be both loved and hated by the gods simultaneously "when they are in a state of discord," and thus the man or action is pious and impious at the same time. Finally, Euthyphro qualifies the previous definition to include only those things which *all* the gods love or hate. He concludes, "I would certainly say that the pious is what all the gods love, and the opposite, what all the gods hate, is the impious."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>G. M. A. Grube, trans., "Euthyphro," in *Plato: Five Dialogues*, (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1974), 8.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 14.

It is at this point that Socrates introduces what is commonly known as the Euthyphro Dilemma. Socrates inquires, “Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods?”<sup>6</sup> Euthyphro expresses confusion, and Socrates attempts to clarify the challenge by drawing a distinction between that which is carried, led, seen, and loved and the state of being carried, led, seen and loved. Socrates observes that that which is carried is only in the state of being carried because one carries it. Similarly, the pious (god-beloved) is only in the state of being god-beloved because the gods love it. Euthyphro happily agrees, but fails to recognize the inconsistency with his earlier claim that the pious is that which is god-beloved. Euthyphro merely provides a quality of the pious but does not provide an explanation of the nature of piety.<sup>7</sup> This is a clear indication that the dilemma is primarily aimed at the ultimate basis for morality.

After accusing Euthyphro of intentionally misleading him, Socrates presses Euthyphro to explain the nature of justice in order avoid the allegations made by Meletus. Euthyphro describes piety as being a part of overall justice. More particularly, Euthyphro describes piety as the part of justice that is concerned with service to the gods. For Euthyphro, service to the gods is primarily described as sacrificing to the gods and begging from the gods. This, to Euthyphro, is the ultimate expression of piety. Socrates summarizes this relationship as one of trade. He claims that piety is learning to trade properly with the gods. The benefit that the gods receive from this trade includes honor, reverence, and gratitude. Euthyphro asserts that these are not only beneficial to the gods but dear to them as well. Consequently, Socrates notices the circularity of Euthyphro’s thinking when he defines the pious as that which is dear to or loved by the gods.

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<sup>6</sup>Grube, “Euthyphro,” 7.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 6.

Socrates line of questioning has a singular focus. He attempts to expose the inconsistency in grounding piety in the wills or affections of the gods.

As it is with many Socratic dialogues, the ultimate aim is discovering what a thing is. In the case of the *Euthyphro*, Socrates hopes to discover the ultimate basis for piety. Socrates is not concerned with moral semantics, moral epistemology, or whether or not one has an obligations or duty to obey the gods. Socrates singular focus is examining whether or not the gods' affections are a proper basis for piety.

### *The Theology of Euthyphro*

As with any interpretation of an ancient text, proper consideration must be given to its various contexts. In order to understand the force and point of the Euthyphro Dilemma, one must seriously consider the theological context that undergirds the dialogue. Modern skeptics usually offer the Euthyphro Dilemma as a challenge to the notion that God is the most appropriate grounding for objective moral values and duties. However, the notion of God on a theistic worldview is drastically different from the gods of the Greek pantheon. James Ambury notes:

Socrates and his contemporaries lived in a polytheistic society, a society in which the gods did not create the world but were themselves created. Socrates would have been brought up with the stories of the gods recounted in Hesiod and Homer, in which the gods were not omniscient, omnibenevolent, or eternal, but rather power-hungry super-creatures that regularly intervened in the affairs of human beings.<sup>8</sup>

While this may seem to be a trivial distinction, the nature of the God or gods in consideration can strengthen or weaken the application of the Euthyphro Dilemma. Socrates expresses his skepticism when he questions the historical reliability of the accounts of the gods. However, Socrates concedes to Euthyphro's worldview in order to pursue a larger point.

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<sup>8</sup>James Ambury, "Socrates," in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. James Fieser and Bradley Dowden, accessed October 23, 2015, URL=<http://www.iep.utm.edu/socrates/>.

As Socrates solicits a definition of the pious from Euthyphro, Euthyphro claims that prosecuting those who are guilty of impiety is itself considered a pious action. As an example, Euthyphro appeals to Zeus' rebellion against his father, Cronos. It is at this point that one begins to see the inklings of voluntarism represented in a polytheistic structure. In his first attempt to define piety, Euthyphro notes, "Well, I say that the holy is what I am doing now, prosecuting murder and temple theft and everything of that sort, whether father or mother or anyone else is guilty of it. And not prosecuting is unholy. Now, Socrates, examine the proof I give you that this is a dictate of divine law."<sup>9</sup> Euthyphro's opening "definition" of piety is an example of a right action that both Euthyphro and others are obligated to obey due to the fact that the gods serve as an example. One should note that Euthyphro begins by referring to moral normativity.

Unimpressed with this example of a pious action, Socrates presses for a definition. Socrates is not interested in an example of piety, but rather the essence of piety. This is the first clue that the Euthyphro Dilemma is a metaethical challenge. Euthyphro initially defines the pious as that which is dear to the gods. Socrates recognizes the difficulty that a polytheistic worldview poses for Euthyphro's initial definition of piety. The gods could, and often do, differ in what they consider dear to them. For example, Zeus thought that it was pious to place his own father in chains for swallowing his children. However, Cronos did not consider this a just action, but an act of rebellion. So, what was dear to one god was not dear to the other.

One might consider this the first dilemma that Euthyphro faces. Assuming for the moment that the pious is defined by that which is dear to the gods, polytheism inherently weakens this definition the moment the gods differ on what is counted as dear. Theism in general and Christian theism, in particular, remains immune to this challenge. Christian theism affirms

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<sup>9</sup>Reginald E. Allen, trans., "Euthyphro," in *Greek Philosophy: Thales to Aristotle*, 3<sup>rd</sup> (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 60.



that God is one, thereby avoiding a divine contradiction of multiple wills (Deut. 6:4). What is more, the Christian scriptures teach that God does not deliberate or take counsel from another (Job 21:22; Isa. 40:14; 41:28), which stands in contrast to the deliberations held on Mt. Olympus by the Greek pantheon. What is interesting here is that Socrates' line of reasoning implies the existence of a standard that adjudicates between differing opinions. When one disagrees with another regarding sums, the two parties appeal to counting. When one disagrees with another regarding size, the two parties appeal to measurements. Similarly, when one disagrees with another regarding the pious, there must be a standard to which the two appeal.<sup>10</sup> Christian apologist, C. S. Lewis makes a similar observation. In reference to moral disagreement Lewis notes, "It looks, in fact, very much as if both parties had in mind some kind of Law or Rule of fair play or decent behavior or morality or whatever you like to call it, about which they really agreed."<sup>11</sup> While Lewis has the Christian God in mind, Socrates is subtly exposing the weakness of the multiple divine wills as the proper grounding for piety, and slowly forces Euthyphro towards a single universal locus for morality.

Both Euthyphro and Socrates agree that quarrelsome gods pose a significant problem, and Euthyphro amends his definition by defining piety as that which all the gods love or hold dear. It is this scenario that most closely approaches a theistic worldview. Nevertheless, it is clear that Socrates is more concerned with exposing polytheism's inability to ground morality. Likewise, modern formulations of the Euthyphro Dilemma seek to expose theism's alleged inability to ground morality. Interestingly, it is at this point that Socrates' concern shifts from the nature of the gods to the relationship between actions and states of being, thereby emphasizing

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<sup>10</sup>Grube, "Euthyphro," 11.

<sup>11</sup>C. S. Lewis, "Mere Christianity," in *The Complete C. S. Lewis Signature Classics* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002), 15.

philosophy over theology. Therefore, in order to understand the Euthyphro Dilemma, one not only needs to understand the theological context of *Euthyphro*, but he must also understand the philosophical context as well.

### *The Philosophy of Socrates*

To say that there is a definitive “Socratic philosophy” is a bit of a misnomer. It is debatable as to whether Socrates ever authored works of his own. Consequently, what is known about Socrates originates with the works of those he taught. It is difficult to appreciate Socrates’ philosophical life by merely appealing to the works of Plato. This task is made increasingly more difficult by merely appealing to *Euthyphro*. Milton Nahm adds:

So difficult, indeed, has the problem become of differentiating the historical Socrates from the image of the man that scholarship has swung like a pendulum between the thesis that there is a historical Socrates and the alternative that the Socrates we know is largely a construct of Platonic, Xenophonic, Aristotelian, and Aristophanic skills.<sup>12</sup>

The liability here is that these accounts are not always consistent with one another. For example, Aristophanes, an early Greek playwright, depicts Socrates in his various comedies but makes heavy use of sarcasm and hyperbole to the point that the true Socrates is irretrievable.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, Xenophon and Plato are often thought to have made Socrates the “mouthpiece” of their own views.<sup>14</sup> This is what is commonly known as the “Socratic Problem.”<sup>15</sup> Debra Nails adds, “One thing is certain about the historical Socrates: even among those who knew him in life,

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<sup>12</sup>Milton C. Nahm, *Selections from Early Greek Philosophy* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 253.

<sup>13</sup>For examples of the hyperbolic manner in which Aristophanes portrayed Socrates, see: Alan H. Sommerstein, trans., “Clouds,” in *Aristophanes: Lysistrata and Other Plays* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002).

<sup>14</sup>Debra Nails, “Socrates,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014), ed. Edward N. Zalta, accessed October 26, 2015, URL= <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/socrates/>.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

there was profound disagreement about what his actual views and methods were.”<sup>16</sup>

Consequently, it could be claimed that the philosophy found in *Euthyphro* is just as much Platonic as it is Socratic. Of course, the non-voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma is often referred to as the “Platonic” horn of the dilemma. In addition to the Socratic problem, the scope of this study focuses primarily on Socrates’ view on metaethics. In light of the Socratic Problem, Plato’s *Euthyphro* will be the primary text used to understand a Socratic metaethic.

The principal challenge in *Euthyphro* is one of moral grounding or metaethics. This is not to imply that Socrates is not interested in moral epistemology, or the practical application of the right in general. For example, Grube notes that the term for piety [ῥσῖα] can be used to refer to moral knowledge.<sup>17</sup> He adds, “The Greek term *hosion* means, in the first instance, the knowledge of the proper ritual in prayer and sacrifice, and of course its performance.”<sup>18</sup> So it is not as if these aspects of moral philosophy are unimportant. However, Socrates’ primary concern is what makes right actions pious. This is made most evident when he asks, “So tell me now, by Zeus...what kind [ιδέαν] of thing do you [Euthyphro] say that godliness and ungodliness are...what is the pious, and what the impious, do you say?”<sup>19</sup> The Greek term ιδέαν can also be translated as “nature,” which draws out the metaethical implications more clearly.<sup>20</sup> Interestingly,

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<sup>16</sup>Nails, "Socrates," URL= <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/socrates/>.

<sup>17</sup>Plato, *Platonis Opera*. edited by John Burnet. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=o%28%2Fsia&la=greek&can=o%28%2Fsia0&prior=ta&d=Perseus:text:1999.01.0169:text=Euthyph.:section=14b&i=1#lexicon>. The semantic range of ῥσῖα includes that which is sanctioned by the law of God, or a particular pious person

<sup>18</sup>Grube, “Euthyphro,” 5.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>20</sup>Benjamin Jowett, trans. *Euthyphro* (Seattle: Loki’s Publishing, 2013), 10.

Grube comments that the use of ἰδέαν denotes Platonic Forms.<sup>21</sup> Plato held that reality consisted of abstract entities that were not subject to the spatiotemporal world. These abstract entities, or forms served as the universal grounding for all particulars found in nature.<sup>22</sup> Moral propositions are among Plato's list of abstract entities. Central to Plato's philosophy is the concept of forms, and he clearly expresses this emphasis in Socrates' inquisition of Euthyphro.<sup>23</sup> This further underscores Socrates' metaethical aim. While Socrates realizes that piety is expressed in right action (e.g., service to the gods), his ultimate goal is to understand what makes these actions pious, to begin with. It is at this point that Euthyphro's theology and Socrates' philosophy converge. This convergence results in a lesson in causation and states of being known as the Euthyphro Dilemma.

### *The Euthyphro Dilemma*

In its original form, the Euthyphro Dilemma is less potent to theism primarily because it is couched in a polytheistic worldview. It is only after a few attempts that Euthyphro provides an acceptable starting point for Socrates. Euthyphro's definition of the pious is as follows: The pious is what all the gods love, and the opposite, what all the gods hate, is the impious.<sup>24</sup> Finally, the dilemma takes on a form that most resembles the modern formulation, and is most applicable to a theistic worldview. The original dilemma reads as follows: Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods. Here, pious is defined as loved

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<sup>21</sup>Grube, "Euthyphro," 7, n.3.

<sup>22</sup>Richard Kraut, "Plato," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2015), ed. Edward N. Zalta, accessed on October 26, 2015, URL=<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/plato/>.

<sup>23</sup>Grube, "Euthyphro," 10. In 6d of *Euthyphro*, Socrates does not seek "one or two instances of the many pious actions," but rather seeks the form [ἰδέαν] of piety. It appears that Socrates goes out of his way to draw Euthyphro's attention away from right action *per se*, and to the grounding of right action.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 14.

by the gods. Therefore, the dilemma could just as easily read: Is the god-beloved loved by the gods because it is god-beloved, or is it god-beloved because it is loved by the gods. For Socrates, this definition provides an intractable dilemma. As Jowett observes:

He [Socrates] shows that in other cases the act precedes the state; e.g. the act of being carried, loved, etc. precedes the state of being carried, loved, etc., and therefore that which is dear to the gods is dear to the gods because it is first loved of them, not loved of them because it is dear to them. But the pious or holy is loved by the gods because it is pious or holy, which is equivalent to saying, that it is loved by them because it is dear to them. Here then appears the contradiction,--Euthyphro has been giving an attribute or accident of piety only, and not the essence.<sup>25</sup>

Socrates does not explicitly draw out the implications of embracing each individual horn, so it is left to the reader to make those particular conclusions. In typical Socratic form, Socrates essentially seeks to expose the inconsistency in Euthyphro's thinking, not provide a solution. In the case of *Euthyphro*, Socrates is seeking to expose the distinction between the essence of a thing and an attribute. To affirm the first horn of the dilemma is to affirm that the pious has an intrinsic quality that is the basis for its piety. It is this essence that warrants the gods' love. In other words, the gods love something because it is pious. Consequently, to affirm this horn is to deny that the gods' affections are the basis of piety. To affirm the second horn of the dilemma is to affirm that piety is defined as that which the gods love. In this case, then, piety is an attribute that is gained by virtue of being loved by the gods. If this were the case, piety would be based in the arbitrary affections of the gods. Though the first horn avoids arbitrariness, it forces Euthyphro to admit, "the god-beloved is then not the same as the pious."<sup>26</sup> Though the second horn provides justification for Euthyphro's actions, it not only succumbs to arbitrariness, it also fails to describe piety's essence.

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<sup>25</sup>Jowett, *Euthyphro*, 2.

<sup>26</sup>Grube, "Euthyphro," 16.

As noted earlier, interpretation is inevitable when dealing with the Euthyphro Dilemma, and one of the greatest hurdles is contextual distance. The preceding has argued that the theological and philosophical contexts are primary areas in which modern versions of the Euthyphro Dilemma have gone astray. As Copan and Flannagan note, “Most contemporary discussions of the Euthyphro Dilemma don’t focus on Plato’s original argument, which was applied to polytheistic religions and which exposed the contradictions bound up with such a view.”<sup>27</sup> In addition, modern evangelical interpretations of the Euthyphro Dilemma view the dilemma as a false dilemma. Thus they attempt to provide a third way.

### *The Modernization of the Euthyphro Dilemma*

While variegation exists among interpretations of *Euthyphro*, the preceding exegesis has argued that the original dilemma is primarily concerned with the ability to ground piety on a polytheistic worldview. Christian theism remains immune to the original formulation since it does not affirm the plurality of divine wills. Socrates knows that one must appeal to some objective standard in order to settle disputes over what is pious and impious. Consequently, Euthyphro and Socrates must assume a unified will among the gods in order to move the discussion forward. This unity of will among the gods is the closest Socrates gets to a theistic worldview in this dilemma, although in *Apology* Socrates does claim to be a theist, and implies monotheism.<sup>28</sup> In *Euthyphro*, one begins to see a movement away from grounding piety in the affections of the plurality of gods, and towards a single unified god or form. Where Socrates stops short of discussing the Good, Plato’s philosophy of metaphysics follows through. As

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<sup>27</sup>Paul Copan, and Matthew Flannagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide: Coming to Terms with the Justice of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014), 160.

<sup>28</sup>G. M. A. Grube, trans., “Apology,” in *Plato: Five Dialogues* (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1974), 44.

William S. Sahakian notes, “For Plato...the good is the purpose of the world, the form that it assumes, its power, and as its essential being is God. The idea of good, that is, the ideal good, is God.”<sup>29</sup> It is this shift to a single locus for morality, coupled with the Christian conviction that God is essentially good and issues commands that opens the door for modern versions of the Euthyphro Dilemma. While modern versions of the Euthyphro Dilemma are uniformly aimed at theistic attempts to explain objective moral values and duties, they are not uniform in their interpretation of the dilemma itself.

To say that there is one modern version of the Euthyphro Dilemma would be entirely misleading. There are as many different expressions of the dilemma as there are those who seek to modernize it. One example is Antony’s interpretation: “Are morally good actions morally good simply by virtue of God’s favoring, or does God favor them because they are— independently of his favoring them—morally good?”<sup>30</sup> Antony’s interpretation can be contrasted with Rachels’: “Is conduct right because God commands it, or does God command it because it is right?”<sup>31</sup> The semantic distinction between the two versions is noteworthy. First, Antony uses terms such as “morally good” and “God’s favoring,” whereas Rachels prefers the terms “right” and “God commands.” These semantic distinctions are not unique to non-theistic interpretations. Modern interpretations of the Euthyphro Dilemma are just as fluid among theists as well. John Milliken’s interpretation reads as follows: “Is conduct right because God commands it, or does God command it because it is right?”<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, Copan and Paul K. Moser understand

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<sup>29</sup>William S. Sahakian, *Ethics: An Introduction to Theories and Problems* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1974), 48-49.

<sup>30</sup>Antony, “Atheism as Perfect Piety,” 71.

<sup>31</sup>Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 42.

<sup>32</sup>Milliken, “Euthyphro, the Good, and the Right,” 146.

the dilemma to mean, “is something good because God commands it...or is there some autonomous moral standard which God consults in order to command?”<sup>33</sup>

It is evident that confusion exists as to whether there is a single interpretation of the Euthyphro Dilemma. Contemporary evangelical interpretations insist that the Euthyphro Dilemma is a metaethical challenge to moral value (goodness), not moral obligations and duties (rightness). Thus, they argue that by grounding moral value in the divine nature, one can “split” the horns of the dilemma. However, if one interprets the Euthyphro Dilemma to be a metaethical challenge to morality as a whole (good and right), then this distinction does not solve the problem. Moreover, even if the original dilemma was a metaethical challenge to moral value, it could just as easily be applied to moral obligations and duties.

The distinction between moral value and moral obligations and duties seems only to confuse the issue, and cause the divine command theorist to use divine command terminology in a non-standard way. As argued in previous sections, Socrates is clearly attempting to establish the proper grounding for the pious. He is not primarily concerned with delineating between moral value and moral obligations and duties. When adjusted to address theism, it appears to be an illicit modification to impose such an acute distinction between the morally good and the morally right. Therefore, attempts to provide a Divine Command Theory of the right miss the intended point of the Euthyphro Dilemma. Furthermore, modified divine command theorists such as Craig argue that the Euthyphro Dilemma is a false dilemma.<sup>34</sup> This conclusion, however, requires the theist to affirm an interpretation of the dilemma, which seems to be inconsistent with

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<sup>33</sup>Paul Copan, and Paul K. Moser, *The Rationality of Theism* (New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2003), 165.

<sup>34</sup>Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 181; and Copan and Flannagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide*, 184.



both Socrates' main challenge and those put forth by contemporary atheistic reformulations. These theorists argue that one must either ground morality in God's commands, or affirm a standard of morality that is logically prior to and independent of God. For example, Craig argues that God's "character is definitive of moral goodness," but that moral right/wrong is determined by God's will or command.<sup>35</sup> In light of ambiguity, the following formulation of the Euthyphro Dilemma will be used: Does God command an action because it is morally good/right, or is it morally good/right because God commands it?<sup>36</sup> This formulation acknowledges that the Euthyphro Dilemma is meant to pose a metaethical challenge to morality as a whole, not simply moral value. In addition, this formulation seeks to make the dilemma more explicit. Either God's commands constitute moral goodness/rightness, or God's commands do not constitute moral goodness/rightness. With this formulation in place, one can begin to outline each horn of the dilemma, and assess the leading theories for each horn.

### *The Voluntarist Horn*

One horn of the dilemma is broadly known as the voluntarist horn of the dilemma. voluntarism argues that morality as a whole is grounded in the will or volition of God. Standard Divine Command Theory is a voluntarist theory and holds that God's commands constitute moral values, obligations, and duties. The voluntarist horn is thought to be an undesirable horn for two primary reasons and four secondary reasons.<sup>37</sup> The two primary reasons will be referred

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<sup>35</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 182. Craig's formulation of the Euthyphro Dilemma emphasizes the moral the grounding for moral value, thus allowing him to seemingly split the horns of the dilemma by grounding moral value in God's character, rather than God's will or command.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 181. This formulation is similar to, although slightly broader than, Craig's. Craig describes the dilemma in the following way: Either something is morally good because God wills it or else God wills it because it is morally good.

to as the Arbitrariness Objection and the Vacuity Objection. The Arbitrariness Objections claims that God either has no logically prior reasons for commanding or prohibiting an action, or he does. If he does, those reasons become the basis for the moral qualities of the action, rather than his commands, thus contradicting this horn. If he does not, then his commands are arbitrary. The arbitrariness of voluntarism is highlighted in *Euthyphro* when Euthyphro defines piety as that which is loved by the gods. If one embraces the voluntarist horn of the dilemma, one is essentially claiming that there is no independent or prior reason for the god's loving the pious. The reason the gods love the pious is merely because they love the pious. The Vacuity Objection claims that if "X is good/right" is essentially equivalent to "X is commanded by God," then the claim that God is good/right, or God's commands are good/right is equivalent to claiming that God is commanded by God, or God's commands are commanded by God.

The four secondary reasons are less theological in nature, and more philosophical. They will be referred to as the Epistemic Objection, the Moral Authority Objection, the Moral Autonomy Objection, and the Abhorrent Command Objection. The Epistemic Objection to the voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma, seeks to explain how one comes to form moral beliefs in the absence of divine commands. The objection claims that one can surely know good from bad, and right from wrong without a particular command being issued. If voluntarism is correct, it would not be reasonable—so the objection goes—to expect one to form moral beliefs. However, it is the case that one can form moral beliefs in the absence of a divine command. Therefore, voluntarism does not adequately account for moral epistemology. The Moral Authority Objection claims that moral obligations and duties must be morally binding. This

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<sup>37</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 34-35. Baggett and Walls provide a list of objections, or "vices to voluntarism." These vices include the normativity objection, no reasons objection, abhorrent command objection, vacuity objection, epistemic objection, and autonomy objection.

objection holds that on a voluntarist conception of ethics, obligations and duties are binding only in order to avoid punishment from some deity, or to receive some reward from some deity. For example, one would avoid murder simply to gain some divine reward or avoid some divine punishment, not because murder is inherently bad or wrong. The Moral Autonomy Objection claims that voluntarism is an infantile conception of ethics. Mature moral agents should be able to reasons toward correct moral action, not simply refer to a set of divine commands. This challenge argues that voluntarism strips the person of moral autonomy, and the ability to make moral decisions. Finally, the Abhorrent Command Objection asserts that if an action is morally neutral prior to being commanded or prohibited, then God could command murder, for example, and it would not only be morally good, it would also be morally right.

These six reasons are the major objections to the voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma. In light of these objections, many choose to affirm the non-voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma. However, the non-voluntarist horn of the dilemma may not fare much better, depending on how one interprets the horn.

### *The Non-Voluntarist Horn*

The alternate horn of the dilemma is broadly known as the non-voluntarist horn of the dilemma. Non-voluntarism is typically thought to argue that moral values, obligations, and duties are defined by and grounded in something logically prior to and independent of God. Modified Divine Command theorists, such as Craig, describe non-voluntarism as Atheistic Moral Platonism. Moral Platonism argues that moral values, obligations, and duties are determined by a set of necessary, eternal moral abstractions.<sup>38</sup> The most prominent theistic ethical theory that advances this view is often referred to as a Guided Will Theory since it affirms the existence of a

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<sup>38</sup>Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 178.

moral standard to which God refers in order to issue commands and prohibitions. The non-voluntarist horn seems to be undesirable since it allegedly affirms some standard of morality distinct from God. Therefore, one need not appeal to God's commands to know what is morally good. Rather, one can appeal to moral abstractions for making moral decisions, regardless of whether or not God exists, or if God does exist, whether or not he issues commands. Consequently, this horn is thought to make God's *existence* unnecessary for determining moral values and duties and his *commands* superfluous.

Before tracing the historical development of Divine Command Theory from Ockham to its contemporary modified versions, the following section will review Divine Command Theory and Guided Will Theory as they relate to moral philosophy. Three basic questions will be addressed: How does the theory relate to metaethics? How does the theory relate to normativity? What are the weaknesses of each theory?

#### Standard Divine Command Theory and Moral Philosophy

Theistic ethics is a perspective on moral philosophy in which the existence of God is either the best explanation of, or a necessary condition for objective moral values, obligations, and duties. Standard Divine Command Theory is a theistic ethic that asserts that God's commands constitute morality. The Euthyphro Dilemma is a challenge to the idea that morality is in any way dependent upon God's existence, and more particularly the idea that God's commands constitute morality. The following provides a thorough treatment of Divine Command Theory as outlined by William of Ockham, since his is the most recognized form of divine command ethics, and because it directly addresses the metaethical challenge of the Euthyphro Dilemma.

### *Standard Divine Command Theory*

There are two distinct ways of applying the Standard Divine Command Theory. First, as an ethical theory, the Standard Divine Command Theory has metaethical aspects. In other words, it attempts to seek answers regarding the ultimate basis for morality. Second, the Standard Divine Command Theory can be applied as a normative of theory, which seeks to describe what ought to be the case, especially in terms of identifying an expected standard of behavior. As Janine Idziak notes, “Interestingly, the metaethical variety of divine command ethics is not unique to contemporary analytic philosophers; historically, this position was very clearly maintained.”<sup>39</sup> While Idziak asserts that one is not required to read Ockham’s theory as more than a normative ethic, the following will provide evidence that shows Ockham’s theory is primarily concerned with explaining the basis for the good/right.

As noted above, Standard Divine Command Theory is most often associated with 14<sup>th</sup>-century English philosopher and theologian, William of Ockham. Ockham’s moral philosophy has been the subject of much interpretation and debate. This is partly due to the fact that Ockham does not provide a “systematic” moral philosophy. Consequently, many implications can be construed, and misconstrued from his various writings. Ockham’s moral philosophy is primarily drawn from his work in *Opera Theologica*. Peter King writes, “[Ockham] worked within a tradition of moral philosophy that took the basic normative principle to be given in the Bible and the conceptual tools of moral theory to be given by Aristotle.”<sup>40</sup> Ockham’s moral philosophy is

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<sup>39</sup>Janine Marie Idziak, *Divine Command Morality: Historical and Contemporary Readings* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), 8. Idziak goes on to mention that historical examples include William Paley, John Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, and Gabriel Biel. These individuals will shape the historical discussion in Chapter 3.

<sup>40</sup>Peter King, “William of Ockham’s Ethical Theory,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 227.

distinctively theistic, and yet it attempts to account for the role of reason in moral ontology and epistemology. Naturally, this attempt has resulted in divergent interpretations.

In addition to Idziak's two varieties of divine command ethics, there are two broad methods of interpreting Ockham's divine command ethic. The standard way of understanding Ockham is based on the notion that divine commands determine the content of morality.<sup>41</sup> As Thomas Osborne notes, "There are several rival interpretations of William of Ockham's ethical theory. A once predominant view was that Ockham is a divine-command theorist who holds that the source of moral obligation is a divine command."<sup>42</sup> It is this method that will be used for the following overview. The second, and non-standard, way of understanding Ockham emphasizes the role of right reason for moral decision making.<sup>43</sup> This method trades on a distinction that Ockham makes in moral epistemology. Ockham argues that there are two ways to know moral truths: positive moral knowledge and non-positive moral knowledge.<sup>44</sup> "Positive moral knowledge," King adds, "contains human and divine laws that obligate one to pursue or to avoid

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<sup>41</sup>Contemporary examples of standard readings of Ockham can be found in such works as Thomas M. Osborne, Jr. "Ockham as a Divine-Command Theorist," in *Religious Studies* 41, 1-22 (Cambridge University Press, 2005); Armand Maurer, *The Philosophy of William of Ockham in the Light of Its Principles*, Studies and Texts 133 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999), 516-539; and Mary Thomas Noble, trans., *The Source of Christian Ethics* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 240-253. Broadly speaking, these authors affirm that God's commands are the source of moral value, obligations, and duties.

<sup>42</sup>Osborne, "Ockham as Divine-Command Theorist," 1.

<sup>43</sup>Contemporary examples of non-standard readings of Ockham can be found in such works as Marilyn McCord Adams "Ockham on Will, Nature, and Morality," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, ed. Paul Vincent Spade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 245-272; and Peter King "Ockham's Ethical Theory," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, ed. Paul Vincent Spade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 227-244. Broadly speaking, these authors conclude that Ockham affirmed two ethical theories; one that was based primarily on right reason (non-positive moral knowledge), and the other that relied primarily on divine and human commands (positive moral knowledge).

<sup>44</sup>William of Ockham, *Quodl.2.* 14 (OTh IX 177.18-28).

things that are good and evil only because they are prohibited or commanded by a superior whose role it is to establish laws.”<sup>45</sup> Non-positive moral knowledge, on the other hand, “directs human actions without any precept from a superior, as principles that are either known *per se* or by experience direct them.”<sup>46</sup> Osborne critiques this method of interpretation since it takes Ockham’s moral epistemology and attempts to make it the framework for Ockham’s moral ontology.<sup>47</sup>

In *Quodlibeta*, Ockham argues that good/bad and right/wrong actions were solely determined by the intent of the will and according to the dictates of reason.<sup>48</sup> Sin, according to Ockham is a matter of intention. For example, one might perform a good act such as giving alms to the poor, yet perform the act with vainglorious intentions. This, according to Ockham is not virtuous, but vicious.<sup>49</sup> Ockham asserts that besides the act of loving God above all else, no act is inherently vicious or virtuous. He notes, “No act is virtuous or vicious unless it is voluntary and in the power of the will because sin is a sin only because it is voluntary.”<sup>50</sup> The moral content of the act can only be determined by the power of the will.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, if the rightness or wrongness of an action is determined by the will, morality as a whole must be determined by God’s will. For Ockham, determining the moral content of an act naturally begins with a discussion of metaethics.

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<sup>45</sup>King, “Ockham’s ethical theory,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, 227.

<sup>46</sup>*Quodl.* 2.14 (OTh IX 177.18-28).

<sup>47</sup>Osborne, “Ockham as a Divine-Command Theorist,” 2.

<sup>48</sup>*Quodl.* 2.14 (OTh IX 176.11-177.16).

<sup>49</sup>*Sent.* 1 d. 47 q. unica (OTh III 681.2-15).

<sup>50</sup>*Quodl.* 3.14 (OTh IX 255.60-256.67).

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*

## *Divine Command Theory and Metaethics*

Metaethics can be both broadly and narrowly defined. Metaethics is a field that can encompass questions of ultimate grounding, moral knowledge, and the meaning of moral language. For example, Geoff Sayre-McCord broadly defines metaethics as “the attempt to understand metaphysical, epistemological, semantic, and psychological, presuppositions and commitments of moral thought, talk, and practice.”<sup>52</sup> Metaethics can also be defined narrowly by focusing on one area of the broader scope. For example, Moreland and Craig describe metaethics as a branch of moral philosophy dealing with the meaning of moral terms.<sup>53</sup> For the purposes of this study, the primary areas of metaethics that will be explored are the metaphysical presuppositions and commitments of divine command ethics. In other words, it will address the question that the Euthyphro Dilemma focuses on; what grounds morality. While normativity will be addressed in the subsequent section, metaethics must necessarily precede normativity for two distinct reasons. First, as noted earlier, the Euthyphro Dilemma is a metaethical challenge. Second, it makes little sense to talk of normativity unless one has proposed a proper basis for morality as a whole.

In order to understand *Euthyphro* and Ockham’s Divine Command Theory, one must begin by making a distinction between moral “goodness” and moral “rightness.” Adams notes, “One of the standard topics of ethical theory is the relation between the right and the good. Some see them as distinct and coequal categories of evaluation. Others would subordinate the good to the right, or the right to the good. A few may prefer to think about ethics in terms of the good

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<sup>52</sup>Geoff Sayre-McCord, "Metaethics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2014 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta , URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2014/entries/metaethics/>>.

<sup>53</sup>J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 397.



alone, with no very distinct role for the right.”<sup>54</sup> While moral goodness is an evaluative concept, moral rightness deals primarily with concepts such as obligations, duties, prohibitions, and permissibility. Like Adams, this study gives precedence to the good, while acknowledging the right’s “distinctive and important role in ethics.”<sup>55</sup> Unlike Adams, this study does not view the distinction between the good and the right as the solution to the Euthyphro Dilemma.

For divine command theorists such as Ockham, it was not necessary to draw a distinction between the good and the right in terms of their ultimate grounding. Perhaps this is why contemporary readers often conflate the two. Regardless, Ockham held that all of morality’s content, both the good and the right, is determined by the will of God.<sup>56</sup> Osborne adds, that according to Ockham, “It is true that an act is meritorious because God has made it so and not simply because it is virtuous, or even because of the supernatural habit of charity.”<sup>57</sup> For the moral realist, moral values, obligations, and duties must exist either necessarily or contingently. For voluntarists such as Ockham, moral values exist contingently, owing their existence to God’s commands. Standard Divine Command Theory holds that God’s command makes an act of loving one’s neighbor good and right. The implication then is that the act of loving one’s neighbor is morally neutral prior to God’s commanding it. Likewise, an act such as murder is morally neutral prior to God’s prohibiting it. Once a command is issued, the act of loving one’s neighbor has the quality of goodness, but it also has the quality of rightness. In other words, loving one’s neighbor becomes a moral obligation.

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<sup>54</sup>Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 231.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>*Rep.* 2, qq. 3-4 (OTh V, 59).

<sup>57</sup>Osborne, “Ockham as a divine-command theorist,” 4.

## *Divine Command Theory and Normative Ethics*

Regardless of how one grounds morality, the moral realist finds herself in a world where real moral choices exist; real moral decisions must be made, and real consequences result from one's actions. While metaethics is primarily concerned with seeking answers regarding the foundations for the good and the right, the meaning and truth of moral claims, and how one comes to know moral truths; normative ethics is the branch of moral philosophy that deals with right and wrong actions and their proper justifications.<sup>58</sup> Being familiar with this metaethical/normative distinction will prove invaluable as this represents the fundamental shift away from Standard Divine Command Theory to Modified Divine Command Theory. This shift will be outlined in Chapter 3. In any event, it would not be incorrect to say that Ockham's theory, while primarily metaethical, has obvious normative implications. Ockham is explicit in terms of the relationship between God's commands and moral normativity. God, as the supreme will, is supremely authoritative.<sup>59</sup> For Ockham, normativity entails obeying God's commands, in accordance with right reason, and with the right intention of the will. Therefore, moral decisions must take these three elements into consideration.

As far as normative ethical theories are concerned, Divine Command Theory is a non-teleological theory, rather than teleological one. Teleological ethical theories hold that the moral rightness or wrongness of an action is determined by the act's outcome.<sup>60</sup> Conversely, non-

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<sup>58</sup>Similar definitions of metaethics can be found in contemporary moral philosophy. See Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, 2; and Kevin M. DeLapp, "Metaethics," in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. James Fieser and Bradley Dowden, accessed August 29, 2016, URL=<http://www.iep.utm.edu/metaethi/>.

<sup>59</sup>*Connex.* art. 2 (OTh VIII 335.116-123).

<sup>60</sup> Moreland, and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 425. For example, Moreland and Craig describe teleological ethical theories as theories that the moral quality of an act is "exclusively a function of the goodness or badness of the consequences of the act."

teleological ethical theories hold that the moral rightness or wrongness of an action is intrinsic to is not determined solely by the outcomes.<sup>61</sup> Standard Divine Command Theory holds that the rightness or wrongness of an act is determined by God's commands. Standard Divine Command Theory asserts that the one who receives the command of God is duty bound to obey. Treating Divine Command Theory as a theory primarily aimed at addressing normative matters is the preferred interpretation of some prominent evangelical philosophers and theologians. For example, Craig describes his modified version of Divine Command Theory as:

God's moral nature expressed to us in the form of divine commands which constitute our moral duties or obligations. Far from being arbitrary, these commands flow necessarily from His moral nature...God's moral nature is what Plato called the 'Good.' He is the locus and source of moral value. He is by nature loving, generous, just, faithful, kind, and so forth.<sup>62</sup>

Here, Craig seeks to leverage the distinction between good and right to emphasize God's nature as the locus for the good. In turn, this gives moral force to God's commands, which generate moral obligations and duties. What is more, this modification it thought to help divine command theorists escape the liabilities of the Standard Divine Command Theory. Although particular reformulations of the Modified Divine Command Theory will be assessed in Chapter 4, it is important to review the prominent reasons why the Christian theist should not hold to the Standard Divine Command Theory.

#### *Standard Divine Command Theory's Weaknesses*

The fact that the normativity modification is thought to be necessary to save the Standard Divine Command Theory from the Euthyphro Dilemma should indicate that the standard way of understanding the dilemma is metaethically. Unfortunately, both the Standard Divine Command

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<sup>61</sup>Moreland, and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 446.

<sup>62</sup>Craig, "The Indispensability of Theological Meta-Ethical Foundations for Morality," URL=<http://www.leaderu.com/offices/billcraig/docs/meta-eth.html> (Accessed on December 31, 2015).

Theory and the Modified Divine Command Theory suffer under the weight of the various objections associated with the dilemma.

First, the Arbitrariness Objection asserts that if the moral content of an action is grounded in God's command, then that command is altogether arbitrary. If there were prior reasons for the command, so it goes, those prior reasons would be the grounding for morality. Sinnott-Armstrong expresses the arbitrariness objections in the following way:

Let's assume that God commanded us not to rape. Did God have any reasons to command this? If not, his command was arbitrary, and then it can't make anything morally wrong. On the other hand, if God did have a reason to command us not to rape, then that reason is what makes rape morally wrong. The command itself is superfluous. Either way, morality cannot depend on God's commands.<sup>63</sup>

Modified divine command theorists respond by claiming that since the locus for objective moral values is the divine nature, then the reasons are anything but arbitrary.<sup>64</sup> While this is a standard response to the Arbitrariness Objection by modified divine command theorists, one should notice that it appeals to a non-voluntarist solution. The modified divine command theorist ultimately claims that the content of morality is grounded in God's unchanging nature, not his commands. Whether it is successful or not will be assessed in Chapter 4.

Second, the Vacuity Objection challenges the notion that God and God's commands are good and right. Standard Divine Command Theory argues that God's commands constitute both the moral good and the moral right. The claim that loving one another is morally good/right, is to equivalent to claiming that loving one another is commanded by God. If good and right mean "commanded by God," that to claims that God is good/right, or that God's commands are

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<sup>63</sup>Sinnott-Armstrong, "Why Traditional Theism Cannot Provide an Adequate Foundation for Morality," 108.

<sup>64</sup>This largely characterizes the response of philosophers such as William Lane Craig, William P. Alston and Robert M. Adams.

good/right is vacuous. In other words, this does not convey any real moral truth about God. The Standard Divine Command Theory cannot adequately account for God's goodness, or his commands' rightness without asserting some tautological statement.

Third, the Standard Divine Command Theory not only affirms that actions are morally neutral until commanded or prohibited by God, but it also implies that one is not obligated to act in a certain way until a command is issued by God. The Epistemic Objection emphasizes one's ability to recognize and know certain moral qualities in an action whether God issues a command or not. This objection asserts that one does not need a divine command to know that torturing a baby for fun is morally bad/wrong. Consequently, if one can know that torturing a baby for fun is morally bad/wrong *sans* a divine command, then at least some divine commands appear to be altogether superfluous.

The fourth objection is closely related to Sinnott-Armstrong's arbitrariness objection. He claims that if God did not have prior reasons for his commands, then his commands can't generate moral obligations. This is referred to as the Moral Authority Objection. This objection assumes that God's commands provide the moral content of an act, but questions why the command should be authoritative. One might obey God out of fear of punishment, or perhaps the anticipation of reward. Neither fear nor self-interest appears to be viable reasons for acting morally. James Harris adds, "Doing what God commands because we are in awe or fear of God cannot justify obeying God or justify the particular act committed as a result of obeying God because...pure self-interest cannot provide a proper basis for morality."<sup>65</sup> Baggett and Walls attempt to address this issue by claiming that it is not merely God's supreme power that creates

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<sup>65</sup>James Harris, *Analytic Philosophy of Religion* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 360.

moral authority, but the entirety of God's character.<sup>66</sup> Again, this particular assessment trades on the notion that God's morally excellent character creates moral authority, not his commands. While this may be an adequate answer to the challenge, it is not in support of the Standard Divine Command Theory.

The fifth objection is a natural consequence of the Epistemic Objection and the Moral Authority Objection. The Moral Autonomy Objection argues that if God's commands constitute moral values, obligations, and duties, then one need only consult the "divine rulebook" for the good and right action rather than making mature moral assessments. And yet, there are many cases that require moral assessment and autonomy that do not have a corresponding divine command. Perhaps the most obvious biblical example is that of Cain and Able. Cain murders his brother able, although there is no divine command to prohibit that action. And yet, Cain is held accountable by God for his action. In other words, Cain should have known that murder was morally bad/wrong and reasoned to a better course of action, thus exercising moral autonomy. The Standard Divine Command Theory is forced to admit that this act—and others like it—was not morally bad/wrong before a clear command was issued. If this was the case, God unjustly punished Cain for killing his brother.

The sixth objection is known as the Abhorrent Command Objection. Many claim that if morality is determined solely by the commands of God, then what does one make of abhorrent commands? Critics often cite God's injunction to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac or God's command to Joshua to slaughter the Canaanites as examples of abhorrent commands. In other words, if Standard Divine Command Theory is true, the previous actions were not only obligatory but morally good. Generally, standard divine command theorists appeal, once again, to the moral

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<sup>66</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 123.

nature of God. Copan, a defender of Modified Divine Command Theory often provides an apologetic against various examples cited in abhorrent command objectors. In the example of Abraham and Isaac, Copan notes, “Yes, without God’s command, which assumes covenant promise, Abraham would have been murdering his son.”<sup>67</sup> However, Copan argues that God’s command is informed by his moral excellence, and Abraham’s obedience is informed by a covenantal backdrop. However, the Standard Divine Command Theory is not saved by this response since it is not God’s character that constitutes moral values, obligations, and duties.

These objections leave the Standard Divine Command Theory open to some serious liabilities. In order to avoid these liabilities, divine command theorists have attempted to modify Ockham’s theory by claiming that God’s divine nature constitutes moral values, and God’s commands constitute moral obligations and duties. While the distinction between the good and the right is an appropriate philosophical distinction, it does not correspond to the standard way of understanding a divine command conception of ethics. What is more, using divine command terminology in this non-standard way is misleading to those who attempt to understand and assess the modified position, and it creates unnecessary ambiguity. Ultimately, if one is to call oneself a divine command theorist of some sort, modified or not, one is committing to the notion that morality as a whole is grounded in the commands of God. However, by abandoning all forms of Divine Command Theory and embracing the voluntarist horn, the Christian not only provides a stronger apologetic, but she can also clarify the unnecessary ambiguity, and adequately respond to the Euthyphro Dilemma without abandoning something essential to Christian theism.

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<sup>67</sup>Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster*, 50.

According to the Euthyphro Dilemma, an action is either morally good/right because God commands it, or God commands it because it is morally good/right. Standard Divine Command Theory holds that an action is morally good/right because God commands it. Chapter 3 will outline how the Standard Divine Command Theory has been modified historically, and Chapter 4 will demonstrate, in further detail, how three particular contemporary evangelical reformulations of Modified Divine Command Theory do not resolve the most potent challenges. Before this can be done, one must examine the viability of the non-voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma.

### Guided Will Theory and Moral Philosophy

Christian theism is unequivocal regarding God's commands and morally right action. As the author of Ecclesiastes notes, "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."<sup>68</sup> Upon first blush, this appears to be strong biblical evidence for Standard Divine Command Theory. However, there is a difference between what makes God's commands good/right, and why one is obligated to obey God. The previous sections have argued that Standard Divine Command Theory seems to be an inadequate basis for objective moral values, obligations, and duties. In order to affirm the passage cited above without abandoning something essential to Christian theism, the theist must embrace the non-voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma. The non-voluntarist horn offers another option for explaining the relationship between God and objective moral values, obligations, and duties. As noted earlier, the non-voluntarist horn of the dilemma is often interpreted to imply that morality is defined by and grounded in some abstract entity that exists logically prior to and independent of God. While this is not the most accurate interpretation, it is the common interpretation of the non-voluntarist horn of the

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<sup>68</sup>Ecccl. 12:13b (ESV).



dilemma. Whereas voluntarism is an exclusively theistic ethical theory, non-voluntarism includes theistic and non-theistic perspectives. For example, Antony's Divine Independence Theory is an atheistic theory that advances the notion that morality is independent of the divine, and can be accessed through reason.<sup>69</sup> Although it is an atheistic perspective, Antony's perspective is not necessarily hostile to Christian theism. In his letter to the Romans, Paul seems to indicate that humanity can discover right and wrong apart from God's commands, at least in some cases.<sup>70</sup> While Antony denies the existence of God, the claim that morality can be accessed through reason is not a threat to theism or the traditional view that God's nature is the foundation of morality. Michael Levin's Guided Will Theory, on the other hand, is a theistic theory that seeks to explain how God relates to independent moral values.<sup>71</sup>

### *Guided Will Theory*

Since the non-voluntarist horn has been commonly taken to mean that God's commands are guided by an external moral standard, the horn is often represented by Guided Will Theory. Michael Levin proposes the "guided will" theory in contrast to a divine command, or "pure will" theory. Levin describes the Guided Will Theory as God willing "what he does because it is antecedently right," and so "moral standards become independent of God and in this instance God's will becomes a function of something beyond itself."<sup>72</sup> To put the Guided Will Theory in terms used by the Euthyphro Dilemma, the gods love the pious because it is pious. Though Levine clearly presents a foundation for morality that it is independent of God, the guided will

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<sup>69</sup>Louise Antony, "Atheism as Perfect Piety," 71.

<sup>70</sup>Rom. 2:14-15 (ESV).

<sup>71</sup>Levin, "Understanding the Euthyphro Problem," 83-97.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 84.

theorist must also consider the metaethical and normative implications of the Guided Will Theory. Naturally, the Guided Will Theory is capable of addressing a large spectrum of metaethical and normative perspectives.

### *Guided Will Theory and Metaethics*

As opposed to standard divine command perspective on metaethics, the guided will perspective argues that morality is grounded in moral abstractions. In other words, the guided will theorist holds that there are independent moral truths that guide God's will, and thus his commands. This metaethical perspective finds its origin in platonic thought. In Plato's *Republic*, Plato proposes that ultimate reality consists of forms or ideas that constitute the metaphysical basis of the physical world. He observes, "And there is an absolute beauty and an absolute good, and of other things to which the term 'many' is applied there is an absolute; for they may be brought under a single idea, which is called the essence of each."<sup>73</sup> Plato introduces the concept of forms as the metaphysical basis for all of reality. Just as there is a form for beauty, according to Plato, there is a form for the Good. For example, it may be said that a flower and a sunset are beautiful, but these are only particular instantiations of the universal called "Beauty." Likewise, it may be said that loving one's neighbor is good, but it is only a particular instantiation of the universal called "Good." The existence of these forms are necessary for the guided will theorist if she wishes to provide a basis for morality that is independent of God.

Plato considered the Good to be the most fundamental reality.<sup>74</sup> In addition, Plato held that these forms shared what theists would consider god-like, such as eternity and necessity.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>*Republic*, Book VI.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, 505a.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, 517c.

Plato's forms were considered abstract objects that exist independently of any other being. In the case of morality, Platonic Essentialism affirms that moral forms exist eternally and independently of any other being. The existence of these abstract forms is what Craig calls, "metaphysical pluralism."<sup>76</sup> On a platonic account, there are perhaps an infinite number of eternal necessary moral forms that are not dependent of God himself.

Questions regarding the grounding of morality presume that morality is a real feature of reality. The following is built upon the assumption that morality is a real feature of the universe, and that moral claims are more than mere subjective opinion. As Levin observes, "If there is to be a Euthyphro problem, there must be right and wrong and good and bad. Things must be assumed to possess value in an entirely objective sense, for it is pointless to ask what makes things valuable unless value is a trait things themselves have."<sup>77</sup>

In terms of formal metaethical categories, Moreland and Craig note that the Guided Will Theory is a cognitivist theory in that it affirms that moral truths "convey factual information."<sup>78</sup> For example, cognitivist theories hold that moral claims such as, "Misleading shareholders is wrong" is morally true or false in the objective sense. This stands in opposition to non-cognitivist theories which claim that statements such as "Misleading shareholders is wrong," are merely emotive, expressions of personal preference, or commands for action. Furthermore, the Guided Will Theory is an objectivist theory in that it affirms that moral truths contain factual information grounded in something other than the subject of moral truths. Objectivist theories assert that

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<sup>76</sup> Kevin Harris, and William Lane Craig, "God's Attribute of Aseity," Reasonable Faith Podcast (MP3 podcast), *Reasonable Faith*, October 14, 2012. <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/gods-attribute-of-aseity>. URL=<http://www.reasonablefaith.org/gods-attribute-of-aseity> (accessed on January 8, 2016).

<sup>77</sup>Levin, "Understanding the Euthyphro Problem," 84.

<sup>78</sup>Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 400.

moral claims such as, “Selfishness is bad” says something about selfishness. Again, this is contrasted with subjectivist theories which hold that moral claims such as, “Selfishness is bad” says something about the subject’s opinion regarding selfishness. Finally, the Guided Will Theory is a non-naturalist theory in that it holds that moral content is not defined by, or reduced to, scientific properties. For example, one would not be able to reduce moral prescriptions such as “You ought to help the poor” to its sociological properties.

In terms of its formal categories, the Guided Will Theory is similar to the Standard Divine Command Theory. They both view morality as a real, non-natural feature of the universe that contains prescriptive moral truths. While the Standard Divine Command Theory grounds morality in the commands of God, the Guided Will Theory grounds morality in eternal necessary truths. A further distinction that can be made between the Standard Divine Command Theory and the Guided Will Theory is how each accounts for moral normativity.

#### *Guided Will Theory and Normative Ethics*

If the Good exists logically prior to and independent of God, it may not only serve as a guide for God’s commands; it may also serve as a guide for one’s own actions. Therefore, an action may be considered good/right if it is either commanded by God, or good/right logically prior to or independent of God’s command. Antony describes the implications of Guided Will Theory in the following way: “According to divine independence theory...God’s choices [i.e., God’s commands] don’t confer goodness upon certain actions; on the contrary, he chooses to command them because they are the good ones. This view holds out the possibility that human beings can discover for themselves what is right and what is wrong.”<sup>79</sup> Antony’s observation

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<sup>79</sup>Antony, “Atheism as Perfect Piety,” 72.

introduces the question of moral normativity, and how it is accounted for by a Guided Will Theory.

Moral normativity deals with right and wrong actions and their proper justifications. Whereas the Standard Divine Command Theory claims that God's commands constitute the moral right, the Guided Will Theory will theory accommodates multiple normative ethical theories. Traditionally, there are three broad categories of normative ethical theories: deontological theories, teleological theories, and virtue theories.

Deontological theories hold that the rightness and wrongness of an action are intrinsic to the action. Furthermore, one's duty to perform or refrain from certain actions provides the needed justification. For example, citizens should refrain from cheating on their taxes because lying is intrinsically wrong, and they are duty bound to tell the truth. In terms of ethical normativity, a guided will theorist may affirm that one has a duty to act in such a way that is consistent with the good. It is the fact that an action is consistent with the good that creates the intrinsic rightness and wrongness of the action. Therefore, according to the Guided Will Theory, God's will is guided by a duty to act in accordance with the good. Of course, this does not necessarily commit the theist to the existence of a standard of moral goodness and rightness that is independent of God. It merely commits the theists to a standard of moral goodness and rightness that is independent of God's actions or commands. However, guided will theorists are not limited to thinking in terms of the intrinsic value of an action alone.

Guided will theorists may also affirm a teleological conception of ethics. Since one's actions are justified based upon the greatest good, morally right actions are those which accomplish the greatest good either for the individual (egoism) or the greatest number of people (utilitarianism). A guided will theorist that grounds morality in abstract moral entities affirms

that one has a duty to act in such a way that maximizes the good and minimizes the bad. Likewise, God's will is guided by an assessment of the consequences of his actions. Under a teleological rubric, God's course of action is determined by the maximizing the good in any particular situation. Obviously, what one counts as good will determine the type of teleological theory one holds.

Virtue theory is a type of teleological theory in that it is concerned with the type of person one becomes. Whereas teleological theories such as egoism and utilitarianism focus on maximizing utility, virtue theories focus on becoming a morally excellent person. Therefore, virtue theories hold that the rightness and wrongness of an action are determined by how well an action assists in becoming virtuous. In terms of the Guided Will Theory, God's commands are determined by those actions which assist in one's own growth in virtue.

#### *Guided Will Theory's Weaknesses*

One might be dissuaded from affirming the Standard Divine Command Theory because of its various complications. Conversely, the Guided Will Theory seems to avoid the objections that weaken the viability of the Standard Divine Command Theory. As Baggett and Walls note, "This approach [Guided Will Theory] neatly avoids almost all of the major criticism."<sup>80</sup> However, the Guided Will Theory is not without its own weaknesses. At this point, it is important to keep the Guided Will Theory's metaethical position in mind. This theory holds that morality is grounded in moral abstractions that are logically prior to or independent of God. In addition, these moral abstractions also constitute moral obligations and duties.

Both the divine command theorist and guided will theorist agree that objective moral values, obligations, and duties exist, and that they require some transcendent grounding. Just as

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<sup>80</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 39.

the divine command theorist affirms the self-existence, or aseity of God, the guided will theorist affirms the self-existence, or aseity of objective moral values, obligations, and duties. The theist may begin by challenging the existence of an independent moral standard on the grounds that it challenges God's alone is the only self-existent and self-sufficient being. Classical Christian theism has traditionally held that God is the explanatory ultimate for all of reality. As Levin notes, "If moral standards are as ultimate as God, God loses his unique independence."<sup>81</sup> In an attempt to rescue the Guided Will Theory from this challenge, Levin reminds the readers that this uneasiness is due to a misunderstanding of dependence. He notes, "God is conceived as independent of anything beyond himself, the (in)dependence meant is ontological and causal."<sup>82</sup> Levin argues that because moral norms are not substances, nor have causal powers, they do not stand independent of God in the way that challenges the traditional notion of God being the explanatory ultimate for all reality.

Levin's proposed solution is not without its challenges. One potential objection to the notion of independent morality addresses the existence of objective moral values and duties, and their relationship to persons. Moral values appear to be person dependent, and it is difficult to understand a good such as love without its corresponding object. It seems, on Craig's view, that this relational dependence is the greatest weakness of the idea that abstract moral objects exist. He notes, "Moral values seem to exist as properties of persons, not as mere abstractions—or at any rate it's hard to know what it is for a moral value to exist as a mere abstraction."<sup>83</sup> It makes

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<sup>81</sup>Levin, "Understanding the Euthyphro Problem," 84.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 90.

<sup>83</sup>Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 178.

sense to speak of one being loved, or one loving, or even the spirit of love between two persons, but it appears contradictory to speak of a person-independent abstraction called “love.”<sup>84</sup>

Closely related to the metaethical objection is the normative objection. If moral abstractions exist independent of persons, how do moral abstractions create moral obligations? Similar to the metaethical objection, the normative objection argues that moral obligations appear to be person dependent, not person independent. For example, citizens have a duty to obey speed limits when driving, not because they are obligated to an abstract moral principle, but because they are obligated to persons. In this example, the person to whom the obligation is owed may be a municipality, or perhaps another driver on the road. Either way, it is clear that the obligation to drive at safe speeds has force because it is person dependent.

It is at this point that the force of the Euthyphro Dilemma is so evident. By affirming the Standard Divine Command Theory seems to affirm the arbitrariness of morality and the vacuity of God’s goodness. However, to affirm the Guided Will Theory, it seems as if the theist must admit that God is not the explanatory ultimate for morality. The current debate over the Euthyphro Dilemma is between those who affirm the Modified Divine Command Theory and those who affirm the Guided Will Theory. Before proposing a solution to the Euthyphro Dilemma in Chapter 5, Chapter 4 will explore these apparent weaknesses and provide a critique of contemporary evangelical reformulations of the Modified Divine Command Theory. Furthermore, Chapter 4 will demonstrate how each fails to address the dilemma properly. The following chapter will trace the historical development of Standard Divine Command Theory from its Ockhamist roots to its modified form.

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<sup>84</sup>Ibid.



### CHAPTER 3: THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF STANDARD DIVINE COMMAND THEORY

Ethics or moral philosophy is broadly a study of how one ought to live. However, ethics goes beyond merely prescribing a particular course of action. Broadly put, there are two questions that guide ethical inquiry. First, what is the grounding or basis for moral value, obligations, and duties? That is, what is the best explanation for morality as a whole? Second, how does one live the morally good and morally right life? Answering the first question seeks to explain the nature of morality, and answering the second question seeks to prescribe moral behavior. Throughout history, divine command theorists have focused their attention on the first question, by proposing that God's commands constitute moral values, obligations, and duties. Consequently, the divine command theorist answers the second question by proposing that the morally good and right life is one that is lived in obedience to God's commands.

#### Proponents of Standard Divine Command Theory

While many interpretations of *Euthyphro* have been proposed, Chapter 2 demonstrated that the Euthyphro Dilemma is a challenge to a divine command conception of ethics as it relates to the basis for moral value, obligations, and duties. In light of the Euthyphro Dilemma, contemporary evangelical Christian theologians and philosophers have modified the Standard Divine Command Theory in order to provide a more defensible theory. Their proposed solution is fairly straightforward. Modified Divine Command Theory claims that God's morally perfect nature is the basis for moral goodness, not his commands. Furthermore, this theory claims that God's commands constitute one's moral obligations and duties. However, instead of providing a more defensible version of the Standard Divine Command Theory, these theologians and

philosophers have created unnecessary ambiguity by using divine command terminology in a non-standard way. Furthermore, their modified versions of the Standard Divine Command Theory still require the Christian to abandon something essential to Christian theism.

The following traces the historical development of Standard Divine Command Theory by reviewing the works of its proponents and opponents in order to demonstrate the discontinuity between the Standard Divine Command Theory and Modified Divine Command Theory. In Janine Idziak's anthology on Divine Command Theory, she notes "It is not inaccurate to say, however, that the contemporary discussion on divine command morality has been conducted *without* serious attention to the history of this issue."<sup>1</sup> It is this lack of attention to the historical development of the theory that has allowed modifications that remove the *sine qua non* of Divine Command Theory.

### *Ancient Philosophy*

As discussed in chapter 2, the prime example of divine command morality in ancient philosophy is found in Plato's *Euthyphro*. While a summary of this dialogue does not bear repeating at this point, it is important to address the salient features of Euthyphro's Divine Command Theory. Unlike modern moral philosophy, *Euthyphro* does not provide a thoroughgoing moral philosophy. It does not attempt to explain concepts such as moral epistemology, moral semantics, or moral justification. The aim of the dialogue is fairly straightforward; to discover the essence of piety. While some interpretations do not force a distinction between metaethics and normativity when assessing *Euthyphro*,<sup>2</sup> the majority opinion is that

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<sup>1</sup>Idziak, *Divine Command Morality*, 1. Emphasis added. The historical divisions used in this analysis will follow Idziak.

<sup>2</sup>Richard Joyce, "Theistic Ethics and the Euthyphro Dilemma," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 30, no. 1 (2002): 49.

metaethics is Socrates' primary concern.<sup>3</sup> Of course, this is a distinction that is made early on in the dialogue when Socrates reminds Euthyphro that he does not expect an example of piety, but rather the essence of it. Panos Dimas observes, "What he [Socrates] seeks to identify is the essence of piety," that is "the property whose presence in something makes this something *be* pious and is such that by knowing what this is we may determine for anything whether this property is present in that thing."<sup>4</sup>

Plato's characterization of divine command morality begins with the interplay between right action and moral grounding. The circumstance that gives rise to the dialogue is the fact that Euthyphro is prosecuting his father for manslaughter. The justification for Euthyphro's obligation is grounded in the example provided by the gods. Since Socrates seeks an explanation of the essence of piety, and not an example, the two finally settle on the following definition of piety: the pious is what all the gods love, and the impious is what all the gods hate. It is this definition that gives rise to the first iteration of the dilemma, and consequently, foreshadows divine command theories.

To say that Euthyphro is a divine command theorist is only partly true. It is clear that Euthyphro feels that the pious is that which all the gods love, and this is Euthyphro's attempt to explain the basis for moral values, obligations, and duties. Furthermore, he feels he has an obligation to prosecute his father because he believes it to be a pious act. This is one way in which, according to Euthyphro, one lives the morally right life. It is in this sense that it could be

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<sup>3</sup>For examples of those who understand the *Euthyphro* to be concerned with metaethics, see Ásta Kristjana Sveinsdóttir, "Siding with Euthyphro: Response-Dependence and Conferred Properties," *European Journal of Philosophy* 18, no. 1 (2010): 108-125; Panos Dimas, "Euthyphro's Thesis Revisited," *Phronesis* 51, no. 1 (2006): 1-28; or Matthew Sharpe, "Uncovering Euthyphro's Treasure: Reading Plato's with Lacan," *Helios* 37, no. 1 (2010): 23-48.

<sup>4</sup>Dimas, "Euthyphro's Thesis Revisited," 1-2.

claimed that Euthyphro is a divine command theorist. However, upon Plato's examination, it is clear that Euthyphro is altogether unsure of how to explain the basis for piety.

There are several questions regarding piety and pious actions that Plato uses to shape the dilemma. The first question is, what is piety? Euthyphro defines piety as that which all the gods love. It is the gods' love that confers the quality of piety on a particular act. The second question that Plato uses to help shape the dilemma is, does the pious act precede the state of being pious? Euthyphro acknowledges, along with Plato, that acts precede states of being. For example, a cup is only in the state of being carried, if and only if an agent first carries the cup. In the case of piety, Euthyphro affirms that piety is a state of being that is conferred onto an action by the gods' love of the action. The third question that Plato uses to help shape the dilemma is, what causes the gods to love the pious act? Euthyphro claims that it is the quality of piety in the act itself that causes the gods to love it. Therefore, Euthyphro contradicts his previous answers by contending that the reason the gods love the pious act, is because the act is in itself pious, not because the gods love the act. Euthyphro's duty to prosecute his father is grounded in the wills and affections of the gods exemplified in Greek mythology, but piety itself is what causes the gods to love the act in the first place. If Euthyphro were to be a consistent divine command theorist and answer Plato's challenge, he would indeed have to claim that the gods' arbitrary wills cause the act of loving to precede the state of being loved. Euthyphro, however, is constrained by his worldview and is not able to answer in this way. Grube adds:

Whatever the gods may be, they must by their very nature love the right because it is right...This separation of the dynamic power of the gods from the ultimate reality, this setting up of absolute values above the gods themselves was not as unnatural to a Greek as it would be to us...The gods who ruled Olympus...were not creators but created beings. As in Homer, Zeus must obey the balance of Necessity, so the Platonic gods must conform to an eternal scale of values. They did not create them, cannot alter them, and [sic] cannot indeed wish to do so.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>G. M. A. Grube, *Plato's Thought* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1980), 152-3.

Euthyphro serves as an example of one who seeks to explain the nature of morality in terms of divine commands. Unlike Greek polytheism, Christian theism is free to view this “scale of values” as contingent upon God’s existence. Unlike the gods in Greek mythology who, according to Grube, did not create moral values, Christian theism holds that God is an uncreated being who is responsible for creating everything that began to exist (John 1:3). Therefore, according to the divine command theorist, moral value is in some way determined by God. While there are hints of divine command ethics in *Euthyphro*, various Scholastic theologians provide a more robust and articulated Divine Command Theory.

#### *Scholastic Sources*

The scholastic conception of the Standard Divine Command Theory has several common themes. One common theme is the centrality of the divine will. The divine will, often synonymous with divine command, is viewed as the cause of all morality. John Duns Scotus is the earliest scholastic divine command theorist. In *On the Mercy and the Justice of God*, Scotus frames the issue of the nature of morality by referring to the divine will in the following way:

The divine will, which is the first rule of all works and of all acts, and the activity of the divine will, of which the first rule consists, is the first principle of righteousness. For from the fact that something is suitable to the divine will, it is right; and whatever action God could perform, is right absolutely.<sup>6</sup>

Since the divine will is the first principle of righteousness, Scotus is led to affirm that whatever the divine will brings about, in terms of morality, “will be right and just.”<sup>7</sup> It is the expression of the divine will that creates justice for humanity. Consequently, it is possible for God’s justice to

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<sup>6</sup>John Duns Scotus, “The Paris Commentary on the Sentences,” in *Divine Command Morality: Historical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Janine Marie Idziak (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), 54.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

appear arbitrary since, as Scotus adds, “he [God] sometimes acts contrary to this order of justice.”<sup>8</sup>

Not only does Scotus affirm that God’s commands constitute morality, but he also denies the notion that morality is a quality that is intrinsic to an act. In *Four Books on the Sentences*, Scotus responds to the notion that an act is considered morally good or evil based on some intrinsic quality. He asserts that the command not to kill would cease to be binding if God were to “revoke this precept.”<sup>9</sup> What is more, Scotus adds that it would be “not only legitimate, but meritorious.”<sup>10</sup> As an example, Scotus refers to God’s command to kill Isaac. While taking the life of an innocent human person may be considered morally evil, Abraham’s obedience to God’s command to take the life of Isaac would be considered praiseworthy.<sup>11</sup>

As a contemporary of Scotus’, William of Ockham’s Divine Command Theory explains the nature or morality of the divine will. Ockham is often cited as the paradigmatic example of divine command ethics by both theists and non-theists. While much of Ockham’s position has been reviewed in the previous chapter, his view is best summarized by his work in *On the Four Books of Sentences*. Ockham argues that acts such as hatred of God, theft, and adultery are not evil in and of themselves, but only have evil “annexed” to them when performed by “someone who is obligated by a divine command to perform the opposite act.”<sup>12</sup> However, if God were to

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<sup>8</sup>Scotus, “The Paris Commentary on the Sentences,” 54.

<sup>9</sup>John Duns Scotus, “The Oxford Commentary on the Four Books of the Sentences,” in *Divine Command Morality: Historical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Janine Marie Idziak (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), 52.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>William of Ockham, “On the Four Books of the Sentences,” in *Divine Command Morality: Historical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Janine Marie Idziak (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), 56.

perform these acts, or command these acts, no evil could be annexed to them. On the contrary, Ockham argues that these can acts “can even be performed meritoriously by an earthly pilgrim if they should come under a divine precept.”<sup>13</sup> Ockham’s focus is less on the obligation that accompanies a divine precept—while that is certainly implied—and focuses more on the fact that divine precepts are the source of the moral content of an action.

Although not as well-known as Ockham, 14<sup>th</sup>-century French scholastic Pierre d’Ailly continues to emphasize the importance of the divine will as the basis for morality. He begins by establishing that the divine will is not only the “first efficient cause in the class of efficient causes,” but also that the divine will is the “first law or rule.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, it is no surprise that D’Ailly’s Divine Command Theory claims that the morally good/right or morally bad/wrong acts possess moral qualities by virtue of God’s loving or hating the act. D’Ailly explains:

Nothing is good or evil which God necessarily or from the nature of the thing loves or hates, speaking of the ‘special’ love and hatred which has previously been described. Neither is any quality connected with justice on account of its own nature, but from sheer divine acceptance; nor is God just because He loves justice, but rather, the contrary is the case: something is possessed of justice because God loves it, that is, accepts it...<sup>15</sup>

The divine will—motivated by God’s love or hatred of an act—is the source of God’s commands and prohibitions. In terms of his commands, D’Ailly notes, “Nor therefore does He command good actions because they are good, or prohibit evil ones because they are evil; but as I have previously stated, these are therefore good because they commanded and evil because they are

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<sup>13</sup>Ockham, “On the Four Books of the Sentences,” 56.

<sup>14</sup>Pierre D’Ailly, “Questions on the Books of the Sentences,” in *Divine Command Morality: Historical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Janine Marie Idziak (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), 58.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 63-64.

prohibited.”<sup>16</sup> Of course, this is also consistent with the way in which Plato frames the Euthyphro Dilemma. The just act, is only just, because God first loves and accepts the act.

Other scholastic philosophers and theologians—principally known for their work in various disciplines—also affirmed a strong divine command ethic. French scholastic Jean Gerson, for example, affirmed that “It is probable that no act of a creature of itself and intrinsically, is good with moral or meritorious goodness, or in like manner, evil, except with respect to the divine reason and will.”<sup>17</sup> In other writings, Gerson takes a more pointed position on the relationship between morality and the divine will. Gerson decisively sides with the voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma when he claims that “God surely does not will exterior things to be made for the reason that they are good...it is rather the contrary, that therefore exterior things are good because God wills them either to be such.”<sup>18</sup> Similar to Gerson, German scholastic philosopher Gabriel Biel argued that “it is not because something is good and just, that God wills it; but because God wills it; it is therefore good and just.”<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Biel adds that the divine will’s acceptance of actions or things is not “a presupposed goodness existing in the objects distinct from God.”<sup>20</sup> On the contrary, Biel clearly affirms that goodness is determined by the “divine will alone.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>D’Ailly, “Questions on the Books of the Sentences,” 64.

<sup>17</sup>Jean Gerson, “On the Spiritual Life of the Soul,” in *Divine Command Morality: Historical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Janine Marie Idziak (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), 66-67.

<sup>18</sup>Jean Gerson, “On the Consolation of Theology,” in *Divine Command Morality: Historical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Janine Marie Idziak (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), 68.

<sup>19</sup>Gabriel Biel, “Exposition of the Canon of the Mass,” in *Divine Command Morality: Historical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Janine Marie Idziak (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), 72.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.



From Scotus to Biel, it is clear that the scholastic conception of divine command ethics is one that grounds morality (goodness and rightness) in the eternal divine will. There are three distinct features of the scholastic conception of divine command ethics. First, the divine will is not only the first efficient cause of all that exists, but it is also the first rule and law. In other words, God's will is the explanatory stopping point. Second, no act is intrinsically morally good or evil. Third, anything that is thought to be morally good or evil is determined by the divine will alone. If contemporary evangelical reformulations of the Modified Divine Command Theory had only scholastic formulations to serve as examples, it would have to admit that the standard way of grounding the good/right is in the divine will. Consequently, claiming to be a divine command theorist and basing moral goodness in something other than God's commands only serves to create confusion. Forcing a sharp distinction between the good and the right is not required to answer the Euthyphro Dilemma.

### *The Reformation Tradition*

It would be difficult to overstate the impact of the Protestant Reformation on both sacred and secular history. Although the formal Protestant Reformation began in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, its tradition extends to contemporary theology. To show the continuity of thought among divine command theorists from scholasticism through the reformation tradition, this dissertation will emphasize theologians from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. While many theological issues motivated the Protestant Reformation, some have argued that moral philosophy was at the heart of it all. Emil Brunner claims that "Since the days of the Apostles no one has taken the ethical problem so seriously as Martin Luther. This alone made him a reformer. The Reformation as a whole is simply one long protest against moral levity, one long struggle for the reality of the Good."<sup>22</sup> So,

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<sup>22</sup>Olive Wyon, trans., *The Divine Imperative* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2002), 57.

contemporary evangelicals might be tempted to look to the reformation tradition for historical support of the Modified Divine Command Theory. Unfortunately, history demonstrates that divine command theorists from the reformation tradition follow in the footsteps their scholastic predecessors.

Martin Luther's Divine Command Theory, consistent with his scholastic predecessors, begins with an emphasis on the divine will as the basis for morality. He claims, "God is He for Whose will no cause or ground may be laid down as its rule and standard; for nothing is on a level with it or above it, but it is itself the rule for all things."<sup>23</sup> Luther's view not only affirms that God's will is the basis for morality, but also denies the existence of a moral standard distinct from or logically prior to the will of God. So, in this, Luther is in perfect agreement with his scholastic predecessors. Furthermore, Luther's elaboration almost appears to answer the Dilemma directly when he claims that "What God wills is not right because He ought, or was bound, so to will; on the contrary, what takes place must be right, because He so wills it."<sup>24</sup> While it is unclear whether Luther makes the distinctions between moral goodness and moral rightness, it is clear that he grounds the whole of morality, both the good and the right, in the will of God. Because, no act—according to Luther—is good apart from God willing it to be so,<sup>25</sup> and no righteousness apart from God's. Luther claims that even if God were to command what appeared to be morally evil, it would not be morally evil by virtue of God commanding it. Furthermore, Luther asserts that not only is man obligated to obey even those apparently evil

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<sup>23</sup>Martin Luther, "The Bondage of the Will," in *Divine Command Morality: Historical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Janine Marie Idziak (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), 94-95.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Martin Luther, "Lectures on Romans," in *Divine Command Morality: Historical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Janine Marie Idziak (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), 96-97.

things that God wills, but they would also be praiseworthy of carrying the action out. He notes, “For if they were willing to do what God wills, even if He should will that they be damned and reprobated, they would have no evil.”<sup>26</sup>

John Calvin—a contemporary of Luther—was just as committed to the idea that God’s will is the basis for morality. Calvin’s moral philosophy begins with the claim that the divine will is the first cause of all creation. He notes:

If at any time thoughts of this kind come into the minds of the pious, they will be sufficiently armed to repress them, by considering how sinful to insist on knowing the causes of the divine will, since it is itself, and justly out to be, the cause of all that exists. For if his will has any cause, there must be something antecedent to it, and to which it is annexed; this it were impious to imagine.<sup>27</sup>

Naturally, since God’s will is the first cause of all creation, it is also the basis for morality.

Calvin adds, “The will of God is the supreme rule of righteousness, so that everything which he wills must be held to be righteous by the mere fact of his willing it.”<sup>28</sup> What is more, Calvin clearly denies the existence of any “antecedent” cause of God’s moral will and affirms that God’s will alone is the moral guide for humanity’s actions. Calvin argues that the purpose behind the moral law is to show that God alone is the “master and guide of our life,” and that “there is nothing which he more requires of us than obedience.”<sup>29</sup> By making this claim, Calvin reinforces the idea that the basis of morality is the divine will, and that conformity to the divine will is the moral duty and obligation of humanity.

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<sup>26</sup>Luther, “Lectures on Romans,” 96-97.

<sup>27</sup>John Calvin, “Institutes of the Christian Religion,” in *Divine Command Morality: Historical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Janine Marie Idziak (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), 101-102.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 4.10.7

As influential as Luther and Calvin were, Standard Divine Command Theory within the reformation tradition are not limited to its 16<sup>th</sup>-century representatives. In response to 19<sup>th</sup>-century liberal theology and the rationalism that informed its moral philosophy, Karl Barth reemphasized the idea that God's will is the only viable foundation for morality. Although Barth's Divine Command Theory is more nuanced when compared to his predecessors, it is clearly in agreement with Luther and Calvin's moral philosophy. Barth viewed moral philosophy as the attempt to address what he called the "ethical problem."<sup>30</sup> Barth defines the ethical problem as discovering the "whence" and "whither" of ethics. In other words, the ethical problem deals with the origins and purpose of morality.<sup>31</sup>

For Barth, moral philosophy must begin with theology. He notes, "The doctrine of God must be expressly defined and developed and interpreted as that which it also is at every point, that is to say, ethics."<sup>32</sup> From Barth's perspective, attempts to explain morality through human reason "all too easily skims" over this essential fact.<sup>33</sup> Barth further explains this position:

But we must be more exact and say that it is the attestation, the 'tradition,' the repetition of the answer. For the answer is not theology, or the doctrine of God, but their object—the revelation and work of the electing grace of God. But this, the grace of God, *is* the answer to the ethical problem. For it sanctifies man. It claims him for God. It puts him under God's command. It gives predetermination to his self-determination so that he obeys God's command. It makes God's command for him the judgment on what he has done and the order for his future action.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2.2.8.1.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

The electing grace of God in Barth's ethic is the manner in which he describes the divine will. For Barth, this act of election places man under God's command and generates moral obligations and duties. Barth argued that man's sole moral obligation was obedience to the commands of God. This raises an additional aspect of Barth's ethical problem. If God's electing grace is the basis for morality, and God's commands are the basis for one's obligations and duties, how can man fulfill his moral obligation? Barth argues that Jesus Christ provides the example of fulfilling one's moral obligations and duties. He adds, "The man Jesus, who fulfills the commandment of God, does not *give* the answer, but by God's grace He is the answer to the ethical question put by God grace."<sup>35</sup> In Barth's estimation, Jesus does not deliberate between good/right and bad/wrong actions, but "is subject only to the will and command of the God who alone is good."<sup>36</sup> For Barth, the ultimate example of obedience is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>37</sup>

These two positions—that God's electing grace is the basis for morality; and that Jesus's obedience to God's commands is the basis for one's moral obligations and duties—naturally exclude any other possible basis for morality. While Barth recognizes the role of reason in ethical investigation, he notes that "all investigation of the good can be only an investigation of its explanation and confirmation." He adds, "The ethical problem which we have to answer can be an open problem only in the sense and to the extent that our human life and will and action are put in question by the command of God."<sup>38</sup> For Barth, the problem of ethics (i.e., what is the

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<sup>35</sup>Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2.2.8.1.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

good, and what right) is ultimately an investigation of God himself. The foundation of the good is the will God, and right action is exemplified in Jesus.

As one of Barth's contemporaries, Emil Brunner affirmed a Divine Command Theory that was more akin to that of Luther's and Calvin's. As noted earlier, it was Brunner that saw the entire reformation as a response to the [Roman Catholic] Church's "moral levity."<sup>39</sup> For Brunner, the reformation was "one long struggle for the reality of the Good."<sup>40</sup> Brunner argued that the ethical problem could be framed as answering two basic questions. First, one must provide a basis for moral goodness. Second, one must provide an explanation of "achieving the Good, that is, the question of the agent."<sup>41</sup>

Brunner held that the basis for the Good was the will of God. He notes, "What God does and wills is good; all that opposes the will of God is bad. The Good has its basis and its existence solely in the Will of God."<sup>42</sup> Brunner flatly denies the notion of some autonomous basis for morality apart from God. The Good, Brunner asserts, "Is simply and solely the will of God."<sup>43</sup> Brunner not only affirms the reformed position on this point, but he also argues that the Old Testament conception of morality denies the existence of a moral standard distinct from God. He adds, "The idea of a law which is even higher than God himself is unthinkable in the Old Testament. God is not merely the guardian of the Moral Law and of the moral ordinances, but their Creator."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Wyon, *The Divine Imperative*, 57.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 53.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 56.

Bruner explained that achieving the Good meant “union with God,” which was accomplished by obedience to God’s command in Christ; that is love God, and love one another.<sup>45</sup> Jesus’ life was not only the example of what it meant to achieve the Good, but his crucifixion and resurrection were the reasons that one should trust this example. Bruner notes, “God the Father, men his children, bound to Him by His own love, who through this love of His are also united to each other. It is this absolute will of God for community which was revealed in the Cross of Christ as the final and real meaning of all life.”<sup>46</sup>

Carl F. H. Henry was also a proponent of the Standard Divine Command Theory as represented in the reformation tradition. Henry continued to advance the notion that morality finds its basis in the will of God. While he affirmed the major tenants of Standard Divine Command Theory, Henry makes a particular observation that speaks directly to contemporary evangelical reformulations’ attempt to ground the good in the character of God, thereby equating God with the good. Craig provides a clear example of this attempt when claims that “God’s moral nature is what Plato called the ‘Good.’”<sup>47</sup> Henry argues that for the divine command theorists, God’s nature is not the appropriate basis for the good. He claims:

The question whether the good is to be conceived as identical with the nature of God has supplied fuel for theological debate in numerous Christian controversies...the nature of God must not be regarded as independently good in the sense that it gains its goodness independently of his will, nor that his good nature determines his will so that the will bows to the good by a sort of pantheistic inevitability. The good is what God wills, and what he freely wills. The good is what the Creator-Lord does and commands.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Wyon, *The Divine Imperative*, 56.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 57.

<sup>47</sup>Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 491.

<sup>48</sup>Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics*, ed. Christianity Today (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1957), 212.

Once again, it is evident that the divine command theorists within the reformation tradition understood God's will as the foundation morality (goodness and rightness). Similar to the scholastics, these divine command theorists viewed the divine will not only as the first efficient cause of all that exists, but also as the first rule and law (i.e., the explanatory stopping point). Also, they agreed that no act is intrinsically morally good or evil. Historically, those within the reformation tradition affirmed that moral goodness was determined by the divine will alone. Thus, contemporary modifications to the Standard Divine Command Theory that attempt to ground morality in the divine nature, are not consistent with the historical conception of the theory. Consequently, claiming to be a divine command theorist and basing moral goodness in something other than God's commands forces one to deviate from a classical understanding of the theory, which only serves to weaken its apologetic force.

Traditionally, there have been two questions that guide ethical inquiry. First, what is the grounding or basis for moral value, obligations, and duties? That is, what is the best explanation for morality as a whole? Second, how does one live the morally good and morally right life? It is clear that proponents of Standard Divine Command Theory have focused their attention on the first question, by proposing that God's commands constitute moral values, obligations, and duties. Consequently, the Standard Divine Command Theory answers the second question by proposing that the morally good and morally right life accomplished by obeying God's commands. Proponents of the Standard Divine Command Theory were not the only ones that understood the theory to be an explanation of the basis of moral goodness and moral rightness. Opponents also recognized this as the primary emphasis of the theory.



## Opponents of Standard Divine Command Theory

Throughout history, divine command theorists have consistently argued that the divine will is the basis for moral values, obligations, and duties. In addition, they have proposed that the morally good and morally right life is one that is lived in obedience to divine commands. This view has not gone uncontested. Opponents of the Standard Divine Command Theory have rejected the notion that God's will is the basis for moral values, obligations, and duties. These opponents will be referred to as non-divine command theorists. It is important to note that Non-Divine Command Theory is not necessarily a non-theistic view, though consistent non-theists will also be non-divine command theorists. Theists have also attempted to explain the basis of moral values, obligations, and duties apart from the divine will.

Theistic non-divine command theorists argue that morality can be explained and that the moral life can be lived, without grounding morality in divine commands. Non-theistic non-divine command theorists argue that morality can be explained and that the moral life can be lived, without appealing to the divine at all. As Rachels observes:

To the moral agent intent on discovering what she should do, religious considerations are not to the point. What she wants to know is: What are the reasons for and against the various options? What do reason and conscience require of me? Believers and nonbelievers may approach these questions in the same way, and if both are conscientious and rational, they may arrive at the same answer.<sup>49</sup>

The following historical overview of moral philosophy is not intended to trace an entire history of moral philosophy but highlight theistic and non-theistic views in moral philosophy that oppose the Standard Divine Command Theory. Furthermore, it is intended to demonstrate that those who have opposed the Standard Divine Command Theory have understood the theory to be an attempt to ground moral values, obligations, and duties in divine commands. This explains

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<sup>49</sup>Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 47.

why contemporary attempts to redefine Standard Divine Command Theory as a theory of moral obligation and duties only serve to create unnecessary ambiguity.

### *Ancient Philosophy*

Prior to classical Greek society and thought, morality was generally explained in theocratic terms, and the moral life was that which was lived by obeying divine commands.<sup>50</sup> Historians often associate the beginning of formal moral philosophy with classical Greek society and thought.<sup>51</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre argues that moral philosophy begins with Greek society as depicted in Homeric poetry.<sup>52</sup> Homer's works, such as the *Iliad*, contained heroic escapades often set within the context of warfare and provided philosophical and ethical fodder for classical philosophers such as Aristophanes, Xenophon, Plato, and Aristotle. While there is debate over how advanced the Homeric moral philosophy actually is, most agree that Homer's poetry was the material that informed ancient moral philosophy and helped establish the foundation upon which ancient philosophers built.<sup>53</sup> Among these philosophers are Plato and Aristotle. Both not only addressed the gods' relationship to morality, but also sought to explain the nature of morality in terms other than the divine will.

Plato's moral philosophy is found within his various dialogues, which are traditionally categorized as early, middle, and late dialogues. Plato's early dialogues—which includes

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<sup>50</sup>Examples of this perspective include the Jewish *Torah* and the Babylonian *Hammurabi's Code*. These are examples of moral codes that did not include thorough treatment of what it means to live the good life. This does not mean that earlier societies were are not interested in being moral, only that they do not explicitly provide a thoroughgoing moral philosophy, *per se*.

<sup>51</sup>Examples include Roger Crisp, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), and Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966).

<sup>52</sup>MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*, 5.

<sup>53</sup>Crisp, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Ethics*, 1.

*Euthyphro*—focus primarily on identifying the essence, nature, and basis of morality. Nicholas White notes, “The terms that the earlier works seek to define are: courage (*Laches*), moderation (*Charmides*), friendship (*philia*, *Lysis*), beauty (*Hippias Major*), piety (*Euthyphro*), virtue (*Meno*), and justice (*Republic*, Book I).”<sup>54</sup> It is in these earlier works, claims White, that Plato poses the “meta-questions” of essence, nature, and basis.<sup>55</sup> Even though it has been argued that Plato’s late works do not offer a systematic approach to moral philosophy,<sup>56</sup> they do move towards a more mature ethical perspective.

Plato’s moral philosophy is informed by his metaphysics, which proposed that ultimate reality consisted of eternal abstract forms that served as the ultimate basis for the physical world. For example, if a sunrise is thought to be beautiful, its beauty must be grounded in the eternal form called “Beauty.” Similarly, if something or someone is thought to be good, its goodness is ultimately explained in terms of the eternal form called “Good.” For Plato, the Good was not only distinct from the gods, but the gods’ actions were measured by the Good. Plato’s position stands in stark contrast to the position proposed by *Euthyphro*. *Euthyphro* asserts that piety is that which is loved by the gods, and thus piety finds its basis in the divine will(s). Socrates objects to this assertion by claiming that its piety cannot be based on the divine will if it is piety that causes the gods to love it. Plato implies that there must be some other basis for what is perceived to be pious.

Plato not only claims that morality finds its basis in the Good, but also seeks to explain what it means to live the good life. For Plato, the Good and the good life are closely connected. In

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<sup>54</sup>Nicholas White, “Plato’s Ethics,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Ethics*, ed. Roger Crisp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 22.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>56</sup>Dorothea Frede, “Plato’s Ethics: An Overview,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/plato-ethics/> (Accessed March 11, 2016).

platonic thought, knowledge of the Good is necessary for living the good life and those who are devoted to knowing the Good have greater insight on how to act rightly in everyday affairs. As Frede notes, “Like other ancient philosophers, Plato maintains a virtue-based eudaemonistic conception of ethics. That is to say, human well-being (*eudaimonia*) is the highest aim of moral thought and conduct.”<sup>57</sup> Again, this stands in contrast to a divine command conception of ethics where the right action in everyday affairs is determined by the divine will.

Apart from Plato, Aristotle was perhaps the most influential philosopher of the fourth century B.C.E. While Aristotle’s work is foundational in areas such as logic, physics, psychology, biology, and metaphysics, it is his moral philosophy, as Christopher Shields puts it, which “is seen most overtly and avowedly in the resurgence of virtue ethics which began in the last half of the twentieth century.”<sup>58</sup>

Similar to Plato, Aristotle proposed a moral philosophy that attempted to explain the basis of moral goodness apart from the divine will or the divine command. Plato attempted to explain the basis of moral goodness in terms of eternal forms. Michael Wedin notes, “Aristotle rejected Plato’s transcendental Form of the Good as irrelevant to the affairs of persons and, in general, had little sympathy with the notion of an absolute good.”<sup>59</sup> Instead, Aristotle based moral goodness in the ability of a person to choose and act virtuously.

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<sup>57</sup>Dorothea Frede, "Plato's Ethics," URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/plato-ethics>, (Accessed March 11, 2016).

<sup>58</sup>Christopher Shields, "Aristotle," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2015 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/aristotle/> (Accessed March 18, 2016).

<sup>59</sup>Michael Wedin, “Aristotle,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 51. See also, Kraut, "Aristotle's Ethics," URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/aristotle-ethics>.

Aristotle presents his moral philosophy in two works: *Nicomachean Ethics*, and *Politics*. Aristotle sought to explain morality as a means to some ultimate end. Aristotelian ethics is commonly referred to as Virtue Ethics. Aristotle's use of virtue refers to the excellence of a person or thing. A person or thing is considered excellent when it performs its intended functions properly. For example, the excellence of a knife lies in its ability to cut. Likewise, the excellence of a man lies in his ability to act in accordance with his nature. While there are many facets to man's nature, Aristotle argued that man's moral nature is aimed at happiness (εὐδαιμονία). In other words, if any action is to be considered good or virtuous, it must be a means to happiness or well-being. Therefore, the moral excellence of a man lies in his ability to act in such a way that he accomplishes εὐδαιμονία. Wedin adds:

Most things, such as wealth, are valued only as a means to a worthy end. Honor, pleasure, reason, and individual virtues, such as courage and generosity, are deemed within their own right but they can also be sought for the sake of eudaimonia. Eudaimonia alone can be sought only for its own sake.<sup>60</sup>

It is important to note that Aristotle's moral philosophy does not emphasize the *basis* of virtue, but rather one's ability to *become* virtuous.<sup>61</sup> This distinction is at odds with Standard Divine Command Theory, which primarily attempts to explain the basis for morality. Where the divine command theorist claims that morality is determined by the divine will, Aristotle claims that morality is acting virtuously for the sake of happiness. Consequently, Aristotle proposes a basis for morality without appealing to the divine will, or divine commands.

### *Scholastic Sources*

Generally speaking, the Schoolmen of Scholasticism stand as the isthmus between the cold atheistic moral philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, and modern moral philosophy. As Joseph

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<sup>60</sup>Wedin, "Aristotle," 51.

<sup>61</sup>Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 1098b9.

Rickaby notes, “The ethics and politics of the Schoolmen are founded upon the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics* of Aristotle...The Aristotelian ethics stood alone, complete, but isolated. The Schoolmen added to them a science of deontology, and thereby brought them into connection with Theology.”<sup>62</sup> In an attempt to provide a robust moral philosophy that does not view God’s commands as the basis for morality, Scholasticism sought to retain the best of both Plato and Aristotle’s moral philosophy and apply it to Christian theism. Rickaby adds: “About the best thing that Scholasticism has done is the perfecting of the Aristotelian scheme of happiness, and the adaptation of it to the Christian promises, contained in Scripture and Church tradition, as set forth in many a glowing page of St. Augustine. Plato and Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas, here felicitously join hands.”<sup>63</sup>

While Augustine is not technically considered a scholastic, his theology laid a foundation for the scholastic thought in general, and theistic moral philosophy in particular.<sup>64</sup> Augustine was deeply influenced by Neoplatonism and the writings of its founder, Plotinus.<sup>65</sup> Perhaps the most common notion that persists from Platonic to Neoplatonic thinking is explaining the immaterial realm in terms of Forms. Where Plato emphasized the Good, Plotinus emphasized the One, which served as the basis for the entire immaterial realm.<sup>66</sup> Although Augustine would

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<sup>62</sup>Joseph Rickaby, *Scholasticism* (New York: Dodge Publishing Company, 1908), <https://www3.nd.edu/Departments/Maritain/etext/scholas8.htm> (Accessed March 20, 2016).

<sup>63</sup>Rickaby, *Scholasticism*, <https://www3.nd.edu/Departments/Maritain/etext/scholas8.htm> (Accessed March 20, 2016).

<sup>64</sup>For example, Gordon Leff and G. R. Evans begin their review of medieval thought and theology with Augustine. See Gordon Leff, *Medieval Thought: St. Augustine to Ockham* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1958); and G. R. Evans, *The Medieval Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Medieval Period* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2001).

<sup>65</sup>Christian Wildberg, "Neoplatonism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2016 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, URL =<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/neoplatonism/>> (Accessed March 25, 2016).

eventually break from Neoplatonism, its influence on his moral philosophy as a Christian theologian was significant. Gordon Leff adds:

Strictly speaking St. Augustine is not a philosopher at all, nor did he create a system. Like all the early Fathers, both Greek and Latin, his end was to defend and strengthen the faith. It therefore took in all those problems which needed a solution. But in St. Augustine's case, these were put on a lasting foundation and extended to all the fundamental questions which were germane to a Christian outlook.<sup>67</sup>

Augustine's moral philosophy was informed by his metaphysic. Augustine explained the existence of the immaterial world, which included moral goodness, as based in God. Augustine asks, "Who made me? Did not my God, Who is not only good, but goodness itself," and often refers to God as "the Good."<sup>68</sup> When explaining this basis, Augustine introduces the notion of the "Divine will." In an attempt to avoid the dualism of Manicheism, Augustine seeks to preserve the unity of God by explaining the Divine will's relationship to moral goodness. He claims:

For corruption does no ways impair our God; by no will, by no necessity, by no unlooked-for chance: because He is God, and what He wills is good, and Himself is that good; but to be corrupted is not good. Nor art Thou against Thy will constrained to anything, since Thy will is not greater than Thy power. But greater should it be, were Thyself greater than Thyself. For the will and power of God is God Himself.<sup>69</sup>

One may be tempted to interpret this passage as a type of Divine Command Theory, since Augustine claims that what God wills is good. However, Augustine does not ground moral goodness in the same way that Scotus, Ockham, D'Ailly, Gerson, and Biel do. These scholastic

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<sup>66</sup> Wildberg, "Neoplatonism,"  
URL=<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/neoplatonism/>> (Accessed March 25, 2016).

<sup>67</sup>Leff, *Medieval Thought*, 34.

<sup>68</sup>Augustine, *Conf.* 7.10.16.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

divine command theorists equate the divine will with divine commands. Augustine equates the divine will with God himself and argues that God is the basis of all moral goodness.

In addition to Augustine's pre-scholastic influence, Thomas Aquinas stands as one of the more prominent and influential thinkers among the Scholastics. Although one could not characterize Scholastic moral philosophy as essentially Thomistic, Leff observes that Thomas was "regarded as the liberators of mankind, the precursors of Descartes, the revivers of philosophy and reason as independent pursuits."<sup>70</sup> While many medieval theologians were influenced by Augustine's Neoplatonism, Thomas' distinctively Aristotelian moral theory serves as a representative of many of his contemporaries and paves the way for much of modern moral philosophy. Thomas' influence on the modern age is both deep and wide. His work in moral philosophy not only challenges the idea that divine commands are the basis for morality but also provides a less cumbersome path to resolve the Euthyphro Dilemma.

Thomas' moral philosophy represents a shift away from "traditional accounts of the spiritual and moral life in terms of keeping or breaking the Commandments," and towards an account that emphasizes the development of moral and theological virtues.<sup>71</sup> Similar Aristotle, Thomas' moral philosophy emphasizes the practical over the theoretical. However, Thomas does address metaethical issues before moving to normative ones. For Thomas, answering the moral question begins by discovering the purpose or end of human life. According to Thomas, that end is happiness.<sup>72</sup> Thomas views happiness from two perspectives. First, there is a sense in which

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<sup>70</sup>Leff, *Medieval Thought*, 211.

<sup>71</sup> Fergus Kerr, "Thomas Aquinas," in *The Medieval Theologians*, ed. G. R. Evans (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 209-2010.

<sup>72</sup>Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2.1.



the object of happiness which humans seek to obtain is grounded in God's divine nature.<sup>73</sup> In this sense, one can say that morality is uncreated and eternal. Second, there is the sense in which happiness is something grounded in attaining virtues that are specific to the aim of humanity. In this sense morality is something that is created and not eternal.<sup>74</sup> The former allows the theist to affirm that God is the supreme good, and the latter allows the theist to affirm goodness apart from divine commands. Thomas adds, "Happiness is called man's supreme good, because it is the attainment or enjoyment of the supreme good. Happiness is said to be the last end, in the same way as the attainment of the end is called the end."<sup>75</sup> For Thomas, God is the basis for moral goodness, which enables man to pursue happiness.

Happiness in Thomas' moral philosophy is not merely acquired by obeying divine commands. Rather, happiness is acquired by acting in accordance with certain virtues.<sup>76</sup> Thomas refined and expanded Aristotle's list of virtues and agreed that the basis for moral decision making lay not only in acting, but acting in accordance with right reason. This is commonly referred to as the Natural Law Theory. Rachels explains that "the Theory of Natural Law holds that moral judgments are 'dictates of reason.' The best thing to do, in any circumstance, is whatever course of conduct has the best reasons on its side."<sup>77</sup> Thomas argues that since God is a rational being and created man as a rational being, virtue cannot be that which acts against the

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<sup>73</sup>Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2.3.1.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 2.3.1.2.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 2.1.2.1.

<sup>77</sup>Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 45.

dictates of reason.<sup>78</sup> Although Thomas agreed that God was supremely good,<sup>79</sup> he also held that human actions must be free, in accordance with reason, and aimed at man's end, if they are to be virtuous.

Thomas' attempt to resurrect and implement the philosophy of Aristotle was not met with universal acceptance. Quite the contrary, many viewed Thomas' Aristotelian moral philosophy as the heretical influence of Greek pagans. Martin Luther saw Aristotelian philosophy as a direct challenge to the Holy Spirit.<sup>80</sup> Perhaps this sort of response was due to the fact that, according to Fergus Kerr, "Aristotle's *Ethics* enabled Aquinas to supplement, or replace, traditional accounts of the spiritual and moral life in terms of keeping or breaking the Commandments."<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, both Augustine and Thomas produced moral philosophies that attempted to synthesize the theology of Christian theism and the philosophy of ancient Greece in hopes to better explain what it meant to live the morally good life. This attempt intensified a slow, but steady separation between exercising faith in divine revelation to determine morality, and utilizing reason to discover moral truths.

### *Rationalism*

On the heels of the Protestant Reformation, Continental Rationalists such as René Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz sought to explain how one could live the morally good life through the use practical reason. Giving precedence to reason, these men argued that one does not arrive at moral truths via divine revelation, but rather as a result of first

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<sup>78</sup>Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.90.3.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 1.6.2.

<sup>80</sup>Martin Luther, "Pagan Servitude of the Church," in *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Random House, 1962), 270.

<sup>81</sup>Kerr, "Thomas Aquinas," 209-2010.

principles of thought. Unlike Thomas Aquinas, who saw reason as a guide for moral decision making, 17<sup>th</sup>-century rationalists saw reason as the source for moral decision making. Each individual's practical reason was closely connected to their metaphysics. Often referred to as the father of modern philosophy, René Descartes clearly viewed God's will as the basis for moral goodness, and therefore maintained the voluntarism of his predecessors. Descartes claimed, "God cannot have been determined to make it true that contradictories cannot be true together, and therefore...he could have done the opposite."<sup>82</sup> Descartes' contemporaries such as Thomas Hobbes and Samuel von Pufendorf also supported a voluntarist basis for moral goodness. The notion that moral truths were somehow grounded in the divine will or command did not go unchallenged. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, perhaps the most notable opponent of Descartes' voluntarism, claims:

...one destroys, without realizing it, all the love of God and all his glory; for why praise him for what he has done, if he would be equally praiseworthy in doing the contrary? Where will be his justice and his wisdom if he has only a certain despotic power, if arbitrary will takes the place of reasonableness, and if in accord with the definition of tyrants, justice consists in that which is pleasing to the most powerful?<sup>83</sup>

Leibniz's sentiment can also be found in many contemporary sources that reject Standard Divine Command Theory. However, in order to understand the contemporary debate over Standard Divine Command Theory, one must be familiar with the 17<sup>th</sup>-century debate over the basis of moral values, obligations, and duties, and the general agreement over the use of practical reason to achieve ultimate happiness.

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<sup>82</sup>Cottingham Stoothoff Murdoc, trans., "To [Mersenne], 27 May 1630," in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 25.

<sup>83</sup>George R. Montgomery, trans., "Discourse on Metaphysics," in *Discourse on Metaphysics Correspondence with Arnauld and Monadology* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1908), 4-5.

If rationalism could generally be characterized, it would be as a philosophical position that gives reason a unique role in acquiring knowledge. Contrary to the empiricism of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, rationalists argued that knowledge was acquired *a priori*—prior to—sensory experience. This method of epistemology was not only applied descriptively but also prescriptively. Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz agree that the right course of action in any given situation should necessarily comport with reason. For example, Descartes claims:

Since our will tends to pursue or avoid only what our intellect represents as good or bad, we need only to judge well in order to act well, and to judge as well as we can in order to do our best—that is to say, in order to acquire all the virtues and in general all the other goods we can acquire. And when we are certain of this, we cannot fail to be happy.<sup>84</sup>

Similarly, Baruch Spinoza held that the happy life (i.e., the moral life) was one that sought to attain knowledge and love of God,<sup>85</sup> and this did “not depend on the truth of any historical narrative (Scripture) whatsoever, for inasmuch as this natural Divine law is comprehended solely by the consideration of human nature.”<sup>86</sup> In other words, one can arrive at the knowledge and love of God through reason when reflecting upon human nature. Leibniz defines virtue as “the habit of acting according to wisdom,”<sup>87</sup> and that “One must hold as certain that the more a mind desires to know order, reason, the beauty of things which God has produced...the happier he will be.”<sup>88</sup>

While the Continental Rationalists generally agree that the moral life is one that is achieved through practical reason and is aimed at happiness, the practical application of moral

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<sup>84</sup>René Descartes, AT VI 28/CSM I 125.

<sup>85</sup>Joseph Ratner, *The Philosophy of Spinoza* (Tudor Publishing Company, 1926), 77

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

<sup>87</sup>Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, PW, *Felicity*, 3.194.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 15.84.

philosophy is not the point that distinguishes Standard Divine Command Theory from Non-Divine Command Theory. As was noted in the previous section, normative issues are not at the heart of the Standard Divine Command Theory, but rather metaethical issues. This point is made abundantly clear in Leibniz's specific critique of Samuel von Pufendorf's *The Duty of Man and Citizen*. Leibniz writes *Opinion on the Principles of Pufendorf* as a "warning" to his readers.<sup>89</sup> Contrary to the Aristotelean model, Leibniz understands Pufendorf to have asserted that "the efficient cause of this law [the natural law]" is not found "in the nature of things and in the precepts of right reason which conform to it, which emanate from the divine understanding, but in the command of a superior."<sup>90</sup> Leibniz's critique of this position is not only aimed at Pufendorf but also Hobbes and Descartes. He claims:

Neither the norm of conduct itself, nor the essence of the just, depends on his [God's] free decision, but rather on eternal truths, objects of the divine intellect, which constitute, so to speak, the essence of divinity itself... And, indeed, justice follows certain rules of equality and of proportion [which are] no less founded in the immutable nature of things, and in the divine ideas, than are the principles of arithmetic and of geometry.<sup>91</sup>

Leibniz sees several distinct problems with grounding morality in God's will (free decision), and these problems are directly related to the Euthyphro Dilemma. Leibniz recognizes that God's commands, and "whatever God wills" is thought to be both good and just, but still recognizes the necessity of being able to ground goodness and justice properly.<sup>92</sup> Leibniz notes, "But there remains the question whether it is good and just because God wills it or whether God wills it

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<sup>89</sup>Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "Opinion on the Principles of Pufendorf," in *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought: Leibniz Political Writings*, ed. Patrick Riley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 66.

<sup>90</sup>Leibniz, "Opinion on the Principles of Pufendorff," 70.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 71.

<sup>92</sup>Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "Reflections on the Common Concept of Justice," in *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, 2<sup>nd</sup>, ed. Leroy E. Loemker (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1969), 561.

because it is good and just; in other words, whether justice and goodness are arbitrary or whether they belong to the necessary and eternal truths about the nature of things, as do numbers and proportions.”<sup>93</sup> It was clear to Leibniz that since one is not tempted to ground abstract entities such as numbers and proportions in the will of God, one should not be tempted to ground morality in the will of God.

Leibniz rejected the idea of grounding morality in the arbitrary commands of God since this conception of morality makes God out to be nothing more than a tyrant that claims “Let my will stand for the reason.”<sup>94</sup> For Leibniz, this completely “destroys the justice of God,” and the ability to praise God for just acts.<sup>95</sup> If it were the case that morality was based in God’s commands, one would not be able to worship God for being good, and one’s motivation for fulfilling one’s moral obligations would be fear of punishment.<sup>96</sup> Instead, Leibniz argues that the basis of moral goodness and justice is similar to logic and mathematics, which are true and fixed irrespective of divine “whim.”<sup>97</sup> Although man and God are subject to the same moral standard of goodness and justice, Leibniz argues, man’s justice is “mixed with injustice” while God’s justice is perfect.<sup>98</sup>

Leibniz was primarily known for his work in metaphysics, which is not to say that he was merely a metaphysician. Leibniz understood that “speculative philosophy” (i.e., metaphysics)

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<sup>93</sup>Leibniz, “Reflections on the Common Concept of Justice,” 561.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 563.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid.

served to “strengthen” moral philosophy.<sup>99</sup> Admittedly, his inclination toward philosophy was one that sought to synthesize previous moral philosophies.<sup>100</sup> However, he was convinced that the voluntarist view of morality was fraught with errors. This perspective deeply influenced the metaphysics and moral philosophy of modern philosophy in general, and its most notable philosopher, Immanuel Kant.

### *Immanuel Kant*

Eighteenth century pietism attempted to counterbalance the emphasis that rationalism placed on the role of reason by emphasizing religious experience, fervor, and practice.<sup>101</sup> It was from this context that Immanuel Kant emerged as perhaps the most influential moral philosopher of the modern period. Furthermore, Kant’s moral philosophy was deeply influenced by Leibniz as well as Empiricist David Hume.<sup>102</sup> Hume’s philosophical perspective emphasized experience (fact and observation) over speculation (hypotheses).<sup>103</sup> Unable to accept Hume’s conclusion that understanding was only acquired *a posteriori*, Kant produced a metaphysic and moral philosophy that began with *a priori* reason.

Similar to Plato’s worlds, Augustine’s two cities, and Leibniz’s two kingdoms, Kant’s metaphysic (transcendental idealism) reflected a distinction between the material/natural world (*phenomena*), and the world as it really is (*noumena*).<sup>104</sup> For Kant, it was impossible to know the

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<sup>99</sup>Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1.1.71.

<sup>100</sup>Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, 1.1.71.

<sup>101</sup>E. J. Brill, trans., *German Pietism during the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 23.

<sup>102</sup>John E. Hare, *God and Morality: A Philosophical History* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 129.

<sup>103</sup>David Hume, “A Treatise of Human Nature,” in *Oxford Philosophical Texts*, eds. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3.

noumenal world. One could gain knowledge about the phenomenal world in one of two ways; sense experience and *a priori* reasoning. For those truth claims that lay beyond the boundaries of sense experience and *a priori* reason, Kant relegated to faith (e.g., God, Freedom, Morality).<sup>105</sup> This distinction governed the way in which Kant constructed his moral philosophy. Since Kant thought moral truths to be grounded in the noumenal realm, the only way one could know moral truths was through the use of reason. Furthermore, if one were to report allegedly to receive a divine command that went against one's reason, Kant suggested that one should obey one's reasons and not the divine command.<sup>106</sup>

While Kant's moral philosophy is most widely known for his Categorical Imperative, he outlined his basis for moral goodness in his *Lectures on Ethics*, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, and *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Kant's metaphysics of morals begins by seeking the "the one principle of morality, the criterion by which to judge everything and in which lies the distinction between moral goodness and all other goodness?"<sup>107</sup> Kant claimed that morality has either an empirical basis or intellectual basis, and either of these must be on internal or external grounds.<sup>108</sup> By empirical, Kant means "derived from the senses."<sup>109</sup> By intellectual, Kant means "conformity of our actions to the laws of reason."<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>104</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 35/B294-B295.

<sup>105</sup>Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B30.

<sup>106</sup>Immanuel Kant, "The Conflict of the Faculties" (1978), in *Religion and Theology*, 283.

<sup>107</sup>Louis Infield, trans., "Lectures on Ethics," in *Immanuel Kant Lectures on Ethics* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers), 11.

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>109</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*



Kant holds that the first principle of morality has an intellectual basis in internal grounds. It must be intellectual rather than empirical since morality is “completely apprehended *a priori*,” and not determined by experience or the senses.<sup>111</sup> Consequently, whatever moral principle is discovered must, in turn, be necessary and universal. The first principle of morality must also be internal, because the first principles “depends on the inner nature of the action as apprehended by the understanding.”<sup>112</sup> Kant viewed divine command ethics as an appeal to an empirical basis on external grounds. He rejects this basis since it does not permit “reason to pass ethical judgment on actions. Instead, we act by reference to...the commands of authority” and that this “first principle of ethics is based upon contingent grounds.”<sup>113</sup> For Kant, any moral law must be objectively binding. A moral law that finds its source in the divine will is by definition contingent, and not necessary. In addition, Kant repeats Leibniz’s objection regarding the circularity of calling God good from a divine command perspective. Kant’s commentary on Mark 10:18 exposes the circularity that he has in mind. He observes that one’s concept of good must exist as an “idea of moral perfection which reason formulates *a priori*” in order to call God good.<sup>114</sup> Kant claims, “Even the Holy One of the Gospel must be compared with our ideal of moral perfection before He is recognized as such.”<sup>115</sup> To do otherwise, for Kant, would be to enter into vicious circularity. While Kant rejects the divine will as a basis, or “general principle” of morality, he

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<sup>111</sup>Infield, “Lectures on Ethics,” 13.

<sup>112</sup>*Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>114</sup>Lewis White Beck, trans., “Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals,” in *Immanuel Kant: Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company), 25.

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*

does recognize some merit to divine commands in terms of one's duty and moral motivation. He adds:

the moral law leads to religion, i.e., to the recognition of all duties as divine commands, not as sanctions, i.e., arbitrary regulations of a foreign will, which are otherwise contingent...but which must be viewed as commandments of the highest being because only from a morally perfect (holy and good) and likewise all-powerful Will are we able to hope for the highest good, the institution of which as the object of our striving is made into a duty for us by the moral law, and therefore then also the achievement of that highest good through agreement of my will with this Will.<sup>116</sup>

Here, Kant recognizes the importance of the “all-powerful Will.” This Will—one that acts perfectly in accordance with the moral law—acts as a source of moral motivation for mankind, and is necessary as an example of attaining the highest good. One should notice that Kant does not affirm that God's commands constitute moral values, duties, and obligations. Rather, Kant argues that God commands what he does because it is consistent with an independent standard of moral values, obligations, and duties.

Immanuel Kant's metaphysical distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal, and his moral philosophy that followed, was a catalyst for the shift from metaethics to his own normative theory called deontology. Kant's metaphysic not only creates an epistemic gap between morality and the person, but it also creates what Hare terms a “moral gap.”<sup>117</sup> This distinction creates an epistemic gap by introducing a moral realm that is unknowable in and of itself. It creates a moral gap “because he [Kant] both places the moral demand on us very high and recognizes that we are born with what he calls a natural propensity not to follow it.”<sup>118</sup> Hare goes on to argue that Kant held that “we are required to believe that God is (with us) the

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<sup>116</sup>Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:129. 6.1.

<sup>117</sup>John E. Hare, *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 7.

<sup>118</sup>*Ibid.*

legislator of the moral law, and (unlike us) the rewarder and punisher of our lives as a whole in relation to this law. We have to deny knowledge, he says, in order to make room for faith.”<sup>119</sup> It is this distinction between metaethics and normativity that lays the groundwork for the Modified Divine Command Theory. The modified divine command theorists argue that moral values are grounded in a transcendent Good, what God’s commands serve as the basis for moral obligations and duties.

### The Contemporary Debate

There is confusion in the contemporary conversation about the Standard Divine Command Theory and the emphasis that it has placed on moral values. In a 2011 lecture at Auckland University, Flannagan asserted that both contemporary and historical divine command theories are theories of moral rightness (deontology) rather than moral goodness (axiology).<sup>120</sup> The previous two sections have shown that, while it is true that the Standard Divine Command Theory includes a basis for moral obligations and duties, the theory necessarily includes a basis for moral values. It is only with the advent of modern moral philosophy that the emphasis has decidedly shifted to deontology alone.

In hopes to salvage the Standard Divine Command Theory, contemporary philosophers have focused primarily on the basis for moral obligations and duties exclusively. Unable to provide an adequate defense against challenges to the Standard Divine Command Theory, Adams proposed the Modified Divine Command Theory. This theory seeks to avoid these challenges by appealing to the loving nature of God. The following will show that Modified

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<sup>119</sup>Hare, *God’s Call*, 104.

<sup>120</sup>Matthew Flannagan, “Divine Command Theory with Dr. Matthew Flannagan” (presented at Auckland University, Auckland, New Zealand, February 4, 2011), <http://www.mandm.org.nz/2011/02/video-of-matthew-flannagan-speaking-on-divine-command-theory.html>, (Accessed April 4, 2016).

Divine Command Theory arose out of the various efforts to explain the nature of morality. This theory uses divine command terminology in a non-standard way, and creates unnecessary ambiguity for non-theists thereby weakening its apologetic force. Since Adams is credited with naming the Modified Divine Command Theory, those who propose a similar, but earlier approach will be referred to non-standard divine command theorists.

### *Proponents of Non-Standard Divine Command Theory*

In general, contemporary proponents of the Standard Divine Command Theory have sought to explain the nature of morality, understanding that this entails the notions of moral goodness and moral rightness. However, there was a noticeable shift in the 20<sup>th</sup> century away from grounding moral value in divine commands, to grounding moral obligations and duties in divine commands. This shift from moral value to moral obligations and duties began with Brown's Divine Command Theory—which most closely resembles the Standard Divine Command Theory—and ends with Philip L. Quinn's Causal Divine Command Theory, which he defines as “a normative Divine Command Theory.”<sup>121</sup>

Brown is a premier example of a contemporary philosopher that attempts to emphasize the importance of God being the basis for moral goodness in order to develop a theory of moral rightness. Brown holds that the statement “If God commands something, then it ought to be done” is redundant, since the use of the term “God” necessarily means a being that is “perfectly good, and indeed the standard of all goodness.”<sup>122</sup> In other words, any obligation that results from the command of God is also good by virtue of his command since God is perfectly good. Brown's defense of the Standard Divine Command Theory centers on properly understanding the

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<sup>121</sup>Philip L. Quinn, “Divine Command Ethics: A Causal Theory,” in *Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Christian B. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 38.

<sup>122</sup>Patterson Brown, “Religious Morality,” *Mind* 72, no. 286 (1963): 239.

term “God.” He claims that it is partially a moral term, and adds that “it would not be strictly proper to call a being ‘God’ whose actions were not perfectly good or whose commands were not the best moral directives.”<sup>123</sup> Brown views God’s will as the moral standard for Christians, and claims that “by ‘God’ Christians in part mean ‘a being whose will is taken as the final moral authority.’”<sup>124</sup>

Brown’s position drew criticism from opponents such as Flew, Kai Nielsen, and Keith Campbell, whose objections will be addressed in the next section. What is important to note is that Brown’s Divine Command Theory affirmed that moral goodness was determined by the will of God, and that God’s will created moral obligations for humanity. R. G. Swinburne’s Divine Command Theory attempts to embrace both horns of the Euthyphro Dilemma and focuses primarily on moral obligations, rather than moral goodness.

Swinburne offers a Divine Command Theory that conflates moral goodness with moral rightness for the sake of argument, but moves on to suggest a theory for moral obligations. It is not that Swinburne denies the distinction between moral goodness and moral rightness, only that his argument for a divine command conception of ethics does not rest on this distinction. Swinburne attempts to resolve the Euthyphro Dilemma by arguing that some moral truths rely on a voluntarist explanation, while other moral truths rely on a non-voluntarist explanation. Swinburne’s Divine Command Theory holds that contingent moral truths rely on God’s will or command since it is his will that creates the situation that gives rise to the moral question.<sup>125</sup> Contingent moral truths are moral truths that hold “only because the world is as it is in some

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<sup>123</sup>Brown, “Religious Morality,” 239.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., 578.

<sup>125</sup>R. G. Swinburne, “Duty and the Will of God,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 4, no. 2 (1974): 216-217.

further contingent respect.”<sup>126</sup> A necessary moral truth is a truth that holds regardless of the contingencies of reality.<sup>127</sup> For Swinburne, any given circumstance can be assessed by either appealing to contingent moral truths which are determined by divine commands, or appealing to a necessary moral truth which guides God’s commands.<sup>128</sup> Swinburne goes on to argue that there is “no doubt” that every contingent moral truth is grounded in a necessary moral principle.<sup>129</sup> Therefore, when it comes to moral value that informs one's obligation, Swinburne is not a divine command theorist. When it comes to contingent moral obligations, Swinburne claims to be a divine command theorist, and thus departs from the core essential features of Standard Divine Command Theory.

Similar to Swinburne, Quinn departs from the Standard Divine Command Theory. Quinn argues that the statement “God Commands that *p*,” is equivalent to “the moral law imposes the obligation that *p*.”<sup>130</sup> While he does attempt to make a case that God’s commands can adequately serve as the basis for moral value, he is explicit that his Divine Command Theory is distinctively deontological. Quinn focuses his efforts on moral obligations and duties rather than moral values, and like his contemporaries, he departs from the Standard Divine Command Theory. While the particulars of Quinn’s argument are valuable, they are informed by a methodology that begins by addressing normative issues rather than metaethical ones, and moral obligations and

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<sup>126</sup>Swinburne, “Duty and the Will of God,”216-217.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid.

<sup>130</sup>Philip L. Quinn, *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 5-6.

duties, rather than moral values. Quinn's emphasis on normativity provided the framework to begin thinking about divine command ethics in terms other than morality as a whole.

### *Opponents of Non-Standard Divine Command Theory*

The Non-Standard Divine Command Theory offered by Brown, Swinburne, and Quinn did not go uncontested. The contemporary opponents' rejection of Non-Standard Divine Command Theory was based upon three of the six challenges listed earlier. Among these challenges, the Arbitrariness Objection, the Moral Authority Objection, and the Vacuity Objection were most prominent.<sup>131</sup> Opponents to the Non-Standard Divine Command Theory understand that a robust moral philosophy should be able to account for both moral goodness and moral rightness. Furthermore, they understood the Standard Divine Command Theory to be a theory of moral goodness and moral rightness. A. C. Ewing and Nielsen are two prominent examples of contemporary opposition to the Non-Standard Divine Command Theory.

Ewing begins by defining his perspective on ethics before he proceeds to list objections to the notion that morality is dependent on religion in general, and the divine will in particular. He notes, "I consider it to be involved in the 'autonomy' of ethics that the goodness or badness, rightness or wrongness of anything that is really good or bad, right or wrong, follows from the inherent nature of what is pronounced good, etc., in its context and is necessarily fixed by this."<sup>132</sup> Ewing clearly indicates that his objection applies to divine command theories of moral goodness and divine command theories of moral rightness. Nielsen asserts, "The statement, 'God wills x,' is not a moral pronouncement. Before we know whether we ought to do x, we must

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<sup>131</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 34. Baggett and Walls enumerate these objections and other prominent objection to the Standard Divine Command Theory.

<sup>132</sup>A. C. Ewing, "The Autonomy of Ethics," in *Prospect for Metaphysics*, ed. Ian T. Ramsey (Allen & Unwin, 1961), 37.

know that what God wills is good. And in order to know that what God wills is good, we should have to judge independently that it is good.”<sup>133</sup>

Ewing objects to divine command theories of all stripes for three distinct reasons. First, is the Arbitrariness Objection. Ewing argues that morality based on the will of God is completely arbitrary.<sup>134</sup> This objection begins by understanding moral terms such as good and right to mean “commanded by God,” which causes one to ask why God would command one action rather than its opposite. One cannot claim that God commands alms giving because almsgiving is independently good, since good is defined as commanded by God. Furthermore, Ewing argues, “We cannot say that he commands it because it ought to be done, for that would have to be translated into ‘God commands it because it is commanded by God.’”<sup>135</sup>

Second, Ewing raises the Moral Authority objection, claiming that one cannot adequately explain why one would obey God’s commands without employing a viciously circular argument.<sup>136</sup> Ewing raises the question of moral authority because the Standard Divine Command Theory appears to reduce moral authority to a matter of self-interest, or forces one to enter into circular arguments. For example, one might claim that one should obey God’s commands in order to be rewarded or avoid punishment. Ewing notes, “This might be a very good reason from a prudential point of view, but these considerations of self-interest cannot be

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<sup>133</sup>Kai Nielsen, “Some Remarks on the Independence of Morality from Religion,” *Mind* 70, no. 278 (1961): 175.

<sup>134</sup>Ewing, “The Autonomy of Ethics,” 39.

<sup>135</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup>*Ibid.*, 40-41.



an adequate basis for ethics.”<sup>137</sup> On the other hand, one might claim that one should obey God’s commands because God is good, but this begs the question regarding goodness.

Ewing and Nielsen’s third objection is the Vacuity Objection. Ewing and Nielsen both argue that morality based on the will of God not only makes morality arbitrary, but it also empties the phrase “God is good” of all moral value.<sup>138</sup> If there are no ethical reasons for God’s commands, and God arbitrarily assigns moral value, then to claim that God is good is simply to claim that God simply does what God wants to do. However, according to Ewing, if the claim that God is good is to convey that God has an attribute called moral goodness, it implies that there is some standard by which one can measure God’s moral goodness. Nielsen provides a more strenuous form of the Vacuity Objection when he asks, “How do we know that this being is *good*, except by our own moral discernment?”<sup>139</sup>

#### *Modified Divine Command Theory*

The contemporary debate has revealed two distinct perspectives regarding the Non-standard Divine Command Theory. First, proponents of the Non-standard Divine Command Theory have focused primarily on deontology, or moral obligations and duties. Opponents of Non-standard Divine Command Theory assess the theory in the same way that one might assess the Standard Divine Command Theory, recognizing that a divine command conception of ethics is not merely a theory of obligations and duties, but also a theory of moral value. In an effort to address the metaethical weaknesses of contemporary divine command theories, and in hopes to

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<sup>137</sup>Ewing, “The Autonomy of Ethics,” 40.

<sup>138</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup>Nielsen, “Some Remarks on the Independence of Morality from Religion,” 237.

address the challenges of its objectors, Adams developed the Modified Divine Command Theory.

There are three distinct stages of development to Adams' Modified Divine Command Theory, and it is important to review those stages here for three reasons. First, these stages represent a renewed emphasis on moral value. Second, Adams' account for moral value, while it appears to be veridical, does not reflect the view of the Standard Divine Command Theory. Third, Adams' final formulation of the Modified Divine Command Theory informs contemporary evangelical attempts to resolve the Euthyphro Dilemma.

Adams proposes his first formulation of Modified Divine Command Theory in an article entitled *A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness* in 1973. This article represents what others have called "Early Adams."<sup>140</sup> Adams begins by clearly outlining an *unmodified* version of divine command of ethical wrongness.

Adams understands the unmodified version to claim that the following two statements are logically equivalent:

- (1) It is wrong (for A) to do X.
- (2) It is contrary to God's commands (for A) to do X.<sup>141</sup>

Adams sees two particular problems with this unmodified version. First, he recognizes that not all people mean what this theory means when it uses the term "wrong." Therefore, Adams' first modification is to limit the Divine Command Theory to those theists who understand morality in Judeo-Christian terms. Second, he argues that the most potent objection to unmodified divine command theories of ethical wrongness is the Abhorrent Command Objection. Adams observes, "Suppose God should command me to make it my chief end in life to inflict suffering on other

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<sup>140</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 111.

<sup>141</sup>Adams, "A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness," 462.

human beings for no other reason than that He commanded it. Will it seriously be claimed that in that case it would be wrong for me not to practice cruelty for its own sake?”<sup>142</sup>

Assuming that term wrong is used in its “normal ethical sense” within Judeo-Christian ethical discourse, Adams argues that it would be wrong (for A) to do X only if X is contrary to the commands of a God who loves his creatures. It is only when this condition—a loving God—is assumed that one could claim that “wrong,” and “contrary to God’s commands” are logically equivalent. Therefore, the abhorrent command objection is resolved since, on Adams’ formulation, a loving God would never make it man’s chief end in life to inflict suffering on other human beings for no other reason than that He commanded it.

Adams’ early work represents a decisive step toward emphasizing God as the basis for moral value (goodness), which in turn informs one’s moral obligations. However, Adams’ saw the need for further modification in order to address the semantic challenge to the use of the term “wrong,” and the axiological challenges to God’s goodness. Consequently, Adams proposed a further modification in “Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again”<sup>143</sup> in 1979, which will be referred to as Middle Adams. In this article, Adams’ position is influenced by the work of Keith Donnellan, Saul A. Kripke, and Hilary Putnam’s work in the area of philosophical linguistic analysis.<sup>144</sup> Adams argues that the epistemological/ontological distinction regarding a concept

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<sup>142</sup>Adams, “A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness,” 463.

<sup>143</sup>Robert M. Adams, “Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 7, no. 1 (1979): 73-74.

<sup>144</sup>Keith Donnellan, “Reference and Definite Descriptions,” *The Philosophical Review*, 75 (1966), 281-304; Keith Donnellan, “Proper names and Identifying Descriptions,” *The Semantics of Language*, eds. Donald Davidson and Gilbert Harman (Boston: Reidel), 1972; Saul A. Kripke, “Naming and Necessity,” *The Semantics of Language*, eds. Donald Davidson and Gilbert Harman (Boston: Reidel), 1972; and Hilary Putnam, *Mind, Language and Reality: Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

allows the use of the term “wrong” not necessarily to mean contrary to a loving God’s command, even though it is a necessary attribute of the action in question. In other words, those who use the word wrong to describe actions that are obviously wrong, can do so even though they either deny, or are altogether unaware that the action’s wrongness is determined by the command of a loving God.<sup>145</sup> This position modifies Adams’ earlier theory to apply not only to Judeo-Christian ethical discourse, but all ethical discourse.

Having responded to the question of ethical semantics in *Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again*, Adams’ late work was dedicated to a full-fledged ethical framework.<sup>146</sup> Once again, Adams’ Modified Divine Command Theory trades on the notion that wrong is logically equivalent to contrary to the commands of a *loving* God.<sup>147</sup> Adams provides a very clear definition of his theory, which warrants the full quotation:

We should be clear, first of all, about some things that are *not* claimed in the Divine Command Theory that I espouse. Two restrictions, in particular, will be noted here. One is that when I say that an action’s being morally obligatory consists in its being commanded by God, and that an action’s being wrong consists in its being contrary to a divine command, I assume that the character and commands of God satisfy certain conditions. More precisely, I assume that they are consistent with the divine nature having properties that make God an ideal candidate, and the salient candidate, for the semantically indicated role of the supreme and definitive Good.<sup>148</sup>

Not unlike Plato’s account of the Good, Adams views God as the basis for both moral and non-moral value. He presupposes this theory of moral goodness as a necessary truth, which reinforces his view on ethical semantics noted earlier.<sup>149</sup> God, as the supreme and infinite Good, serves as

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<sup>145</sup>Adams, “Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again,” 73-74.

<sup>146</sup>Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*.

<sup>147</sup>*Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>148</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup>*Ibid.*, 14-15.

the measure of all other finite goods. Therefore, the phrase “God is good” is not meant to measure God’s goodness using finite goods, but rather to establish God as the infinite standard by which to measure finite goods.<sup>150</sup>

In addition, Adams makes it clear that his Modified Divine Command Theory is not a theory of “moral properties in general.”<sup>151</sup> He adds, “In particular, it is not a theory of the nature of the good, but presupposes a theory of the good.” Adams adds that his approach is not untraditional, arguing that one can discern his approach in the writings of Locke, Cumberland, and Pufendorf.<sup>152</sup> However, this chapter has gone to great lengths to demonstrate that the majority of divine command theorists throughout history not only hold that the divine will is the basis for moral value, but that it necessarily precedes any moral obligation.

Adams’ is perhaps the most prominent contemporary proponent of a divine command conception of ethics. Consequently, his Modified Divine Command Theory has served as the foundation for many contemporary evangelical reformulations of the Non-standard Divine Command Theory. However, there are problems that still exist within Adams’ theory. First, Adams’ theory is not a Divine Command Theory, classically understood. As stated earlier, the Standard Divine Command Theory is primarily a theory of moral goodness and moral rightness. While Adams’ attempt to ground moral goodness in God is well thought out—and perhaps veridical—it uses divine command terminology in a non-standard way. This causes unnecessary ambiguity since objectors view a divine command conception of ethics to be a theory of morality as a whole. Second, even as a theory of moral rightness, Adams’ Modified Divine Command

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<sup>150</sup>Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 28.

<sup>151</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup>*Ibid.*, 251-252.

Theory does not adequately reply to the objections of its critics. Challenges such as vacuity, authority, and epistemology can still be leveled against this theory. Third, Adams' theory still requires the Christian to abandon something essential to his theology. Finally, just as Adams' theory is reflected in contemporary evangelical philosophical theology, so are his errors. Rather than critique Adams' Modified Divine Command Theory directly, the following chapter will review and critique the modified divine command theories of contemporary evangelical philosopher/theologians Craig; Baggett and Walls; and Copan and Flannagan.

## **CHAPTER 4: AN ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY EVANGELICAL REFORMULATIONS OF MODIFIED DIVINE COMMAND THEORY**

Orthodox Christian theology affirms that God is not only supremely good, but also just, and righteous. These claims imply some explanation of the relationship between God and morality. Furthermore, various moral arguments for God's existence depend on the idea that God is either the best explanation for, or a necessary condition for morality. A predominant theory that explains God's relationship to morality is Divine Command Theory. The standard formulation of Divine Command Theory is represented by William of Ockham. The Standard Divine Command Theory holds that the morality is determined by the divine will or divine command. In other words, something is morally good and morally right because God wills it, or commands it. The Euthyphro Dilemma is a metaethical objection to the Standard Divine Command Theory and poses particular challenges that were reviewed in previous chapters.

Standard divine command theorists have argued that God's commands provide the moral content of moral values, obligations, and duties. However, contemporary theorists have modified the standard formulation by arguing that God's commands create moral obligations and duties, but do not provide the moral content for moral values. Adams' Modified Divine Command Theory proposes that God's divine nature is the basis for moral value and that the commands of a loving God constitute moral obligations and duties. This modification is intended to present a theistic ethic that avoids both horns of the Euthyphro Dilemma. Building upon Adams' work, contemporary evangelical philosophical theologians propose their own reformulations of the Modified Divine Command Theory. Craig provides the most concise definition of this view: "...moral values are rooted in the moral nature of God such that his moral commands are necessary expressions of his nature..."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Moreland, and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 531.

This chapter builds the case that contemporary evangelical reformulations of Modified Divine Command Theory, such as Craig's, provide for a less effective defensive apologetic. The apologetic effectiveness of each formulation is assessed on three criteria: methodological clarity; theological strength; and explanatory scope. First, the contemporary reformulations create unnecessary ambiguity by limiting their theory to moral obligations and duties. Craig is clear that moral values are grounded in the God's divine nature. This is not the majority historical position of divine command theorists. Consequently, these theorists remove that which makes divine command theories what they are, at least as divine command theories have been understood by nearly all scholars prior to those making the contemporary reformulations. By making this distinction, modified divine command theorists require non-theists to redefine terminology in order for the theory to be persuasive. Second, contemporary evangelical modified divine command theories fail to address specific challenges that force the Christian theist to abandon essential doctrines of Christian theology. Simply bifurcating moral values from moral obligations and duties does not safeguard against the various theological challenges associated with the Euthyphro Dilemma. Finally, contemporary evangelical modified divine command theories are not able to adequately respond to various objections associated with moral philosophy, thereby having a narrower explanatory scope. Weaknesses in these three areas serve to create a more cumbersome, and less effective apologetic.

The contemporary reformulations either explicitly or implicitly affirm that the Euthyphro Dilemma is a false dilemma. However, the Euthyphro Dilemma is a true dilemma, requiring one of two responses. The standard Euthyphro Dilemma is a set of questions that asks whether God commands an action because it is morally good/right, or is an action morally good/right because God commands it? Either God's commands are the basis for the moral good/right, or God's



commands are not the basis for the moral good/right. In other words, the theist cannot affirm both horns of the dilemma without contradiction. The modified divine command theorists misconstrue the dilemma by claiming that either God's commands constitute moral values, obligations, and duties, or something independent of God constitutes moral values, obligations, and duties. This misconstrual lies at the foundation of the Modified Divine Command Theory. These theorists propose to split the horns of the dilemma by grounding moral values in the divine nature, and moral obligations and duties in divine commands. This is an unnecessary move. First, it is not clear that the Euthyphro Dilemma is a false dilemma. Second, one may assent to the non-voluntarist horn of the dilemma without committing to a moral standard independent from God.

#### William Lane Craig's Non-Voluntarist Divine Command Theory

Craig is one of the most influential Christian apologists in contemporary scholarship. He also is a prominent proponent of the Modified Divine Command Theory. In order to understand Craig's formulation of the Modified Divine Command Theory, one must begin with his deductive moral argument for God's existence. Craig's deductive argument takes the form of *modus tollens*:

1. If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist,
2. Objective moral values and duties do exist.
3. Therefore, God exists.<sup>2</sup>

Craig's first premise maintains that God's existence is a necessary condition for objective moral values and duties. Each word in the consequent of the first premise is important, but the emphasis on values *and* duties is especially important. Craig's argument asserts that God is the necessary condition for both the good (values) and the right (obligations and duties).

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<sup>2</sup>Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 172.

The Euthyphro Dilemma, as was previously shown, attempts to challenge the position that God's commands are the basis for objective moral values, obligations, and duties.

Elaborating on his view of God's relationship to morality, Craig claims to avoid the horns of this dilemma.<sup>3</sup> He argues that God's "moral nature...is the locus and source of moral value," and that his commands express God's moral nature, and constitute one's moral duties.<sup>4</sup> In an interview, Craig refers to his position as "non-voluntarist Divine Command Theory,"<sup>5</sup> from which, two important details can be noted: First, Craig considers himself a divine command theorist. Second, he views at least part of morality as being grounded in something other than divine commands.

Craig claims:

I think that an appropriately formulated Divine Command Theory of ethics, such as has been articulated by Robert Adams, Philip Quinn, William Alston, and others, supplies an alternative [to Moral Platonism]: our moral duties are constituted by the commands of an essentially just and loving God...Since our moral duties are grounded in the divine commands, they are not independent of God...Thus, the morally good/bad is determined by reference to God's nature; the morally right/wrong is determined by reference to his will.<sup>6</sup>

Following in the footsteps of Adams *et al.*, Craig is a prominent example of an evangelical attempt to resolve the Euthyphro Dilemma by claiming to be a divine command theorist, while simultaneously changing several essential features of Divine Command Theory, as it has been historically known. Craig's Non-Voluntarist Divine Command Theory will be critically assessed on three bases: methodological clarity; theological strength; and apologetic effectiveness.

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<sup>3</sup>Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 181.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 491.

<sup>5</sup>Kevin Harris, and William Lane Craig, hosts, "The Euthyphro Dilemma Yet Again," Reasonable Faith Podcast (MP3 podcast), *Reasonable Faith*, January 4, 2015, accessed April 18, 2016, <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/the-euthyphro-dilemma-once-again>.

<sup>6</sup>Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 181-182.

### *Methodological Clarity*

Craig argues that his deductive moral argument for God's existence does not necessarily commit him to a "particular account of the relationship between God and moral values or duties."<sup>7</sup> However, it appears at face value that his argument is distinctly non-voluntarist. That is to say; the first premise does not assert that if God's commands did not exist, objective moral values and duties would not exist. It simply asserts that moral values and duties would not exist if God did not exist. This might imply some sort of Divine Command Theory, but only tangentially. Despite the vagueness of this first premise, Craig's response to the Euthyphro Dilemma reveals that he attempts to affirm a type of Divine Command Theory that is non-voluntarist. This is the first hint that Craig is using divine command terminology in a non-standard way.

Craig's method of developing his Non-Voluntarist Divine Command Theory begins with his understanding of the Euthyphro Dilemma. Craig correctly views the Euthyphro Dilemma as a metaethical challenge. However, his interpretation of the dilemma is too narrow, since it is applied to moral value only. He notes, "The objection, first recorded in Plato's dialogue *Euthyphro*, goes as follows: either something is good because God wills it, or else God wills it because it is good."<sup>8</sup> This is not the standard way of framing the Euthyphro Dilemma. First, the dilemma clearly calls for a proper basis for morality as a whole, rather than merely on rightness. The dilemma does not make the distinction between moral values and moral obligations and duties. While this distinction is a legitimate distinction, it is not helpful in responding to the dilemma.

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<sup>7</sup>Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 181.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

Second, the standard and accurate way of understanding the voluntarist horn includes the implication that God's commands may be arbitrary. It appears that Craig's understanding of the voluntarist horn of the dilemma is only partially correct. He affirms that a consequence of embracing the voluntarist horn of the dilemma is that one must affirm that moral values are arbitrary.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, on this view, God could have just as easily commanded evil actions, and they would be good simply by virtue of God commanding them. Therefore, Craig cannot embrace this horn of the dilemma. However, he does not seem to apply this understanding to moral obligations and duties in the same way that he applies it to moral values.

Third, Craig misconstrues the non-voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma. He understands the implication of the non-voluntarist horn to be an affirmation of a moral standard that is independent of God, which "undermines premise (1) of [his] moral argument."<sup>10</sup> Craig thinks that embracing the non-voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma is to embrace Atheistic Moral Platonism, which affirms the existence of eternal abstract moral entities that exist logically prior to and independent of God. This interpretation of the non-voluntarist horn is incorrect on two accounts. First, the non-voluntarist horn does not commit the theist to a moral standard logically prior to or independent of God. The non-voluntarist horn merely commits the theist to a moral standard logically prior to or independent of God's *commands*. Second, by affirming the non-voluntarist horn, one does not necessarily affirm Atheistic Moral Platonism. There is nothing about the non-voluntarist horn that necessarily commits the Christian to Moral Platonism.

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<sup>9</sup>Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 181.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

Finally, based on his misinterpretation of the dilemma, Craig proposes a third way that grounds moral value in the moral nature of God, and grounds moral obligations and duties in the divine commands of God as a necessary expression of his moral nature. Craig calls this third way the Non-Voluntarist Divine Command Theory.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to misinterpreting the force and point of the Euthyphro Dilemma, Craig appears to miss the main thrust of the Divine Command Theory, at least as it has been expressed by a majority of scholars from the scholastics to modern moral philosophy. Craig is correct in his understanding of the metaethical nature of the Euthyphro Dilemma. He is also correct in his understanding of the metaethical nature of the Standard Divine Command Theory. Unfortunately, Craig's description seems to be at odds with all standard accounts of Divine Command Theory. The Standard Divine Command Theory is primarily concerned with explaining the basis of moral values, obligations, and duties. It does not merely seek to explain the basis for moral obligations and duties. To remove moral values from the explanatory scope of the Standard Divine Command Theory, is to remove a necessary feature of the theory. This modification also requires the non-theist to adopt non-standard divine command terminology. Craig refers to his position as a Non-Voluntarist Divine Command Theory, which appears to be a contradiction in terms. It is non-voluntarist in the sense that moral goodness is not grounded in the God's commands, but it is a Divine Command Theory in the sense that moral obligations and duties are grounded in God's commands. The Standard Divine Command Theory does not necessarily make this distinction. This is evidenced not only by a review of the historical

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<sup>11</sup>Harris and Craig, "The Euthyphro Dilemma Yet Again," accessed August 31, 2016, <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/the-euthyphro-dilemma-once-again>.

literature, but also by Craig's own characterization of theorists such as Ockham, which Craig attempts to avoid by grounding moral goodness in God's moral nature.<sup>12</sup>

By mischaracterization of the non-voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma demonstrates that Craig's methodology begins with unnecessary ambiguity. By mischaracterizing Divine Command Theory, Craig creates a nuanced position that is not reconcilable with the majority historical position. This creates unnecessary ambiguity for those who are familiar with the Standard Divine Command Theory. In addition to methodological clarity, Craig's Non-Voluntarist Divine Command Theory must be tested for theological strength. In other words, Craig's theory must be able to adequately answer the challenges commonly associated with the Standard Divine Command Theory.

### *Theological Strength*

Craig's Non-Voluntarist Divine Command Theory relies upon grounding moral values in God's unchanging moral nature. Furthermore, Craig holds that God's commands—which “flow necessarily from His moral nature,”—constitute humanity's moral obligations and duties.<sup>13</sup> Craig not only hopes to resolve the Euthyphro Dilemma, but also seeks to parry the Arbitrariness Objection and the Vacuity Objection. These objections are intended to show that the Christian must abandon one or more essential doctrines to Christian theism if he holds to a divine command conception of ethics. The theological strength of Craig's position will be determined by its ability to address the Arbitrariness Objection and the Vacuity Objection.

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<sup>12</sup>Kevin Harris, and William Lane Craig, hosts, “The Euthyphro Dilemma Yet Again,” Reasonable Faith Podcast (MP3 podcast), *Reasonable Faith*, January 4, 2015, accessed April 18, 2016, <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/the-euthyphro-dilemma-once-again>.

<sup>13</sup>Craig, “The Indispensability of Theological Meta-Ethical Foundations for Morality,” URL=<http://www.leaderru.com/offices/billcraig/docs/meta-eth.html>.

The most potent and frequent objection to the Standard Divine Command Theory is the Arbitrariness Objection. Of course, the Arbitrariness Objection is at the heart of the Euthyphro Dilemma as it has been historically understood. This objection ultimately seeks an explanation for objective moral values, obligations, and duties. It argues that if divine commands constitute moral values, obligations, and duties, then God must arbitrarily assign moral qualities to actions. If it were not so, there would be some logically prior reason(s) for God to command or prohibit an action. Consequently, it would be those reasons that constitute morality, not God's command. Baggett and Walls characterize the Arbitrariness Objection as the "no reasons objection," for "if God's say-so is the sole reason for the morality of an action, then there is no reason that slavery or genocide is wrong except God's command."<sup>14</sup> Craig attempts to split the horns of the Euthyphro Dilemma and avoid the Arbitrariness Objection by grounding moral value in God's unchanging nature. Craig claims:

On classical theism, God's own holy and perfectly good nature supplies the absolute standard against which all actions and decisions are measured. God's moral nature is what Plato called the 'Good.' He is the locus and source of moral value. He is by nature loving, generous, just, faithful, kind and so forth.<sup>15</sup>

Craig continues by arguing that God's commands constitute one's moral obligations and duties and that these commands "flow necessarily from his moral nature."<sup>16</sup> Craig hopes that by grounding moral value in God's necessary nature and claiming that his commands flow necessarily from this nature, that his theory can avoid arbitrariness. Assuming that Craig is correct, and God's nature is the proper basis for moral values, it does not resolve the Euthyphro Dilemma but merely redirects its aim. The dilemma can be aimed at moral obligations and

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<sup>14</sup>Baggett and Wall, *Good God*, 34.

<sup>15</sup>Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 491.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

duties, and it can be aimed at moral values as individual parts of moral philosophy as a whole. The Euthyphro Dilemma—as applied to moral obligations and duties—asks two distinct questions. Is an act morally wrong because a morally perfect God prohibits it, or does a morally perfect God prohibit the act because it is morally wrong? Craig claims that moral obligations and duties are “grounded in the divine commands.” In other words, Craig affirms that an act is morally wrong just because God prohibits it. This solution is susceptible to the Arbitrariness Objection.

Craig claims to avoid the Arbitrariness Objection by asserting that God’s commands flow necessarily from his moral nature. This might speak to the necessary goodness of the command, but it does not adequately address the Arbitrariness Objection. First, this perspective implies that one only has an obligation to refrain from evil acts when—and only when—a divine command has been issued. For example, God’s command to refrain from murder may flow necessarily from his morally perfect character, but the obligation to refrain from murder does not exist until the command to refrain from murder is made. So the command’s goodness is not arbitrary, but the command’s right-ness apparently is. Not only does this appear to be wildly unintuitive, but it also introduces the question of motivation. What reason does God have for prohibiting murder? If there is some moral quality inherent to murder that motivates God’s prohibition, it is this quality that grounds one’s obligation and duty. Craig is forced to deny this since he argues that God’s commands constitute one’s obligations and duties. Craig might claim that murder is prohibited because the act of murder does not comport with God’s perfectly moral nature. However, this views murder in moral terms that are inherent to the act. If Craig responds by saying that God prohibits murder because the act does not comport with God’s perfectly moral



nature, then it would seem that the rightness is also grounded in the something other than the command itself. This also undercuts Craig's stated position.

The Euthyphro Dilemma can also be aimed at the grounding for moral values. For example, one might ask whether being loving, generous, just, faithful, and kind are morally good because God possesses these qualities, or does God possess these qualities because they are morally good. This introduces the Vacuity Objection as applied to moral values. The Vacuity Objection asserts that if God is the ultimate standard for moral goodness, then the statement "God is good," is vacuous, or empty. Sinnott-Armstrong argues that Craig's "line of reasoning assumes that it is good to be loving, generous, just, faithful, and kind, so this argument begs the question if it is supposed to show that objective values exist."<sup>17</sup> Craig's response to this challenge begins with an Anselmian appeal to the necessity of God's existence. He claims that classical theism holds that if God exists, he exists necessarily.<sup>18</sup> For Craig, God's necessary existence ensures that his moral qualities such as love, generosity, justice, faithfulness, and kindness are necessary, thus placing God as the moral standard by which all moral value is measured. This is thought to avoid the Vacuity Objection.<sup>19</sup> However, this approach has not persuaded theists such as Wes Morriston and atheists such as Sinnott-Armstrong and Jeremy Koons, for example. Morriston claims to not see the ultimate difference between grounding these moral qualities in a concrete object such as God as opposed to abstract principles. He notes, "We

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<sup>17</sup>Sinnott-Armstrong, "Why Traditional Theism Cannot Provide an Adequate Foundation for Morality," 104. This objection is also highlighted in Koons, "Can God's Goodness Save the Divine Command Theory from Euthyphro?" 177-195; and Morriston, "Must There Be a Standard of Moral Goodness Apart from God?" 127-138.

<sup>18</sup>Craig, "This Most Gruesome Guest," 170.

<sup>19</sup>Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 491.

can still ask which stopping point is preferable. If we have to stop somewhere, why not stop with the special combination of love and justice that make up God’s moral character?”<sup>20</sup>

One of the more prominent objections raised by Sinnott-Armstrong, Morrision, and Koons is the Vacuity Objection. In response to Craig’s Non-Voluntarist Divine Command Theory, Koons notes, “Then what does it mean to say that God is good? It doesn’t mean that He is just, or loving—His goodness is prior to the goodness of these features...So the property of goodness, as it applies to God, is undifferentiated, a ‘featureless property.’”<sup>21</sup> Ultimately, Craig is forced to assert that one must posit a “metaphysical and moral ultimate, [an] explanatory stopping point.”<sup>22</sup> Since Craig conceives of God as the greatest conceivable being, then God is the most “plausible stopping point” to explain moral goodness. Craig avoids the Vacuity Objection in two distinct ways. First, Craig claims that the Vacuity Objection is an objection regarding moral semantics, whereas the issue at hand is one of moral grounding. Craig claims:

Divine Command Theory is not a semantical theory about the meaning of the English word ‘good.’ It is an ontological or metaphysical theory about the grounding of moral values, and it identifies the good with God himself...the divine command theorist semantically uses the word ‘good’ in the same way that other ethicists who speak English use the word.<sup>23</sup>

While Craig is ultimately correct regarding the emphasis of the Euthyphro Dilemma, the Vacuity Objection is a reasonable challenge to either attributing goodness to God or identifying goodness with God. Therefore, it seems appropriate that his Modified Divine Command Theory include

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<sup>20</sup>Morrision, “Must There Be a Standard of Moral Goodness Apart from God?”132.

<sup>21</sup>Koons, “Can God’s Goodness Save the Divine Command Theory from Euthyphro?” 181.

<sup>22</sup>Kevin Harris, and William Lane Craig, hosts, “The Euthyphro Dilemma Yet Again,” Reasonable Faith Podcast (MP3 podcast), *Reasonable Faith*, January 4, 2015, accessed April 18, 2016, <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/the-euthyphro-dilemma-once-again>.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

some explanation of what is meant by the phrase “God is good,” especially since the theory entails God is the ultimate standard for goodness. In light of this, Craig provides a more robust response to the Vacuity Objection in general and Koons’ argument in particular by utilizing a distinction that Koons makes in his article. Koons observes a distinction between what he calls “explanations-why” and “explanations-what.”<sup>24</sup> Koons clarifies:

Even if explanations-why come to an end, and no further reasons can be given at this point, it does not follow that at this point there can be no further explanations-what. For we should still be able to explain what something is even if we can give no further explanation for why it is the way that it is.<sup>25</sup>

Craig presses this distinction into service for his own view of God. On this view, God is the explanatory stopping point, and there is no further explanation-why for the goodness of properties such as love, mercy, justice.<sup>26</sup> Craig adds, “you can still explain to people that God is loving, kind, merciful, generous, and so forth. That would be an explanation-what, but not an explanation-why.”<sup>27</sup> Craig then shifts his argument and proposes theism as the best explanation for objective moral obligations and duties. He claims that God is “a very plausible stopping point for these why-explanations,” but Morrision claims that it could just as easily be Platonic forms.<sup>28</sup> Craig argues that grounding moral values and duties in abstract Platonic forms seem implausible for three reasons. First, Craig makes an appeal to ignorance. He claims, “It is difficult, however, to comprehend this view. What does it mean to say, for example, that the moral value *Justice* just

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<sup>24</sup>Koons, “Can God’s Goodness Save the Divine Command Theory from Euthyphro?” 191.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Kevin Harris, and William Lane Craig, hosts, “The Euthyphro Dilemma Yet Again,” Reasonable Faith Podcast (MP3 podcast), *Reasonable Faith*, January 4, 2015, accessed May 27, 2016, <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/the-euthyphro-dilemma-once-again>.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

exists?”<sup>29</sup> This does not seem to be a convincing reason to reject what Craig calls “Atheistic Moral Platonism.” After all, that a concept is difficult does not make it false. Second, Craig challenges the notion that a blind evolutionary process would have produced moral values and duties that correspond to these previously existing abstract forms.<sup>30</sup> This response seems to assume that if one were to affirm the existence of Platonic forms, one is necessary committed to Atheism and Darwinism. Third, and most persuasive, Craig mentions that it is difficult to conceive of moral values and duties existing without people. Craig intuitively feels that a person is just and a person can act justly only within the context of a relationship or society. Just as moral values are person dependent, it would appear consistent to view moral obligations and duties as person dependent as well. While Craig appears to avoid the Vacuity Objection by grounding moral values in the divine nature, he is not able to avoid the Arbitrariness Objection as applied to moral obligations and duties precisely because he grounds them in divine commands.

### *Explanatory Scope*

Presumably, Craig’s response to the Euthyphro Dilemma is meant—at least in part—to persuade the non-theist to abandon naturalistic attempts to ground moral values. Furthermore, Craig’s Non-voluntarist Divine Command Theory states that “God’s moral nature is expressed to us in the form of divine commands, which constitute our moral duties and obligations.”<sup>31</sup> Craig’s theory—like Adams’—is inextricably tied to his theory of moral values. In other words, one must remember that it is not God’s commands that ultimately ground moral obligations and duties, but *a good* God’s commands that ultimately ground moral obligations and duties. Also,

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<sup>29</sup>Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 178.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>31</sup>Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for A Christian Worldview*, 491.

Craig explicitly states that God's commands *constitute* our moral duties and obligations. As previously noted, *constitute* indicates that God's command are right-making, rather than right-indicating. Once again, Sinnott-Armstrong elaborates on the general philosophical meaning of *constitute*:

As philosophers normally use this term, it signals a very strong relation. If a divine command constitutes our moral duty not to rape, for example, then what makes it morally wrong to rape is just that God commanded us not to rape. Moreover, whenever God commands us to do (or not to do) any act, we have a moral duty to do (or not to do) that act.<sup>32</sup>

Adams and Craig would require that this definition be modified to include the essentially good nature of God. Consequently, this modification would exclude the possibility of the hypothetical example offered by Sinnott-Armstrong, but it does not change the definition of *constitute*. Third, Craig implies that God's commands constitute all of one's moral obligations and duties. Craig makes this point explicitly by elaborating on his account of moral obligations and duties:

A is required of S *if and only if* a just and loving God commands S to do A.  
A is permitted for S *if and only if* a just and loving God does not command S to not do A.  
A is forbidden to S *if and only if* a just and loving God commands S not to do A.<sup>33</sup>

With these three considerations in mind, one can begin to assess the apologetic effectiveness of Craig's Non-Voluntarist Divine Command Theory. Craig's theory partially addresses the Arbitrariness and Vacuity Objections by appealing to God as the explanatory ultimate for moral values, but his theory of moral obligations and duties it is still susceptible to other serious objections.

If it is assumed that God's commands constitute one's moral obligations and duties, it stands to reason that one must have some epistemic access to the divine command before the

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<sup>32</sup>Sinnott-Armstrong, "Why Traditional Theism Cannot Provide an Adequate Foundation for Morality," 106.

<sup>33</sup>Craig, "This Most Gruesome of Guests," 172. Emphasis added.

obligation is considered binding. The Epistemic Objection asserts that even if moral obligations and duties are grounded in divine commands, it does not necessarily mean that one can know whether or not God has commanded or prohibited a particular action. The Epistemic Objection assumes that as a mature moral agent, one can discover moral truth through means other than divine commands. Craig agrees that there are mechanisms by which one can discover the good and the right. He notes, “I, too, can affirm...that human beings have a capacity called conscience, which enables them to discover for themselves what is right and wrong.”<sup>34</sup>

Surprisingly, this appears to be a tacit admission that the rightness/wrongness of the act is based in something other than the divine command. Craig’s rejoinder is that this is an epistemological challenge, whereas the Euthyphro Dilemma is a metaethical challenge. He claims, “My argument is that theism is necessary for there to be moral goods and duties, not that it is necessary for us to discern the moral goods and duties that there are.”<sup>35</sup> In this response, Craig seems to be not taking into consideration the epistemic implications of his position. Modified Divine Command Theory states that God’s commands constitute one’s moral obligations and duties. However, commands naturally entail a speaker/hearer relationship. Therefore, Craig’s theory naturally entails some aspect of moral epistemology. Interestingly, Craig admits that one can know moral truths without a specific divine command. Craig supports this position by appealing to passages such as Romans 2:14-15, which claims that the moral law is written on the hearts of mankind. In other words, in the absence of a divine command, one can make moral decisions and be held accountable.<sup>36</sup> Once again, this position is inconsistent with the idea that an act is required/forbidden/permitted *if and only if* a loving God commands it.

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<sup>34</sup>Craig, “This Most Gruesome of Guests,” 172.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

Related to the Epistemic Objection is the Moral Authority Objection. The Moral Authority Objection asks, “Why must one obey God’s commands?” If one were to assume that one had Epistemic Access to a divine command, one might still ask what makes the command authoritative. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong claims that there are three standard theistic answers to this question: “We owe God gratitude for creating us...God will punish us...God the father knows best.”<sup>37</sup> Sinnott-Armstrong and Antony deny that these reasons generate moral authority, or warrant obedience.<sup>38</sup> On their view, the mere fact that God created humanity, will punish humanity, or knows more than humanity may provide some motivation to obey God’s commands, but this implies that one would obey God for prudential reasons rather than for the fact that the act in question is good or right. While Craig does not respond directly to these objections made by Sinnott-Armstrong and Antony, his view implies that God’s commands should be obeyed because he is “essentially compassionate, fair, kind, impartial, and so forth.”<sup>39</sup> His response relies upon his view that God is the Good. Again Craig could reply that the challenge regarding moral motivation is one that is altogether foreign to the Euthyphro Dilemma. Furthermore, it is not entirely clear how these truths about God’s power, moral knowledge, and goodness do not adequately generate moral authority. Nevertheless, Craig’s response must appeal to God himself and not his divine commands. This appears to weaken his Non-Voluntarist Divine Command Theory, since the moral authority must be grounded in something other than the divine command itself.

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<sup>36</sup> Craig, “This Most Gruesome of Guests,” 168.

<sup>37</sup>Sinnott-Armstrong, “Why Traditional Theism Cannot Provide an Adequate Foundation for Morality,” 108.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 182.

An important feature of any moral philosophy is one's ability to make moral decisions with the proper moral motivation. The Moral Autonomy Objection asserts that voluntarism removes one's moral autonomy. Baggett and Walls, for example, claim that "Rather than carefully thinking through issues on their own, voluntarists simply consult the relevant command or allegedly sacred text to find their marching orders."<sup>40</sup> As noted earlier, Craig's theory suggests that God's commands constitute one's moral obligations and duties. In other words, one is obliged to love one's neighbor, not because one can reason to the intrinsic moral value of loving one's neighbor, but simply because God commanded it. Sinnott-Armstrong objects to Craig's theory by comparing it to childish, or immature moral behavior. Sinnott-Armstrong claims:

Divine Command Theory makes morality childish. Compare a small boy who thinks that what makes it morally wrong for him to hit his little sister is only that his parents told him not to hit her and will punish him if he hits her. As a result, this little boy thinks that, if his parents leave home or die, then there is nothing wrong with hitting his little sister. Maybe some little boys think this way, but surely we adults do not think that morality is anything like this.<sup>41</sup>

Sinnott-Armstrong and others argue that obedience for obedience sake simply reduces morality to an "infantile" or "childish" moral philosophy.<sup>42</sup> Craig responds to this objection by dismissing it as an *ad hominem* or *consensus gentium* fallacy.<sup>43</sup> While there may be an element of this in the initial presentation, the observation still has some force. Even though Craig is inconsistent on

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<sup>40</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 35.

<sup>41</sup>Sinnott-Armstrong, "Why Traditional Theism Cannot Provide an Adequate Foundation for Morality," 109.

<sup>42</sup>For an example of this argument see Patrick Nowell-Smith, "Morality: Religious and Secular," in *Readings in the Philosophy of Religion: An Analytic Approach* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974).

<sup>43</sup>Craig, "This Most Gruesome of Guests," 185 n9.



this point, he argues that the mature Christian is able to make moral decision in the absence of a clear command from God.

The final and perhaps most popular objection to the Modified Divine Command Theory is known as the Abhorrent Command Objection. Even Craig's Non-Voluntarist Divine Command Theory is not immune to this objection. If God has moral authority for any of the reasons mentioned above, and one is obliged to obey his commands for these reasons, how does one reconcile God's essential goodness with what appear to be abhorrent commands? Examples often cited include, but are not limited to, the flood account in Genesis 6-9, God's request that Abraham sacrifice his son Isaac in Genesis 22, and the Canaanite genocide of Deuteronomy 7 and 20.<sup>44</sup>

Craig recognizes that "these stories offend our moral sensibilities," and that "the command to kill the Canaanite peoples is jarring precisely because it seems so at odds with the portrait of Yahweh, Israel's God, which is painted in the Hebrew Scriptures."<sup>45</sup> Craig responds to this objection in two ways. First, Craig argues that the "counterfactual antecedent," is an impossibility on his view. In other words, because God is essentially good—assuming this is not a vacuous statement—it excludes the possibility of him commanding anything evil. Furthermore, Craig argues that since God is holy and loving, not only is it impossible for God to command anything evil, it is impossible for God to have moral duties and obligations. Craig notes:

According to the version of divine command ethics which I've defended, our moral duties are constituted by the commands of a holy and loving God. Since God doesn't

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<sup>44</sup>For examples see, David T. Lamb, *God Behaving Badly: Is the God of the Old Testament Angry, Sexist and Racist?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2011); Christopher Wright, *The God I Don't Understand: Reflections on Tough Questions of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008); and Eric Seibert, *Disturbing Divine Behavior* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009).

<sup>45</sup>William Lane Craig, "Slaughter of the Canaanites," *Reasonable Faith*, August 6, 2007, accessed May 6, 2016, <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/slaughter-of-the-canaanites>.

issue commands to Himself, He has no moral duties to fulfill. He is certainly not subject to the same moral obligations and prohibitions that we are.<sup>46</sup>

Second, Craig argues that this objection is the result of an “exegetically naïve interpretation of biblical passages with no attempt whatsoever to understand [the examples given] in their theocratic and historical context.”<sup>47</sup> It is Craig’s hope that a proper exegesis of these passages will demonstrate that God had “morally sufficient reasons for His judgment.”<sup>48</sup> However, by Craig’s own admission, not only does God not have moral obligations and prohibitions, he does not need *morally* sufficient reasons for his commands. What is more, if there are morally sufficient reasons for one’s moral obligations and duties, those reasons—not God’s commands—would be the basis for one’s moral obligations and duties.

Ultimately, Craig’s Non-Voluntarist Divine Command Theory is weak for three distinct reasons. First, Craig’s overall methodology creates unnecessary ambiguity by using divine command terminology in a non-standard way. Second, his theory attempts to avoid the Arbitrariness Objection by grounding moral value in God’s moral nature, while claiming that moral obligations are grounded in divine commands which are necessary expressions of his nature. Yet, this element of his theory is not able to avoid arbitrariness, and strangely resembles the voluntarism that Craig seeks to avoid. Finally, Craig fails to adequately respond to the Epistemic Objection, Moral Authority Objection, Moral Autonomy Objection, and Abhorrent Command Objection. While it is true that the Euthyphro Dilemma does not directly address

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<sup>46</sup>Craig, “Slaughter of the Canaanites,” <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/slaughter-of-the-canaanites>.

<sup>47</sup>Craig, “This Most Gruesome of Guests,” 186 n9.

<sup>48</sup>Craig, “Slaughter of the Canaanites,” URL=<http://www.reasonablefaith.org/slaughter-of-the-canaanites>.

many of these areas, this should not preclude an adequate answer for other salient features of morality such as moral epistemology, moral authority, and moral autonomy.

#### David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls' More Defensible Divine Command Theory

Baggett and Walls' contribution to divine command ethics represents the most thorough and thoughtful work by evangelicals to date. Unsatisfied with both historical and contemporary attempts to respond to the Euthyphro Dilemma, Baggett and Walls argue that the Christian theist is at a clear crossroads. "If the moral argument for God's existence is to hold water," Baggett and Walls observe, "the Euthyphro Dilemma and the handful of objections it raises against theistic ethics must be answered, either by abandoning voluntarism altogether or by offering a more defensible version of Divine Command Theory."<sup>49</sup> Of course, Baggett and Walls argue that a more defensible version of Divine Command Theory is able to save the moral argument for God's existence.

Clearly, Baggett and Walls understand that one's moral philosophy determines the success or failure of the moral argument for God's existence. Unlike Craig's deductive argument for God's existence, Baggett and Walls reason to God's existence using abduction, or inference to the best explanation.<sup>50</sup> In other words, they do not rely upon premises that ensure a necessary and particular conclusion. Rather, they propose that theism is the best explanation of certain "salient [moral] facts."<sup>51</sup> Baggett and Walls claim that their more defensible Divine Command Theory is able to withstand the various challenges associated with the Standard Divine

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<sup>49</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 37.

<sup>50</sup>Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, 15.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

Command Theory. The following will show that their theory is only able to do so when it resembles a Non-Voluntarist Theory.

### *Methodological Clarity*

The strengths and weaknesses of Baggett and Walls' method for answering the Euthyphro Dilemma are best understood within the context of their moral argument for God's existence. Unlike Craig, Baggett and Walls use an abductive moral argument. While Craig's deductive moral argument guarantees the conclusion that God exists, Baggett and Walls' abductive argument makes a more modest claim.

While the method they utilize in providing a more defensible version of Divine Command Theory is sufficiently clear, they often use divine command terminology in a non-standard way and misconstrue the non-voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma, as historically understood. Their method begins by making a firm distinction between moral goodness and moral rightness.<sup>52</sup> They clarify this position by adding, "Our axiological theory (moral goodness) is distinctly non-voluntarist, but our deontic theory (of moral obligation) is not...we will defend a version of Divine Command Theory—not of moral goodness (axiology), but of moral rightness (deontic matters)—in our continuing effort to bolster the moral argument."<sup>53</sup> This strategic move is consistent with Quinn, Adams, and Craig's.

In addition, Baggett and Walls' Divine Command Theory of moral obligations argues that God freely issues commands that are consistent with his moral nature, and by virtue of his moral authority, create obligations. Unlike Craig, Baggett and Walls do not view God's

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<sup>52</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 249, n3. Baggett and Walls note that Alston's "Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists," was the motivation for this a more "limited application of Divine Command Theory to moral obligations."

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 104-105.

commands as necessary commands, but rather, in some cases “optional.”<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, Baggett and Walls argue that moral truths, of the normative type, are obligatory because they are issued by a moral authority. Morality authority, by Baggett and Walls’ account, “is a matter of power, knowledge, and character.”<sup>55</sup> It is important to note two significant issues at this point in their methodology. First, Baggett and Walls’ claim that God’s commands are not necessary. This exposes their view to the Arbitrariness Objection. Second, by arguing that moral obligations and duties are ultimately grounded in God’s moral authority, Baggett and Walls implicitly affirm a non-voluntarist basis for moral obligations and duties.

Baggett and Walls’ approach is offered as an alternate apologetic for God’s existence from morality, and a more defensible version of Divine Command Theory. In some instances, their method is an improvement on Craig’s. For example, Baggett and Walls’ strategy in arguing from abduction allows the Christian theist make a more modest claim than Craig’s. Although Craig’s deductive argument may be sound, Baggett and Walls simply argue that God’s existence is the best explanation for moral facts. Presumably, the non-theists is more likely concede this point. Craig’s deductive moral argument for God’s existence requires the non-theist to essentially affirm that if God did not exist, objective moral values and duties would not exist. This position causes non-theists such as Paul Kurtz to immediately cry foul by noting that “Millions of people do not believe in a personal God...but they do believe very deeply in morality.”<sup>56</sup> To be fair, Craig’s first premise is not that belief in God is required to for existence

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<sup>54</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 120. Baggett and Walls give the example of God’s command to give 10 percent of ones’ income to the poor, and suggest that God could have just as easily been 11 percent. They argue that both would have been consistent with God’s nature, and so nothing is lost by claiming that the command to give 10 percent is not a necessary moral truth.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 123.

of objective moral values and duties, rather that God's existence is required. Nevertheless, Kurtz response is indicative of the need for a more strategic method.

Baggett and Walls' approach is more strategic in that it requires the non-theist to recognize certain moral facts about reality, and then argues that God is the best explanation for those facts. They believe that abductive reasoning "better explains the facts of morality"<sup>57</sup> and is to be preferred over saying "that naturalism can say nothing of morality."<sup>58</sup> Baggett and Walls intentionally recognize the "beauty" of Craig's deductive argument, but ultimately believe that this approach "dismisses secular ethical theories too quickly."<sup>59</sup> Obviously, this is certainly more inviting than the alternative, not matter how valid and sound the deductive argument might be.

While Baggett and Walls suggest a more strategic moral argument, there are some significant methodological weaknesses that remain. It is clear that Baggett and Walls understand that to affirm the voluntarist horn of the dilemma is to hold that moral value is grounded in God's commands. They claim, "The first horn of the dilemma [voluntarist] suggests that God's commands determine the nature of goodness, and God's prohibitions determine what is bad."<sup>60</sup> However, this interpretation is too narrow. The voluntarist horn of the dilemma is meant to include both moral values and moral obligations and duties.

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<sup>56</sup>Paul Kurtz, "The Kurtz/Craig Debate: Is Goodness without God Good Enough?" in *Is Goodness without God Good Enough? A Debate on Faith, Secularism, and Ethics*, ed. Robert K. Garcia and Nathan L. King (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), 25.

<sup>57</sup>Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, 67.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 78.

<sup>60</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 33.

On the other hand, Baggett and Walls believe that for one to affirm the non-voluntarist horn of the dilemma commits one to grounding moral values in something independent of God. They note, “The second horn of the dilemma suggests that God’s commands are what they are by virtue of God’s choosing to command what is already good.”<sup>61</sup> Consequently, Baggett and Walls frame the dilemma in such a way that one must either embrace voluntarism, or affirm some standard of moral goodness independent of God. Once again, this appears to be a misinterpretation of the non-voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma. By Baggett and Walls’ own account, the Christian theist is left either to face the various objections associated with voluntarism, or affirm that “morality is independent of God and a standard to which God himself is accountable.”<sup>62</sup> This can also be seen in the fact that they refer to Antony’s divine independence theory and Levin’s Guided Will Theory as examples of the non-voluntarist horn.<sup>63</sup>

Baggett and Walls’ first methodological weakness lies in a misinterpretation of the voluntarist and non-voluntarist horn. It has been demonstrated that voluntarism is an attempt to base both moral value and moral obligations and duties in the commands of God. If voluntarism is just that morality is determined by God’s commands, then non-voluntarism is *not* the view that morality is determined by something other than God, but rather the view that morality is determined by something other than God’s *commands*. Baggett and Walls hint at this solution for moral value, when they claim that “there is another option beyond an Ockhamistic voluntarist account of the Good and a divine independence theory. Goodness can ultimately depend on God even if it does not depend on God’s commands.”<sup>64</sup> This interpretation and application are

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<sup>61</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 33.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 45-46.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 38-39.

exactly right. However, they do not seem to acknowledge that the same could also apply to moral obligations.

Baggett and Walls' first methodological weakness gives rise to their second. Their theory trades on a commitment to the segregation of moral values and moral obligations. Indeed, it is this sharp distinction that presumably allows the Christian theist to split the horns of the dilemma. Baggett and Walls' view is that "God's commands or will...best enable us to determine which actions among those that are good are also morally obligatory. God's commands determine what's morally obligatory, but not what's morally good. So our view will embrace a non-voluntarist account of the good and a voluntarist account of the right."<sup>65</sup> As an example, Baggett and Walls argue that one might "give half of one's income to charity," and thus perform a good act, but they were certainly not obligated to act in this way.<sup>66</sup> This is meant to emphasize the fact that moral values do not necessarily create moral obligations and duties. This distinction is then leveraged to bolster their Divine Command Theory. However, once their voluntarist account of the right is pressed for some basis, Baggett and Walls ultimately appeal to some divine superlative, not the mere command of God.<sup>67</sup>

### *Theological Strength*

Following Adams and Craig, Baggett and Walls' Divine Command Theory relies on grounding moral value in God by claiming that God is good; perfectly good; and the Good

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<sup>64</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 84.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 47.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 105.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 123. Baggett and Walls make the argument that God's commands generate moral obligations, but his moral authority is the basis for why one ought to obey God's commands at all. They support God's moral authority by appealing to God's power, knowledge, character, and freedom. In other words, Baggett and Walls' ultimate basis for moral obligations is God himself, not his commands.



itself.<sup>68</sup> This is taken to mean that God not only acts in a morally good way, but when he acts he acts perfectly. What is more, God himself is the Good. Consequently, Baggett and Walls claim to avoid not only the Arbitrariness Objection with this response, but the Vacuity Objection as well. The following will assess their theories theological strength by evaluating who it withstands these two objections.

As with Craig's Non-Voluntarist Divine Command Theory, Baggett and Walls' more defensible version of Divine Command Theory must be examined for any theological weaknesses that might prevent the Christian theist from adopting their proposed solution to the Euthyphro Dilemma. Since their approach to Divine Command Theory requires that one makes an immediate distinction between the basis for moral value and the basis for moral obligations and duties, one must assess their theories to navigate theological objections. In the early chapters of *Good God*, Baggett and Walls' begin by establishing an Anselmian view of God, which is similar to Adams and Craig's approach. The Anselmian view of God is one that Baggett and Walls call the view of the philosophers. This approach emphasizes *a priori* reasoning to discover truths about God. They contrast this with the Christian view—or better put—biblical view of God that is *a posteriori* in its discovery of truths about God. The former relies on reason and rationality, while the latter relies on divine revelation.<sup>69</sup>

To their credit, Baggett and Walls make it clear that these two approaches are not mutually exclusive, and that only a “narrowly Anselmian conception of God” excludes a biblical conception of God.<sup>70</sup> However, it's not the points of congruence that give one pause for thought,

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<sup>68</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 180.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 50-54.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 54.

but rather the points of contention. Therefore, Baggett and Walls theological conception of God will be assessed on two particular points of tension between an Anselmian view of God and a biblical view of God. The first will be the theological tension created by the Arbitrariness Objection as applied to moral goodness and moral rightness, and the second will be the theological tension created by Vacuity Objection as applied to moral goodness and moral rightness.

Baggett and Walls provide a robust account of God's relationship to various connotations of the word "good." They admit that an Anselmian conception of God affirms that God is "maximally perfect in every way, including morally."<sup>71</sup> In their estimation, God's goodness can refer to God being morally good, perfectly good, recognizably good, and necessarily good.<sup>72</sup> Their ultimate position is reflective of Adams' account, in that they ground moral goodness in "God's own loving and relational character."<sup>73</sup> Consequently, any finite good is merely an intimation of the infinite good (i.e., God). Again, it is thought that this strategic shift in grounding moral goodness in the character of God has the added benefit of avoiding the Arbitrariness Objection and the Vacuity Objection.

The Arbitrariness Objection recognizes that if moral goodness is determined by no other reason than God's commands, then moral goodness is arbitrary. If there were other reasons for the moral goodness of an action, then the moral goodness of that action would be grounded in those reasons and not God's commands. Baggett and Walls argue that moral goodness is not determined by God's commands, but determined by God's character. God's character is not

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<sup>71</sup>Baggett and Walls, 51.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 84.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 126.

arbitrary but necessary. Baggett and Walls remind the reader that they are in agreement with Adams and Craig when they affirm “that all of God’s commands are deeply resonant with his Character, and that a Divine Command Theory must be built on the foundation of God’s loving nature.”<sup>74</sup> Baggett and Walls basis for moral values remains unscathed by the Arbitrariness Objection. However, their basis for moral obligations and duties does not.

It is important, for the moment, to remember that on Baggett and Walls’ account, the morality of an action is ultimately grounded in the goodness of God. In other words, God’s commands are obligatory because they are good, and they are good because they are ultimately reflective of God’s moral character.<sup>75</sup> And yet, both insist that their deontological theory is distinctively voluntarist. This is not a standard understanding of Divine Command Theory. Nevertheless, the Arbitrariness Objection seems to still apply to this conception of moral rightness since both Baggett and Walls hold that not all of God’s commands are necessary. They admit that “if an Anselmian God is free in the libertarian sense and sovereign in the classically Arminian sense, there’s excellent reason to think that some of his commands are optional or could have been different.”<sup>76</sup> It appears that one is left to either affirm that moral rightness is ultimately grounded in God’s character, and thereby avoiding the Arbitrariness Objection, or affirm that that moral rightness is ultimately grounded in God’s command, and thereby be subject to the Arbitrariness Objection. It seems that Baggett and Walls are suggesting that one conceive of a Divine Command Theory of moral rightness, where the rightness of the action is *not* grounded in the command of God. Since Baggett and Walls seek to “defend...voluntarism on

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<sup>74</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 126.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 120.

deontic matters, especially moral obligations,”<sup>77</sup> it seems that their position is subject to the Arbitrariness Objection. Baggett and Walls would no doubt respond that God’s commands are not arbitrary in that they are consistent with and grounded in his nature. Their response, however, would not be consistent with a voluntarist account of moral obligations and duties. The Anselmian corrective does not save Baggett and Walls’ deontological voluntarism from the Arbitrariness Objection. It may ensure that God’s commands are necessarily consistent with his divine nature, but it does not ensure their necessary moral truth. For example, Baggett and Walls argue that “God has latitude, and on occasion chooses from various alternatives.”<sup>78</sup> They note that God could have commanded an eleven percent tithe instead of a ten percent tithe. While both commands may be necessarily consistent with God’s divine nature, the commands’ obligatory-ness is not necessary. The Arbitrariness Objection asks for reasons why God chooses to command a ten percent tithe instead of an eleven percent tithe. If God commands a ten percent tithe for some particular reason, that reason becomes the basis for tithing’s moral qualities rather than God’s will being the basis.

When applied to Baggett and Walls’ Divine Command Theory, the Vacuity Objection claims that if God is the ultimate Good, then the claim “God is good,” is tautological and vacuous. Baggett and Walls walk toward this objection and explicitly embrace the idea that the goodness of God is “true both as a predication and identity.”<sup>79</sup> Baggett and Walls argue, that one “learns [the] concept of goodness from the bottom up,” while goodness “ontologically functions top down.”<sup>80</sup> In other words, when one speaks of the good as a predication of God, one is merely

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<sup>77</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 47.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, 126.

referring to the epistemic process of learning the concept of goodness. However, when one speaks of God being identical with the Good, one is referring to an ontological conception. So, Baggett and Walls respond to the Vacuity Objection to moral goodness by claiming that the objection makes a category error by confusing ontology with epistemology. The Vacuity Objection can also be applied to Baggett and Walls' voluntarist theory of moral rightness. Baggett and Walls' theory of moral rightness is forced to affirm that moral obligations do not exist unless God issues a command. If an action's moral rightness is determined by God's commands, then what is one to make of God's moral rightness? It seems to imply that the claim "God is morally right," simply means God is commanded by God.

If one were to adopt Baggett and Walls' more defensible Divine Command Theory, one would have to affirm that at least in some cases God's commands are arbitrary. Furthermore, adopting this conception of Divine Command Theory is to affirm that God's righteousness is reduced to tautology and is ultimately vacuous. These objections only have strength if one is committed to forcing a distinction between the good and the right as applied to the Euthyphro Dilemma and then affirming that moral goodness is grounded in God's character, and moral rightness is grounded in God's commands.

### *Explanatory Scope*

The overall apologetic effectiveness of Baggett and Walls' Divine Command Theory is determined by an assessment that takes into account their methodological clarity, theological strength, and their ability to respond to selected objections. It is not enough that a theistic ethical theory be true; it must also be persuasive. It is obvious that Baggett and Walls take the apologetic enterprise seriously and the Gospel even more so. Nevertheless, while Baggett and Walls'

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<sup>80</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 129.

approach has many strengths that serve to advance the Modified Divine Command Theory, their overall apologetic effectiveness and strategy could be further strengthened.

Throughout their work, Baggett and Walls are sensitive to and cognizant of the connection between their Divine Command Theory and their abductive moral argument for God's existence. Their use of abduction is perhaps the first strategic strength in their approach. As noted earlier, the abductive moral argument for God's existence is different from the deductive argument for God's existence in that it appeals to God as the best explanation for salient moral facts. It is not that Baggett and Walls deny the soundness of the deductive moral argument, only that it tends to strong-arm the opposition. Baggett and Walls' approach is more inviting and appeals to the common ground that they share with the opposition.

Apart from being a different approach to the moral argument for God's existence, Baggett and Walls also make much of the distinction between moral value and moral obligations. They argue that their theory of moral value is non-voluntarist. In other words, moral value is not determined by God's commands. On the other hand, their theory of moral obligation is distinctively voluntarist. In other words, moral obligations and duties are determined by God's commands. This distinction is proposed as the preferred path for those who wish to resolve the Euthyphro Dilemma and yet remain divine command theorists. In one sense, this distinction appears to save Baggett and Walls from many of the objection associated with a Divine Command Theory of moral goodness. Unfortunately, this distinction makes it difficult to understand whether or not Baggett and Walls actually ground moral rightness in the commands of God, or in the character of God.

If they mean that an act's moral rightness is determined by its being consistent with the morally perfect nature of God and that this consistency is the reason that God command the

action, then their theory of moral obligation is not voluntarist at all. If this is the case, then perhaps divine commands are not the best explanation for moral rightness. On the other hand, if they mean that an act's moral rightness is determined solely by God's command, then their theory is voluntarist, but also subject to the Arbitrariness and Vacuity Objections.

At various points in their version of Divine Command Theory, Baggett and Walls appeal to the ontological/epistemological distinction. This distinction highlights the difference between the order of being and the order of knowing. They argue that the source of one's knowledge of certain truths does not necessarily act as the "ultimate ground or explanation for why" it is true.<sup>81</sup> For example, Baggett and Walls leverage this distinction in order to propose a solution to the Vacuity Objection. One might learn that goodness is a predication of God through experience, but this does not necessarily explain or challenge the claim that God is identified as the Good. While this distinction performs some "heavy lifting" for Baggett and Walls in explaining moral value, it is unclear why it cannot also be employed when explaining moral obligations and duties as well. The most natural application of this distinction to a theory of moral obligations would be that one might come to know some moral obligations through God's commands, but this does not necessarily mean that God's commands act as the ultimate ground or explanation for moral obligations. Baggett and Walls hint at moving in this direction, and this would be an appropriate strategy, but it would ultimately be inconsistent with Divine Command Theory. It is important to keep in mind that Divine Command Theory has traditionally been understood to answer the ontological question, not the epistemological question, and the Euthyphro Dilemma asks what makes an act good/right, not how we know an act is good/right. Therefore, if one is to be a divine command theorist, then one cannot employ this distinction in this way.

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<sup>81</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 160.

The confusion and ambiguity caused by Baggett and Walls' explanation for the basis of moral obligations create a distinct dilemma. First, to ground moral obligations in the morally perfect character of God is to propose a solution that is fundamentally different from Divine Command Theory. At various points, Baggett and Walls insist that the rightness of God's commands is backed by God's morally perfect nature, which indicates that the ultimate grounding for moral rightness is something other than God's commands. Yet, they also claim that their theory of moral rightness is distinctively voluntarist. Second, if one were to ground moral obligations in God's commands (voluntarism), one would fall prey to various objections.

An example of Baggett and Walls' implicit struggle between voluntarism and non-voluntarism helps illustrate the point. In an attempt to avoid a series of objections (the Arbitrariness Objection, the Abhorrent Command Objection, and the Vacuity Objection) Baggett and Walls claim that God's commands, while not necessary, reflect his power, knowledge and goodness, thereby eliminating the possibility of God issuing morally repugnant or abhorrent commands.<sup>82</sup> This approach seems appealing at first glance, but it is not consistent with the divine command conception of the right. Quite the opposite, it is more consistent with a non-voluntarist conception of the right, since moral rightness of an act is grounded in God's superlative nature.

Even though it is a step in the right direction for an evangelical approach to addressing the Euthyphro Dilemma, Baggett and Walls' apologetic effectiveness could be strengthened. Ironically, the element that would most notably strengthen their theory would be to abandon Divine Command Theory altogether. Doing so would require a minimal adjustment to their theory, since they appear to ultimately ground moral obligations in the character of God rather

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<sup>82</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 126-142.



than the actual commands of God. This adjustment would also dovetail quite nicely with their overall apologetic strategy, since using divine command language so often conjures up the Ockhamist formulation they so desperately seek to avoid. While Baggett and Walls' theistic ethic represents the most thorough evangelical treatment of the relationship between God and morality, their approach is gaining influence among other evangelical theologians, philosophers, and ethicists. Copan and Flannagan represent the most current attempt to propose a Divine Command Theory of moral obligations.

#### Paul Copan and Matthew Flannagan's Divine Command Theory of Obligation

Copan and Flannagan's work in theistic ethics is another prominent evangelical example of the Modified Divine Command Theory. While their approach is similar to Craig's Non-Voluntarist Divine Command Theory, there has been a noticeable shift in Copan's emphasis over the last decade. What is most interesting about Copan's perspective, is the noticeable impact that Craig's work has had on his own position. In some of his early work, Copan's approach for grounding morality begins by appealing to personhood. He claims, "I would argue that a *personal* Creator, who made human *persons* in his image, serves as the ontological basis for the existence of objective moral values, moral obligations, human dignity and rights."<sup>83</sup> Subsequent to Craig, Baggett, and Walls' contribution to the topic, Copan has amended his position to affirm that moral value is grounded in the character of God, and moral obligations and duties are grounded in the commands of God.

Similar to the previous two divine command theories, Copan and Flannagan's Divine Command Theory must be evaluated for its methodological clarity, theological strength, and apologetic effectiveness. Their research brings to light additional interaction with Craig's Divine

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<sup>83</sup>Paul Copan, "The Moral Argument," in *The Rationality of Theism*, eds. Paul Copan and Paul K. Moser (New York: Routledge, 2003), 159.

Command Theory from opposing views. Since their approach so closely mirrors Craig, Baggett, and Walls', additional emphasis will be given to Copan and Flannagan's response to the Abhorrent Command Objection in particular.

### *Methodological Clarity*

Copan's early method begins with three primary assertions. First, he not only affirms the existence of objective moral values, but he also affirms their proper basicity. Second, he argues that a non-theistic worldview is incapable of properly grounding these objective moral values, and that theism is capable of grounding them since humans bear God's image and "thus reflect certain divine properties."<sup>84</sup> Finally, he argues that the Euthyphro Dilemma in no way undermines God's relationship to objective moral values and duties.<sup>85</sup> Copan's initial approach is not unlike previous methods. He begins with a deductive moral argument for God's existence which takes the form of *modus ponens*. His argument is as follows:

1. If objective moral values exist, then God exists.
2. Objective moral values do exist.
3. Therefore, God exists.<sup>86</sup>

As with any deductive argument, the soundness of the argument depends on the truth of its premises. While it is important to demonstrate that naturalism is incapable of grounding objective moral values, primary emphasis will be given to assessing Copan's explanation for a theistic basis of objective moral values.

Copan begins by asserting that objective moral values are properly basic. By properly basic, Copan means that truths are not a "product of culture, individual preference, or socio-

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<sup>84</sup>Copan, "The Moral Argument," 149.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

biological evolution.”<sup>87</sup> In addition, Copan claims that some moral beliefs are properly basic as well, and that “in the absence of any decent defeaters for holding them there is just no good reason to reject them.”<sup>88</sup> One’s belief in objective moral truths—while obviously important—is not the primary focus of the moral argument for God’s existence or the Euthyphro Dilemma. In other words, if one does not affirm the existence of objective moral values, obligations, and duties, the Euthyphro Dilemma loses its force altogether.

Copan quickly turns to providing a proper basis for the existence of objective moral values. Copan argues that the basis for objective moral values is personhood. He claims, “The reason human persons exist is because a personal God exists, in whose image we have been made. The instantiation of moral properties is internally related to (or bound up with) personhood, and if no persons existed, then no moral properties would be instantiated.”<sup>89</sup> Unfortunately, when faced with Euthyphro-like challenges, Copan begins to emphasize naturalism’s inability to properly ground objective moral values rather than providing a robust explanation for various aspects of morality. When faced with the challenge to explain whether God’s characteristics are good because God possesses them, or whether God possesses them because they are good, Copan either shifts the burden to naturalism or provides an explanation that remains subject to further challenges. As an example of the former, one of Copan’s responses to this challenge is “that if the naturalist is correct, then she herself cannot escape a similar dilemma; her argument offers her no actual advantage.”<sup>90</sup> However, it seems as if Copan

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<sup>87</sup>Copan, “The Moral Argument,” 150.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 151.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 157.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 166.

is claiming that the naturalist's inability to respond to a Euthyphro-like dilemma is a positive case for theism. As an example of the latter, Copan appeals to the essentially perfect nature of God claiming that "God simply acts, and it is good as he naturally does what is good."<sup>91</sup> Yet, this response is subject to the Vacuity Objection and does not provide a clear basis for the good.

Copan's recent work with Flannagan represents an explicit shift towards Craig's Non-Voluntarist Divine Command Theory. They describe their method as a Divine Command Theory of obligations that explains the nature of moral obligations by "identifying them with God's commands."<sup>92</sup> They begin by noting the distinction between the good (moral value) and the right (moral obligations and duties). In addition, they claim that their Divine Command Theory is not a theory of moral value, but rather a theory of moral obligations and duties, such that "moral obligations are identical with God's commands."<sup>93</sup> For all intents and purposes, Copan and Flannagan utilize Craig's method for grounding objective moral values, obligations, and duties. For that reason, the same ambiguity that is evident in Craig's approach is also evident in theirs.

Craig's response to the various objections associated with Divine Command Theory certainly influences Copan and Flannagan's methodology. Their response to these objections requires additional assessment as they engage the opposition from a different perspective. The following will assess Copan and Flannagan's theological strength as they respond to the Arbitrariness Objection and the Vacuity Objection. In addition, their theory's apologetic effectiveness will be assessed as they respond to the Abhorrent Objection specifically.

### *Theological Strength*

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<sup>91</sup>Copan, "The Moral Argument," 166.

<sup>92</sup>Copan and Flannagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide*, 149.

<sup>93</sup>*Ibid.*, 151.

In one sense Copan and Flannagan's Divine Command Theory of obligations is subject to similar theological weaknesses as the previous theories. Their response to the Arbitrariness Objection and the Vacuity Objection bring further weaknesses to light. As noted earlier, the Arbitrariness Objection requires the Christian theist to abandon something essential to Christian theism. If God's commands are arbitrary, then it seems to diminish his moral excellence and empty morality of its force. The Vacuity Objection requires the Christian theist to abandon the view that God is morally good and right. In each case, Copan and Flannagan propose solutions to these objections that ultimately expose an internal inconsistency in their theory.

Copan and Flannagan's primary example of the Arbitrariness Objection comes from Rachel's *Elements of Moral Philosophy* when he claims that Divine Command Theory entails the notion that God's commands could have been altogether different than what they are. Rachels adds, "He [God] could have commanded us to be liars and then lying, and not truthfulness, would be right."<sup>94</sup> Copan and Flannagan begin their reply to the Arbitrariness Objection with two distinct forms of the objection in mind; a distinction they contribute to Mark Murphy.<sup>95</sup> The first form of the Arbitrariness Objection addresses God's commands, and the second form addresses the content of morality itself.

The first version of the Arbitrariness Objection looks for reasons why God commands or prohibits certain actions. Copan and Flannagan use Russ Shafer-Landau's objection as an example of this version. Shafer-Landau writes, "If Divine Command Theory is true, then there is trouble either way. If God lacks reasons for His commands...then God's decisions are arbitrary. It would be as if God were creating morality by coin toss. But that is surely implausible. That

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<sup>94</sup>Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 42.

<sup>95</sup>Murphy, "Theological Voluntarism," <http://plato.standord.edu/entries/voluntarism-theological/>.

sort of God would be arbitrary, and thus imperfect.”<sup>96</sup> Shafer-Landau argues that in order to avoid this arbitrariness, the theist must affirm that moral obligations are based upon the reasons that motivate God’s commands, not the commands themselves.<sup>97</sup>

Copan and Flannagan respond to this objection by making a distinction between the reasons that motivate God’s command and that which constitutes moral obligations. They argue that Shafer-Landau equates the reasons for God commands with the moral obligation itself.<sup>98</sup> They note that the divine command theorist can affirm that there are reasons that motivate God’s commands, but God’s commands are what constitute moral obligations. They argue that Shafer-Landau cannot equate the reasons that motivate God’s command with the moral obligation the reasons for the obligation are obviously not identical to the obligation itself.<sup>99</sup>

There are two distinct weaknesses in Copan and Flannagan’s line of reasoning. While the distinction between a constitutive and motivational explanation is accurate, it misses the force of Shafer-Landau’s objection. First, this merely shows that reasons cannot be constitutive of moral obligations. This observation does not automatically make a positive case a constitutive explanation. Simply showing that reasons are not identical with moral obligations, does not necessarily mean that one should equate God’s commands with moral obligations. If Copan and Flannagan are correct, then this ignores a more basic distinction; the distinction between cause and effect. For example, a gun may cause a bang, but the gun is not identical (constitutive) to the

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<sup>96</sup>Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, 66.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

<sup>98</sup>Copan and Flannagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide?* 161.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 161-162.

bang. Similarly, God's commands—according to Copan and Flannagan—may cause moral obligations, but they certainly aren't identical to the moral obligations.

Second, Shafer-Landau expands on his previous observation by claiming that “God’s condemnation does not turn a morally neutral action into an immoral one. Rather, God recognizes what is already bad about torture.”<sup>100</sup> While this observation says nothing to explain the way the badness of torture is grounded, it is far more palatable than Copan and Flannagan’s assessment of the situation. It is at this point that they remind the reader that the theory being proposed is one of moral obligation, not of moral value. They respond by arguing that one would still have reasons for not raping another person since it has bad-making characteristics, even though it lacks the requisite command which confers wrong-making characteristics. Copan and Flannagan claim:

Consider a case of a violent rape, and remove the command of God from the equation. Without the command of God, this action would not have the property of being wrong. However, it could still have other non-arbitrary characteristics: being an action that causes severe harm, being an action that violates someone’s autonomy, being an action that expresses domination and contempt for the person in question, being an action that is unloving, being an action that is contrary to the flourishing of the victim, being an action that—if allowed—would not promote the general well-being of society, and so on.<sup>101</sup>

There are two distinct weaknesses in this sort of response to the moral nature of an act such as rape. First, to admit that violent rape, *sans* God’s command, would not have the property of being wrong is extremely counterintuitive, and at the very least makes Divine Command Theory an unappealing option for explaining the moral landscape. Second, Copan and Flannagan implicitly reach outside of the realm of moral rightness and appeal to the moral badness of violent rape with morally laden terminology (e.g., severe harm, violates, contempt, unloving,

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<sup>100</sup>Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, 67.

<sup>101</sup>Copan and Flannagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide*, 163.

well-being). They argue that these qualities are what make actions such as violent rape, “intrinsically evil.”<sup>102</sup> Shafter-Landau argues that it is the intrinsic evil of violent rape that should cause one to refrain from the action regardless of whether God prohibits it or not.

The second version of the Arbitrariness Objection addresses the content of morality itself. This version proposes a hypothetical counterfactual where God commands something that is obviously evil. Copan and Flannagan use Rachels’ objection as an example of this version.

Rachels writes:

It [Divine Command Theory] means that God could have given different commands just as easily. He could have commanded us to be liars, and then lying, and not truthfulness would be right...on this view, honesty was not right *before* God commanded it. Therefore, he could have had no more reason to command it than its opposite; and so, from a moral point of view, his command is perfectly arbitrary.<sup>103</sup>

Copan and Flannagan, once again, reach outside of his Divine Command Theory of obligation, and appeals to God’s essential goodness as a basis for moral value. He claims that God not only would not, but could not command those things that are morally evil. Similar to Craig and Baggett, this shift is utilized to avoid arbitrariness. However, God’s essential goodness does not completely secure the Divine Command Theory of moral obligations from arbitrariness. As Baggett and Walls note, God could just as easily have commanded that we give 11% of our income to the Church rather than 10%, and his essential goodness would still be intact.<sup>104</sup> In other words, at least some commands could have been different and still have been good. Therefore, at least some commands are not necessary expressions of God’s character.

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<sup>102</sup>Copan and Flannagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide*, 169.

<sup>103</sup>Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 42.

<sup>104</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 120.



Copan and Flannagan frequently refer to Craig, Quinn, and Adams when presenting their Divine Command Theory of moral obligation. However, in most cases, they leave out a crucial element of their argument. Adams, for one, has gone to great lengths to clarify that his Modified Divine Command Theory is one that equates moral obligations with the *commands* of a loving God.<sup>105</sup> However, in almost every case one can demonstrate the dependence that his Divine Command Theory of moral obligations has on grounding moral value in the morally perfect *character* of God. At every turn, the Arbitrariness Objection is parried by appealing to God's moral goodness (value), rather than providing grounding moral obligations in the commands of God. When the opposition raises the question of moral value, Copan and Flannagan are quick to remind them that the theory is one of moral obligations. However, when pressed by the Arbitrariness Objection, Copan and Flannagan appeal to the "intrinsically good nature" of God. In their effort to avoid the Arbitrariness Objection by appealing to God's divine nature, Copan and Flannagan are faced with the Vacuity Objection.

That the Vacuity Objection seeks to assert that if God's commands are the basis for morality, then claims that ascribe moral characteristic to God appear to be empty or vacuous. Rachels recognized this weakness in Divine Command Theory. He argued that:

On this view, the doctrine of the goodness of God is reduced to nonsense...if we accept the idea that good and bad are defined by reference to God's will, this notion is deprived of any meaning. What would it mean to say that God's commands are good? If 'X is good' simply means 'X is commanded by God,' then 'God's commands are good' would mean only 'God's commands are commanded by God'—an empty truism.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>Adams, "A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness," 464.

<sup>106</sup>Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 42-43.

Apart from Rachels' use of *good* rather than *right* the Vacuity Objection easily applies to Copan and Flannagan's Divine Command Theory of moral obligations. This objection deals with whether or not God has moral obligations at all.

The Vacuity Objection addresses how God can be considered good if he has no moral obligations. If moral goodness is grounded in God's morally perfect character, and God's commands constitute moral obligations, then it stands to reason that God has no moral obligations since he does not issue commands to himself.<sup>107</sup> Copan and Flannagan concede that this would be true if the only way one conceives of God's goodness is by fulfilling moral duties.<sup>108</sup> However, they add, "If we are going to understand God's goodness in terms of God having duties that he consistently fulfills, then a Divine Command Theory cannot account for God's goodness."<sup>109</sup> Now, this is certainly the case when one employs a Divine Command Theory of moral goodness, which Copan and Flannagan do not. Their Divine Command Theory is a theory of moral obligation. Therefore, the challenge must be adjusted. How is it that God can be righteous and just if he has no moral obligations? If righteousness and justice merely entail adjudicating between right and wrong, and good and evil, then God's righteousness and justice could be understood as his adjudicating between one's obedience to his commands. However, Christian theism holds that God *is* righteous and just, not merely that he *pronounces* accurate judgments. On Copan and Flannagan's theory, God must have some obligations in order to be consistent with the scriptures, and those obligations must be grounded in something other than his commands. Chapter 5 will propose such a solution.

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<sup>107</sup>Copan and Flanagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide*, 183.

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>109</sup>*Ibid.*

When considering the Arbitrariness and Vacuity Objections, the divine command theorist is forced to either affirm that God's commands are arbitrary, or that claims to God's righteousness and justice are ultimately meaningless. These theological weaknesses are more than enough to dissuade the Christian theist from embracing a Copan and Flannagan's theory of moral obligations. Furthermore, its internal inconsistency would dissuade the non-theist from viewing any theistic ethic as an eligible ethical theory. Whereas Craig, and Baggett and Walls' divine command theories' apologetic effectiveness were assessed on their ability to respond to various philosophical objections (e.g., Moral Autonomy, Moral Authority, Moral Epistemology), Copan and Flannagan's Divine Command Theory will be assessed on its ability to respond to the Abhorrent Command Objection in particular. This is particularly important since Copan and Flannagan's recent work is dedicated to this objection, and their theory of moral obligation argues that the hypothetical counterfactual of God commanding evil is impossible.

### *Explanatory Scope*

The Abhorrent Command Objection takes two distinct forms. The first is hypothetical, and the other is practical. The former will be dubbed the Hypothetical Abhorrent Command Objection, and the latter the Practical Abhorrent Command Objection. The hypothetical version claims that if God's commands make a morally abhorrent action obligatory, then God's goodness is called into question, and his commands are rendered arbitrary. The practical version assesses various biblical examples of what appear to be abhorrent commands (e.g., Canaanite genocide; the binding of Isaac; chattel slavery; ethnocentrism). This objection is nicely summarized when atheist Richard Dawkins emoted:

The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving, control-freak; a vindictive,

bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser, a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.<sup>110</sup>

Although not the first to question the moral legitimacy of God's actions in the Old Testament narrative, Dawkins infamous indictment is perhaps the most stinging. Regardless, the challenge is not merely a hypothetical one, but an appeal to the Christian theist to explain God's acts in history. In his two most recent works, Copan and Flanagan seek to not only address the hypothetical objection, but also the practical objection associated with a variety of alleged moral atrocities found in the Old Testament narrative. The following assessment will begin by addressing the most explicit example of alleged Old Testament atrocities; the binding of Isaac. It is important to note that Copan and Flanagan's resolution to the practical objection, while important, only works in many cases if the hypothetical objection is resolved. Furthermore, if any inconsistencies can be shown to exist between Copan and Flanagan's Divine Command Theory of moral obligation and their assessment of the Practical Abhorrent Command Objection, then their theory's overall apologetic effectiveness will be diminished.

The binding of Isaac recorded in Genesis 22 is perhaps one of the most troubling pericopes found in Christian Scripture. The narrative describes God commanding Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac. The immediate difficulty with this passage is the apparent inability to reconcile God's command to sacrifice an "innocent" human person in one passage while forbidding his people to sacrifice children,<sup>111</sup> and condemning other nations for their practice of child sacrifice.<sup>112</sup> In addition to being a challenge to Christian theism in general, the binding of

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<sup>110</sup>Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 31.

<sup>111</sup>Deut. 12:31

<sup>112</sup>Deut. 18:9-12

Isaac poses a particular problem to Copan and Flannagan's Divine Command Theory of obligations. On their view, God's commands constitute (are identical with) one's moral obligations. Consequently, God's command to sacrifice Isaac was not only good but morally binding. Thus, there are two distinct challenges to their Divine Command Theory. First, God's commands appear to be arbitrary if his command to sacrifice Isaac constitutes Abraham's obligation to sacrifice Isaac, and his prohibition of child sacrifice to the Israelites constitutes their obligation to refrain from child sacrifice. Second, Copan and Flannagan's Divine Command Theory is faced with the prospect of God issuing a morally repugnant command, which indicts God's morally perfect character, or renders the concept vacuous.

Copan goes to great lengths to take into account the overall context of Genesis 22:1-19 in his exegesis. He begins by noting that the major theme of the Pentateuch itself is one of faith, where Abraham's abundance of faith is contrasted with Moses' lack of faith.<sup>113</sup> He continues by suggesting that Abraham had many reasons to trust God's ability to miraculously fulfill his promise, even if Isaac were dead. Furthermore, Copan claims that God was testing Abraham and did not really intend for Abraham to kill Isaac.<sup>114</sup> Finally, he describes God's command to Abraham as a "gentle command," more akin to begging than demanding.<sup>115</sup> All of these reasons, according to Copan, give Abraham confidence in obeying God's command.<sup>116</sup>

There are two distinct weaknesses in this approach. First, this response doesn't seem to address the issue at hand. All of the reasons that Copan lists only show that Abraham was

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<sup>113</sup>Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster*, 43-44.

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*, 49.

warranted in his belief that God could and would fulfill his original promise to bless the nations through Isaac. Notice that Abraham's faith may have motivated his obedience, but his obedience is altogether indifferent to the question as to whether God's command is right or wrong. In other words, this seems to intimate that there is something more transcendent backing the rightness than a mere command. Furthermore, it is not clear that God did not intend for Abraham to kill Isaac. Copan asserts that since this was a test, God did not really intend for Isaac to die. Surely there is a distinction to be made here. God could have intended Abraham to obey his command and kill Isaac while still intending to stop him from performing the act once Abraham's faith was validated. In either case, it would be had to verify God's actual intention.

Second, Copan's exegesis does not make a positive case for a Divine Command Theory of obligation, but rather works against it. His description of Abraham's faith is one of trust in who God is, rather than blind obedience to God's commands. Furthermore, it was not Abraham's obedience that made him "righteous," but his trust in God. If God's command constituted Abraham's obligation, then Abraham's fulfillment of his obligation would constitute his righteousness. However, it is clear that it was Abraham's belief that constituted his righteousness, not his mere obedience.<sup>117</sup>

After his exegesis, Copan offers some philosophical analysis of God's command to Abraham. Seeking to exonerate God, Copan explanation frames the challenge in the following way:

1. God's command to do X obligates person Y to do X.
2. It is wrong to kill innocent human beings.
3. God commanded Abraham to take an innocent life.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup>Gen. 15:6

<sup>118</sup>Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster*, 49.

Copan takes issue with statement 2 and argues that while this statement “normally holds,” perhaps there are exceptions that would justify the taking of an innocent human being’s life (e.g., Ectopic pregnancy; Shooting down hijacked planes). Copan seeks to demonstrate that since one can recognize obvious exceptions to statement 2, one would be able to entertain an exception that would justify God overriding statement 2. Copan argues that statement 2 normally holds unless there are morally sufficient reasons. However, Copan’s position previously ensured that God does not need morally sufficient reasons for overriding statement 2. It is important to note that Copan and Flannagan argue that “Without the command,” cases such as these “would not have the property of being wrong.”<sup>119</sup>

Copan claims that to take statement 2 as “absolutely correct,” is to make an erroneous assumption that ignores or rejects the notion of a “supernatural being who is able to bring people back from the dead...the fact that God acts in history, makes promises, makes good on them, and has morally sufficient reasons for doing what he does.”<sup>120</sup> However, this does not appear to be a necessary conclusion. The fact that God can bring people back from the dead, and acts in history, does not—*ipso facto*—justify killing innocent human beings. The fact that God makes promises and keeps them certainly speaks to his integrity, but does not necessarily warrant killing an innocent human being. Finally, God may have morally sufficient reasons that motivate his command to kill innocent human beings. On this note however, Copan is clear that it is God’s command that makes the killing of innocent human beings morally right in Genesis 22 and morally wrong in Deuteronomy 18. In light of the reasons previously mentioned, Copan argues that God’s commands are not immoral or contradictory.<sup>121</sup> Copan cannot mean immoral in the

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<sup>119</sup>Copan and Flannagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide*, 163.

<sup>120</sup>Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster*, 49-51.

normative sense, since this would render the claim vacuous. He cannot mean immoral in the axiological sense, since his Divine Command Theory is a theory of moral obligation. He cannot argue that God's command is not contradictory, in his view, since God's command to kill Isaac makes the action right in one case, and God's command makes the action wrong in the second. He can only mean that God's commands are not contradictory in the axiological sense, because they are ultimately grounded in the nature of God.

It is clear from Copan and Flannagan's work that Craig, and Baggett and Walls have significantly shaped the evangelical landscape of theistic ethics as it relates to the Euthyphro Dilemma, and the various objections raised against the moral argument for God's existence. It is evident that the Modified Divine Command Theory is quickly becoming the standard evangelical response to the Euthyphro Dilemma. However, this chapter has shown that in each case the evangelical reformulation of the Modified Divine Command Theory creates unnecessary ambiguity in its methodology, requires the Christian theist to abandon something essential to his theology, and fails to provide the explanatory scope needed for responding to various objections to grounding moral rightness in divine commands. These weaknesses all results in a less effective apologetic.

In light of these weaknesses, Chapter 5 will suggest abandoning all forms of Divine Command Theory, and will propose a non-voluntarist basis for objective moral values, duties, and obligations. This approach will serve as an alternative evangelical apologetic for dealing with Euthyphro Dilemma. This theory concedes that the best basis for moral value is God's morally perfect character. However, it will suggest that moral value is more closely related to moral obligations and duties than modified divine command theorists suggest. Furthermore, this

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<sup>121</sup> Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster*, 51.



theory will suggest that divine commands merely serve an epistemic function. Divine commands do not create moral obligations and duties, but rather reveal what one's obligations and duties are. Ultimately, moral obligations and duties are grounded in one person's relatedness to another person, not a person's relatedness to a moral principle or command. Therefore, the proper basis for moral obligations and duties should be personhood.

## CHAPTER 5: A NON-VOLUNTARIST THEORY OF MORAL VALUES, OBLIGATIONS, AND DUTIES

### Introduction

Christian orthodoxy affirms the existence of objective moral values and duties, and that God is not only the best explanation for their existence, but a necessary condition for their existence. However, Christian theists vary in how they explain God's relationship to objective moral values, obligations, and duties. One predominant way of expressing God's relationship to objective moral values, obligations, and duties is the Standard Divine Command Theory. The Standard Divine Command Theory states that God's commands constitute moral values, obligations, and duties. For example, murder is morally bad and morally wrong simply because God has prohibited it. An ancient challenge to the Standard Divine Command Theory is found in Plato's Euthyphro dialogue. Seeking to understand the nature and form of piety, Socrates asks: "Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods?"<sup>1</sup> The modern version of the Euthyphro Dilemma poses a particular challenge to the Standard Divine Command Theory. The dilemma implies that if an act's moral qualities are determined by God's commands, then the Christian is forced to abandon some doctrine essential to Christian theism. First, if moral values, obligations, and duties are determined by God's commands alone, then morality is altogether arbitrary. If God had prior reasons for his commands, those prior reasons would be the basis for morality, not God's commands. This arbitrariness leaves the door open for God to issue abhorrent commands such as "cruelty for its own sake."<sup>2</sup> Second, if moral values, obligations, and duties are determined by God's commands

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<sup>1</sup>Grube, "Euthyphro," 12.

<sup>2</sup>Adams, "A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness," 463.

alone, then God's goodness, as Rachels puts it, "is reduced to nonsense."<sup>3</sup> In addition to these two theological challenges, the Standard Divine Command Theory faces several philosophical challenges.

Although the Standard Divine Command Theory was largely rejected as a veridical ethical theory in modern moral philosophy, there has been a resurgence in contemporary moral philosophy due to the work of divine command theorists such as Alston, Quinn, and Adams. Adams' Modified Divine Command Theory capitalized on the distinction between moral value (good/bad), and moral obligations and duties (right/wrong). Adams argues that "the standard of goodness is defined by the divine nature,"<sup>4</sup> and the commands of a good God constitute one's moral obligations.<sup>5</sup> Adams' has had a significant influence on contemporary evangelical philosophical theologians such as Craig, Baggett, Walls, Copan, and Flannagan. Each begins their response to the Euthyphro Dilemma by echoing Adams' distinction between moral value and moral obligations and duties, and builds a Divine Command Theory of moral obligation. In an attempt to avoid the various challenges associated with the Standard Divine Command Theory, these theorists correctly ground moral value in God's divine nature, but incorrectly ground moral obligations and duties in God's commands. Chapter 4 assessed the overall apologetic effectiveness of these contemporary evangelical modified divine command theories on the following criteria: methodological clarity, theological strength, and explanatory scope. Each theory was found to create unnecessary ambiguity by using divine command terminology

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<sup>3</sup>Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 42.

<sup>4</sup>Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 49.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 249.

in a non-standard way; require the Christian to abandon something essential to Christian theism; and respond inadequately to one or more philosophical challenges.

As a result of the assessment in Chapter 4, the evangelical Christian is in need of an alternative approach to the Euthyphro Dilemma. Just as moral value is grounded in something distinct from God's commands, so are moral obligations and duties. Properly understood, the Euthyphro Dilemma presents an intractable dilemma. Morality is either based in God's commands, or morality is not based in God's commands. Those who deny a Divine Command Theory are left to embrace the non-voluntarist horn of the dilemma. Misinterpreting the non-voluntarist horn, theists and non-theists alike assume that a natural consequence of affirming non-voluntarism is to affirm the existence of a moral standard logically prior to or independent of God. A Non-Voluntarist Theory of moral values, obligations, and duties affirms that morality as a whole is based in the divine nature. The following will demonstrate that the Christian can affirm the non-voluntarist horn of the dilemma without affirming that God's commands are arbitrary, and without affirming a standard of morality logically prior to or independent of God. Furthermore, the Christian that embraces non-voluntarism can boast of a clearer methodology and more effective apologetic. Just as moral value is grounded in the divine nature, moral obligations and duties are ultimately grounded in the divine nature. Thus, this chapter will propose a Non-Voluntarist Theory of moral values, obligations, and duties.

#### A Non-Voluntarist Theory of Moral Values Obligations, Obligations, and Duties

A common misconception among theists and non-theists is that embracing the non-voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma commits the theist to the existence of a moral standard logically prior to or independent of God. This misconception is particularly prevalent among contemporary evangelical modified divine command theorists. They understand the

voluntarist horn, and its implications correctly. The voluntarist horn affirms that God's commands constitute the whole of morality. To avoid abandoning something essential to Christian theism, the modified divine command theorist must either embrace the non-voluntarist horn, or split the horns of the dilemma. Since the Euthyphro Dilemma is a true dilemma, the modified divine command theorist is forced to embrace non-voluntarism. In response, modified divine command theorists have reinterpreted the non-voluntarist horn in order to create a false dilemma. This new interpretation views the voluntarist horn as an affirmation that morality is grounded in God's commands, and the non-voluntarist horn as an affirmation of the existence of a moral standard logically prior to or independent of God. Modified divine command theorists such as Craig, argue that to embrace the new non-voluntarist horn commits the theist to Atheistic Moral Platonism.<sup>6</sup> Since this is an unacceptable position for the Christian theist, the modified divine command theorists argue for a third way. This third way grounds moral value in God's divine nature, and moral obligations in God's commands. Unfortunately, this alleged solution depends on a misinterpretation of the Euthyphro Dilemma in general, and the non-voluntarist horn in particular.

The Euthyphro Dilemma is a true dilemma in that it forces the theist to affirm that morality is either grounded in God's commands, or morality is not grounded in God's commands. The non-voluntarist horn affirms that morality is not grounded in God's commands. This allows for the possibility of Atheistic Moral Platonism, but it does not necessarily commit the theist to that position. A notable example of Atheistic Moral Platonism is that of Antony. Antony's Divine Independence Theory affirms that an act's moral qualities are intrinsic to the act, and not constituted by God's commands or dependent on God's existence.<sup>7</sup> Obviously, the

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<sup>6</sup>Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 181.

Christian cannot affirm this position. However, the Divine Independence Theory, or Atheistic Moral Platonism, is not the only non-voluntarist theory available to the theist. The theist is able to embrace non-voluntarism by grounding moral values, obligations, and duties without affirming the existence of a moral standard that is independent of God.

#### *A Non-Voluntarist Theory of Moral Values*

As Adams suggests, the basis for the Good (i.e., moral value) is the divine nature. Adams' conception of the Good is admittedly Platonic in the sense that it is not exclusively moral. He notes, "Like Plato's, mine will be a theory of nonmoral as well as moral value. The divine greatness adored in the Bible, by the mystics, and in the tradition of theistic worship is by no means exclusively moral."<sup>8</sup> Consequently, Adams' theory of moral value at times refers to the divine nature in a broader sense by using the descriptor, "excellence." This appeal appears to be altogether justified, especially when one considers the semantic range of the Hebrew use of *בוֹרָא* (beautiful, agreeable, excellent, [tō-wb]) in the Old Testament and the Greek use of *ἀγαθός* (intrinsically good, good in nature, excellent [*agathos*]) in the New Testament. Both lend themselves to the broader use that Adams employs, and most certainly includes moral goodness. It is important to note that Adams is not simply grounding some abstract principle in the divine nature, he is identifying God as the Good. This is what Adams refers to as the transcendent or infinite good. Adams argues that finite goods are only good in that they resemble the infinite good. He adds, "It is with respect to the divine nature that God must be faithfully imaged by other good things. A thing can be good by imitating a contingent property of God; but that is because the divine nature is manifested in the contingent properties too."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Louis Antony, "Atheism as Perfect Piety," 71-73.

<sup>8</sup>Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 14.

As noted earlier, evangelical modified divine command theorists have uniformly agreed, in general, with Adams' assessment of the Good. Craig argues that "God's own holy and perfect nature supplies the absolute standard against which all actions and decisions are measured. God's moral nature is what Plato called 'Good.'"<sup>10</sup> As an analogy, Craig frequently refers to the iridium bar in the Bureau of Weights and Measures in Paris that once served as the standard for a meter. Baggett and Walls generally affirm Adams' account of the basis for moral value and "predicate goodness of God and identify God with the Good."<sup>11</sup>

In Chapter 4, it was noted that grounding moral value in the divine nature makes the Modified Divine Command Theory susceptible to a Euthyphro-like dilemma and the Vacuity Objection. This is no less true for a Non-Voluntarist Theory of moral values, since it too seeks to ground moral values in the divine nature. For example, both Morrision and Koons ask whether God is good because he has certain properties such as mercy, or are these properties good because God has them?<sup>12</sup> It is alleged, that to claim that God is good because he has these particular properties would be to admit that there is a standard of goodness that is distinct from God. To do so would be to affirm some form of Moral Platonism. Therefore, one is forced to affirm that characteristics such as mercy, justice, and love are good just because God possess them.

Both Koons and Morrision present this form of the Euthyphro Dilemma in a unique way. Koons begin his objection by addressing Alston's theory of moral value, which claims that the

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<sup>9</sup> Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 49.

<sup>10</sup>Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 491.

<sup>11</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 104.

<sup>12</sup>Morrision, "Must There Be a Standard of Moral Goodness Apart from God?" 179.

property lovingness is good because it is a feature of God.<sup>13</sup> Koons argues that this view of God's goodness is incoherent because it succumbs to the Vacuity Objection. Koons asserts, "Alston claims that God is good, but given the order of explanation, he is debarred from pointing to any feature in which God is good."<sup>14</sup> Morrision makes a similar claim regarding the order of explanation, but adds that one could just as easily ground these particular properties in a Platonic form. Morrision imagines this to be an unacceptable solution to the theist since this would put moral value outside of God's sovereignty. Morrision argues that on Alston's view "God's nature is supposed to fix the nature of moral goodness," and finds it "hard to see how he [God] has any more control over what counts as morally good on their view than on a Platonist view of the relation between God and the Good."<sup>15</sup> Craig responds to the overall charge in general, and Koons' argument in particular, by utilizing a distinction that Koons makes in his article. Koons draws a distinction between what he calls "explanations-why" and "explanations-what."<sup>16</sup> Koons clarifies:

Even if explanations-why come to an end, and no further reasons can be given at this point, it does not follow that at this point there can be no further explanations-what. For we should still be able to explain what something is even if we can give no further explanation for why it is the way that it is.<sup>17</sup>

Craig presses this distinction into service by applying it to Alston's view of God. On this view, God is the explanatory stopping point, and there is no further explanation-why for the goodness

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<sup>13</sup>Alston, "What Euthyphro Should Have Said," 291-2.

<sup>14</sup>Koons, "Can God's Goodness Save the Divine Command Theory from Euthyphro," 181.

<sup>15</sup>Morrision, "Must There Be a Standard of Moral Goodness Apart from God?" 137-138.

<sup>16</sup>Koons, "Can God's Goodness Save the Divine Command Theory from Euthyphro?" 191.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.



of properties such as love, mercy, and justice.<sup>18</sup> Craig adds, “you can still explain to people that God is loving, kind, merciful, generous, and so forth. That would be an explanation-what, but not an explanation-why.”<sup>19</sup>

Baggett and Walls approach such a challenge from a different perspective. Whereas Craig utilizes the explanation-why/explanation-what distinction, Baggett and Walls utilize an ontological/epistemological distinction. They argue that one learns the concept of the goodness of properties such as lovingness, mercy, and justice from the “bottom up.”<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, Baggett and Walls note, “this leaves open the possibility that ontology functions top down and that God himself is the ultimate Good.”<sup>21</sup> These solutions are not mutually exclusive, and could dovetail quite nicely.

This approach certainly makes a way for the Christian theist to ground moral values in the divine nature without succumbing to an extension of the Euthyphro Dilemma or the Vacuity Objection. However, the crucial question is: why does this apply to God and not Platonic forms? Craig claims that God is “a very plausible stopping point for these why-explanations”; but Morrision claims that it could just as easily be applied to Platonic forms. Coincidentally, the explanation-why/explanation-what and the ontological/epistemological methods work in this case as well.<sup>22</sup> However, Craig argues that grounding moral values and duties in abstract Platonic

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<sup>18</sup>Kevin Harris, and William Lane Craig, hosts, “The Euthyphro Dilemma Yet Again,” Reasonable Faith Podcast (MP3 podcast), *Reasonable Faith*, January 4, 2015, accessed May 27, 2016, <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/the-euthyphro-dilemma-once-again>.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 129.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Harris, and Craig, “The Euthyphro Dilemma Yet Again,” <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/the-euthyphro-dilemma-once-again>.

forms seem implausible for three reasons. First, Craig makes an appeal to ignorance. He claims, “It is difficult, however, to comprehend this view. What does it mean to say, for example, that the moral value *Justice* just exists?”<sup>23</sup> This does not seem to be a convincing reason to reject what Craig calls “Atheistic Moral Platonism.” After all, that a concept is difficult to understand does not make it false. Craig also challenges the notion that a blind evolutionary process would have produced moral values and duties that correspond to these previously existing abstract forms.<sup>24</sup> This response seems to assume that if one were to affirm the existence of Platonic forms, one is necessarily committed to Darwinism. His final observation seems to be the most potent.

Craig mentions that it is difficult to conceive of moral values and duties existing without people. Craig intuitively feels that a *person* is just and a *person* can act justly only within the context of a relationship or society. Just as moral values are person dependent, the basis for moral obligations is person dependent. Adams hints at the importance of society in moral obligations when he claims that “If God is the Good itself, then the Good is not an abstract object but a concrete (though not a physical), individual. Indeed, it is a *person*, or importantly like a person.”<sup>25</sup> In addition to claiming that the divine nature is the basis of moral values, the following proposal suggests that moral obligations and duties are also based in the divine nature. However, before this can be accomplished, the relationship between moral value and moral obligations and duties needs to be examined.

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<sup>23</sup>Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 178.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>25</sup>Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 42; n40.

## *The Relationship between Moral Values and Moral Obligations and Duties*

Modified Divine Command Theory trades on the distinction between moral values and moral obligations and duties. On this theory, divine commands constitute one's moral obligations and duties, but God's divine nature, which is the standard of goodness, allegedly secures the objective; non-arbitrary; and non-vacuous nature of his commands. This acute distinction between moral values and moral obligations and duties is crucial to the overall project for the modified divine command theorist. On several occasions, these theorists emphasize that an action can be morally good without being morally obligatory. Note the following example from Baggett and Walls:

Not everything that is morally good is also morally right, in the sense of being morally obligatory. Giving half of your income to the poor might be morally good, but it likely is not your moral obligation; likewise helping out at the soup kitchen five days a week. One of the great challenges of ethics is to determine which, among many good actions, are morally obligatory.<sup>26</sup>

While the distinction between moral value and moral obligations and duties is a legitimate distinction, it is not necessary to resolve the Euthyphro Dilemma. Of course, the modified divine command theorist will claim that God's commands determine which morally good action is obligatory, but this implies that moral obligations do not exist prior to God's command being issued. Perhaps the distinction between moral value and moral obligations and duties is not quite as sharp. Perhaps God's commands do not create obligations and duties, but merely indicate them.

Unlike the standard divine command theorist and the modified divine command theorist, the non-voluntarist can affirm that murder, for example, is morally bad and morally wrong logically prior to and independent of God's commands (e.g., Cain slaying Abel, or Gentiles

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<sup>26</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 47.

living moral lives without the Law). Therefore, God's command not to murder does not make murder bad/wrong but indicates that murder is bad/wrong. God's command serves an epistemic function rather than an ontological function. Richard Mouw suggests that divine commands could be viewed as *right-indicating* rather than *right-making*.<sup>27</sup> For example, Jesus' injunction for the rich young ruler to sell his possession and give them to the poor in Mark 10 may not make the action right, but be indicative of a greater good which is also obligatory. If murder, for example, is defined as the taking of an innocent human life without proper justification, then it was bad/wrong for Cain to take Abel's life without proper justification simply because the taking of an innocent human life without proper justification is not consistent with God's goodness or rightness. God could have commanded Cain not to take an innocent human life without proper justification, but this would merely be indicative of an independent moral truth, not creating a moral truth. If moral goodness/rightness is determined by God's divine nature, then murder's badness/wrongness is determined by how it relates to God's nature (i.e., murder does not comport with, or reflect God's goodness/rightness). Therefore, God's divine nature grounds not only moral values but also grounds moral obligations and duties.

Adams' distinction between infinite and finite goods may serve as a paradigm for understanding the relationship between moral values and moral obligations and duties. Adams claims that God is the infinite good, and that finite goods are good in virtue of their relation to their resemblance to God. This is what Adams calls "Godlikeness." He notes, "If excellence is identified with a sort of Godlikeness, for example, it will contribute to the explanation of the existence of some things if we can correctly suppose that God takes such Godlikeness as a reason

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<sup>27</sup>Richard Mouw, *The God Who Commands* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1990), 28-29.

for creating things.”<sup>28</sup> In the case of beauty, for example, Adams argues that the beauty of an object is grounded in God because in some meaningful way it is resembling or imaging God.<sup>29</sup>

In a similar way, moral obligations can be thought of in terms of the finite and infinite, immanent and transcendent, material and formal.<sup>30</sup> Jesus’ teaching on the Law in Matthew 22 is a good example of this distinction. A Pharisee asked Jesus to disclose the greatest commandment in all of the Law. Jesus replied, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind This is great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”<sup>31</sup> In this case, Jesus explains that material/immanent norms for the Israelites (the Law) were indicative of a more formal/transcendent set of norms (Love of Person(s)). Baggett and Walls also provide an excellent example of this distinction. Perhaps a morally good act such as giving half of your income to the poor is not obligatory in the material/immanent sense, but if one could demonstrate that this act resembles or images—to use Adams terminology—some formal/transcendent norm, then this act would have a type of moral rightness, obligation, or duty associated with it. If this were the case, perhaps all moral goods have moral obligations associated with them in this sense.

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<sup>28</sup>Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 70.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 41.

<sup>30</sup>This distinction between formal and material norms was introduced by Scott Henderson, Professor of Apologetics at Luther Rice College and Seminary. Henderson, Scott, Interview with Evan Posey. Personal Interview. Lithonia November 11, 2015. This distinction can be found in other works as well. These works include, but are not limited to, Gula, Richard M., *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989), 286-290; and Wedgwood, Ralph, *The Nature of Normativity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 79.

<sup>31</sup>Matt. 22:37-40 (ESV).

## *A Non-Voluntarist Theory of Moral Obligations and Duties*

A common misconception in both theistic and non-theistic moral philosophy is that if the Christian theist rejects the voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma, she must affirm the existence of a moral standard that is logically prior to or independent of God. The Modified Divine Command Theory argues that the basis for moral value is the divine nature. God himself is the moral standard by which all moral goodness is measured. Therefore, the modified divine command theorist claims that one does not need to appeal to a standard of moral value that is logically prior or independent of God. While this approach successfully accounts for moral value, it does not adequately account for moral obligations and duties. The Modified Divine Command Theory argues that God's commands constitute one's moral obligations and duties. In other words, without a divine command, moral obligations and duties do not exist. For example, one would not have a moral obligation to refrain from adultery, unless God himself prohibits it. When faced with this observation, the modified divine command theorist appeals to the morally evil nature of adultery, and argues that it is not consistent with the essentially good nature of God. Therefore, one has morally sufficient reasons for not committing adultery.<sup>32</sup> By responding in this way, the modified divine command theorist reveals that the actual basis for moral rightness/wrongness is not a particular divine command. A Non-Voluntarist Theory of moral obligations and duties argues that moral rightness is also based in the divine nature. On this view, the morally evil nature of adultery is determined by its inability to be reconciled with God's essentially good nature. Since this act cannot be reconciled with God's essentially good nature, one has an obligation to refrain from adultery, regardless of whether God issues a command. God's command is not a necessary condition for the immorality of adultery, but God's existence

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<sup>32</sup>An example of this argument can be found in Copan and Flannagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide*, 163.

is. However, if God were to issue a command, it would not be value adding in the ontological sense (right-making), but would be value adding in the epistemological sense (right-indicating).

Before one can assess the basis for moral obligations and duties, it is important to be aware of the distinction between moral value and moral obligations and duties and their relatedness. Generally, moral value is concerned with whether something is morally good or morally evil. Moral obligations and duties are concerned with the requirement to act in a particular way. Acting in a way that is consistent with moral goodness is typically considered morally right. For example, Hedonism is the view that pleasure is intrinsically good, and pain is intrinsically evil.<sup>33</sup> For the hedonist, right actions are those actions that bring the most pleasures and reduce the most pain. In addition to something having the quality of moral goodness, and actions having the quality of moral rightness, is the quality of moral requirement. Prior to this point moral goodness and moral rightness were purely *descriptive*. Moral obligations and duties are *prescriptive*. In other words, it is not that an action is good and right, but that one should perform good and right actions. This *ought-ness* is what characterizes moral obligations and duties. Another way of describing the descriptive/prescriptive distinction is the is/ought distinction. Moral value and moral rightness address what a particular thing or circumstance *is* (morally), but moral obligations and duties address what one *ought* to do in relation to a particular thing or circumstance.

Moral obligations and duties carry with them a type of moral force that binds a person to a particular course of action. Baggett and Walls argue that moral obligations, “typically are thought to provide distinctive and authoritative reasons to perform an action or refrain from one. A moral obligation, particularly *ultima facie* ones among them, out to be obeyed; it has authority,

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<sup>33</sup>James A. Montmarquet, “Hedonism,” *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd, ed. Robert Audi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 364.

punch, clout, prescriptive power.”<sup>34</sup> For example, if one were to see a person drowning in a lake, one might feel the obligation to attempt a rescue. All things being equal, it is good and right to rescue a drowning person, and one has a duty to attempt to rescue a drowning person. As it was noted above, there is a legitimate distinction between moral value and moral obligations and duties. However, it was also emphasized that obligations are related to moral value so that every appropriate obligation and duty is metaethically connected to moral value. The inability to explain the basis of this connection is at the heart of the Modified Divine Command Theory.

Modified Divine Command Theory argues that moral requirements (obligations and duties) are created by divine commands, and are consistent with the goodness of God. On this view, loving your neighbor is consistent with God’s goodness, but is morally neutral in terms of its rightness. Therefore, there is no moral requirement to love one’s neighbor, or refrain from hating one’s neighbor until a divine command/prohibition is given. And yet, there appear to be moral requirements that are logically prior to, or independent of God’s commands. For example, it seems intuitive to refrain from cruelty for its own sake, even if God does not weigh in on the matter.

Chapter 4 argued that the contemporary evangelical reformulations of the Modified Divine Command Theory created unnecessary ambiguity as a result of their misinterpretation of the Standard Divine Command Theory and the Euthyphro Dilemma. In addition, the attempt to ground moral obligations and duties in divine commands was not sufficient to answer the dilemma or associated apologetic challenges. Finally, the Modified Divine Command Theory must, therefore, argue that actions are morally neutral independent of God’s commands. Ultimately, God’s commands do not appear to be the best explanation for the existence of moral

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<sup>34</sup>Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, 156.



obligations and duties. Before suggesting the best explanation, it should be clarified that a Non-Voluntarist Theory of moral obligations and duties does not mean that if God commands a particular action, it isn't obligatory. It simply means that God's commands do not constitute one's obligations and duties. In other words, God's commands serve an epistemic function. They are right-indicating. Divine Command Theory holds that God's commands serve an ontological function and are right-making. If God's commands are merely right-indicating, then their metaethical basis must be something other than God's commands, since they are indicating a moral truth independent of the command itself.

In Robert Garcia and Nathan Kings' edited work *Is Goodness without God Good Enough*, Paul Kurtz and Craig debate the relationship between God and ethics. Craig's initial claim is that while the non-theist can be moral without belief in God, she cannot be moral without the existence of God.<sup>35</sup> Even if one were to grant that the non-theist could be moral *sans* God's existence, she certainly could not be moral (good or right) without the existence of persons. That personhood, in general, is a necessary condition for ethics is more than just an obvious ontological observation (i.e., if people didn't exist, ethics wouldn't exist). Ethics involves the relatedness of one person to another. Standard texts in moral philosophy begin with defining ethics as a branch of moral philosophy that seeks to answer the question of how one person should treat another.<sup>36</sup> Obviously, Christian theism recognizes a more deep and intimate connection between personhood and morality. Copan argues, "Moral categories (right/wrong, good/bad, praiseworthy/blameworthy) get to the essence of who we fundamentally are. They

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<sup>35</sup>Craig, "The Kurtz/Craig Debate," 29.

<sup>36</sup>A few examples of the basic concept of ethics and its relation to persons include Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, 1; James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 11.

apply to us *as persons* (e.g., a good architect may be good as an architect, but not *as a human being/person*). Moral values and personhood are intertwined.”<sup>37</sup>

A standard way of thinking about moral obligations includes the notion of fellowship or person-to-person relatedness. For example, Deigh describes moral rightness as a set of principles that are “understood to constitute a moral code that defines the duties of *men and women who live together in fellowship*.”<sup>38</sup> It is this relatedness that gives the moral “punch” which Baggett and Walls argue characterizes moral obligations and duties.<sup>39</sup> On a Christian worldview, morality is such that one person has particular obligations to another person, not to an abstract principle. A paradigmatic example of the application of this principle would be the taking of an innocent human life without proper justification (i.e., murder). The prohibition not to murder does not make murder wrong. Rather, the prohibition indicates that murder is wrong. A Non-Voluntarist Theory holds that murder is wrong because it is not consistent with God’s essential goodness. Furthermore, one is not obligated to the abstract principle “Murder is wrong.” Rather, one is obligated to another person. In this example, the moral obligation is grounded in the view that humans are made in the image of God, thus having intrinsic moral value. It is important to note that humanity’s intrinsic value is the not the explanatory stopping point for moral obligations and duties, but whatever part of God’s divine nature is entailed in the *Imago Dei*.

It was noted earlier that it seems entirely appropriate to ground moral value (goodness) in the divine nature, thereby appealing to an infinite good whose moral goodness is instantiated by finite goods. In this case, moral value’s ultimate basis is the person of God. Likewise, moral

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<sup>37</sup>Copan, “The Moral Argument,” 160.

<sup>38</sup>Deigh, “Ethics,” 286. Emphasis added.

<sup>39</sup>Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, 156.

rightness' ultimate basis is the person of God. Consequently, humanity's moral obligations are constituted by God's divine nature. This conception of moral obligations and duties is more consistent with the biblical narrative as well. For example, Cain was held accountable for murdering Abel even though there was no specific prohibition. The pagan nations of Canaan were held accountable for their sins even though there was no particular command issued by God to the Canaanites. Even the New Testament's ethic describes the Gentiles' moral life as one that is lived without the law, but is enough to make them morally accountable to the law that was written on their hearts.<sup>40</sup>

This approach to the Euthyphro Dilemma is a distinctively non-voluntarist explanation for objective moral obligations and duties, and yet it does not necessarily require the Christian theist to affirm the existence of a moral standard that is logically prior to or independent of God. It certainly does not require one to affirm Atheistic Moral Platonism. This approach merely requires the Christian theist to affirm the existence of a moral standard that is logically prior to or independent of God's commands. This standard is God himself.

#### Apologetic Effectiveness

The Euthyphro Dilemma is a challenge to a theistic concept of ethics and presumably, requires the theist to abandon something essential to Christian theism. Thus, the Christian must respond to this challenge with a defensive apologetic. He may respond to the dilemma in one of two ways. First, he may seek to expose the dilemma as a false dilemma by providing a third way. Second, he may embrace one of the horns of the dilemma. The voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma affirms that God's commands constitute moral values, obligations, and duties. The non-voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro dilemma affirms that God's commands do not constitute

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<sup>40</sup>Rom. 2:14-16.

moral values, obligations, and duties. Presented in this way, it is clear that the Euthyphro Dilemma is not a false dilemma, since one horn is a contradiction of the other. Therefore, the theist is forced to embrace one of the two horns.

Though embracing one of the two horns of the dilemma is necessary for providing an effective apologetic, is not sufficient for an effective apologetic. In other words, the Christian may select the correct horn of the dilemma, but not be clear in his methodology, or be able to explain salient moral features of reality. An effective apologetic must be clear in the method it employs, adequately respond to theological objections, and sufficiently explain salient moral features. While the Modified Divine Command Theory can boast of some strengths, ultimately it requires the Christian to abandon something essential to Christian theism. Also, the Modified Divine Command Theory creates unnecessary ambiguity by using terminology in a non-standard way. Finally, it is unable to explain various salient moral features adequately. On the other hand, a Non-Voluntarist Theory of moral values, obligations, and duties does not necessarily require one to abandon something essential to Christian theism. It uses terminology in a standard way, and is able to explain various salient moral features adequately. The apologetic effectiveness of contemporary evangelical formulation of the Modified Divine Command Theory was assessed using three criteria: methodological clarity; theological strength; and explanatory scope. The following will assess a Non-Voluntarist Theory using the same criteria in hopes to demonstrate its overall apologetic effectiveness.

### *Methodological Clarity*

The methodological clarity of contemporary evangelical reformulations of the Modified Divine Command Theory was an essential part of Chapter four's overall assessment. Assessing these theories' overall methodological clarity began with the theorists' moral argument for God's

existence; the theorists' use of divine command terminology; and the theorists' interpretation and application of the Euthyphro Dilemma and its implications. A Non-Voluntarist Theory of moral values, obligations, and duties clarifies the unnecessary ambiguity created by these various divine command theories by providing a more strategic use of the standard moral arguments for God's existence; providing a clearer use of divine command terminology; and a more faithful interpretation and application of the Euthyphro Dilemma.

Most evangelical attempts to respond to the Euthyphro Dilemma are preceded by a moral argument for God's existence. There are two basic moral arguments for God's existence utilized by evangelical divine command theorists: deductive moral arguments and abductive moral arguments. Craig, Copan, and Flannagan propose the deductive moral argument, while Baggett and Walls propose the abductive moral argument. The deductive moral argument for God's existence is strategically weaker than the abductive moral argument in two distinct ways.

First, the deductive moral argument as presented by Craig and Copan does not lend itself to their Divine Command Theory of moral obligation. Craig and Copan's argument is as follows:

1. If God did not exist, objective moral values and duties would not exist.
2. Objective moral values and duties do exist.
3. Therefore, God exists.<sup>41</sup>

Premise 1 seeks to establish a necessary relationship between objective moral values and duties and God's existence. However, their Divine Command Theory is one of moral obligations and duties, not moral values. That is, either Premise 1 should read, "If God did not exist, objective moral values would not exist," or it should read "If God's commands did not exist, then objective moral duties would not exist." Craig, Copan, and Flannagan would obviously choose the former

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<sup>41</sup>Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 495.

since their argument is not an argument for the existence of God's commands, but God himself. This leads to the second objection.

The deductive argument for God's existence requires the non-theist to concede too much without proper justification. The first premise has been charged with being circular since God, on their distinctly Anselmian conception, has necessary existence. This is not to say that God does not exist necessarily, only that if he does exist the first premise of the deductive argument for God's existence may be seen as circular. This is one of the strategic reasons that Baggett and Walls "prefer an abductive moral argument."<sup>42</sup>

Baggett and Walls' abductive argument for God's existence is one that seeks the best explanation for "a set of salient [moral] facts requiring explanation."<sup>43</sup> The abductive argument agrees on the fact that there are certain moral facts in reality, and invites other competing explanations into the realm of possibility. In this way, it is much more strategic than the deductive argument. However, the primary weakness of the abductive argument for God's existence is that God's existence is one of many possible explanations, even if it is thought to be the best. Furthermore, while the strength of the abductive argument is its ability to establish common ground with the non-theist, the God of Baggett and Walls' abductive argument is a God whose commands constitute moral obligations. This feature of their abductive argument may cause the non-theist to not seriously consider this explanation for the already conceded set of salient facts required explanation.

The best strategy, in terms of overall apologetic effectiveness, appears to be the abductive moral argument for God's existence. This is not to say that deductive moral arguments for God's

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<sup>42</sup>Baggett and Walls, *God and Cosmos*, 67.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 15.

existence are not sound, only that they are not as strategic. A Non-Voluntarist Theory of moral values, obligations, and duties proposes that God is the best explanation for morality and does not require the non-theist to implicitly or explicitly affirm that God is a necessary condition for morality prior to affirming the existence of objective moral values, obligations, and duties. What is more, the Non-Voluntarist Theory does not require the non-theist to affirm that God's commands constitute one's moral obligations and duties. Rather, it proposes God's existence as the best explanation for moral obligations and duties. One may wonder how this is any more appealing to the non-theist than a divine command concept of God's relationship to morality. Its appeal is found precisely in its explanatory scope and power of the salient facts. Furthermore, it is able to explain these facts without falling victim to the various challenges associated with the Euthyphro Dilemma.

Contemporary evangelical modified divine command theories are constructed on a particular interpretation of what Adams has dubbed the "modified divine command theory of ethical wrongness."<sup>44</sup> Of course, Adams understands that the Standard Divine Command Theory is not merely a theory of moral obligations. He notes, "This restriction of the scope of the Divine Command Theory to the realm of obligation may be contrary to the expectations of some readers. Much of the discussion of divine command theories in analytical philosophy of religion has assumed that they would be intended to explain the nature of all values."<sup>45</sup> Chapter 3 was dedicated to tracing the historical development of Divine Command Theory and how it was understood by its proponents and opponents. Adams appeals to philosophers such as Locke, Cumberland, and Pufendorf as examples of divine command theories of obligation which appeal

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<sup>44</sup>Adams, "A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness," 462.

<sup>45</sup>Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 251.

to a standard of moral value that is independent of God's commands. Adams shift to moral obligation, as clever as it may be, is certainly not supported by the common historical conception of divine command ethics. Furthermore, it only serves to create ambiguity for those who read his position, and causes others to repeat the same mistake.

The Standard Divine Command Theory seeks to explain the ultimate basis of moral value and moral obligations and duties. It is not a semantical theory, meaning it does not attempt to explain the meaning of moral terms such as *good, bad, right, wrong, obligation, forbidden-ness, and permitted-ness*. What is more, it is not a theory of moral epistemology or moral accountability, but a theory of ultimate grounding. The question that the Standard Divine Command Theory seeks to answer is, what is the basis for moral values, moral obligations, and moral duties? Historically, standard divine command theorists have viewed God's commands as the basis for both moral values, obligations, and duties. Adams' approach weakens the argument's overall apologetic effectiveness because it strips the Standard Divine Command Theory of that which makes it a Divine Command Theory. Adams introduces unnecessary ambiguity, by his own admission, because this move is "contrary to the expectation" of his audience.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, this modification causes the Divine Command Theory to be self-defeating since it grounds moral value in God's divine nature, which ultimately determines the types of commands that God can issue. In other words, there appears to be an internal tension within the Modified Divine Command Theory as to whether it is God's command or God's divine nature that *ultimately* grounds rightness of a command. Finally, Chapter 4 has shown that many of the objections to the Standard Divine Command Theory are not escaped when modified to apply to moral obligations and duties.

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<sup>46</sup>Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 251.



By embracing a Non-Voluntarist Theory of moral values, obligations, and duties and abandoning all forms of Divine Command Theory, one can provide a metaethical and explanatory stopping point that is clear in its terminology, internally consistent, and explanatorily powerful. Obviously, Adams' *et al.* need only abandon the concept of God's commands constituting moral obligations to affirm the non-voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma. One potential reason that would dissuade such a move would be the alleged force of the non-voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma. Unfortunately, this perceived hurdle is based in a misinterpretation of the dilemma.

Chapter 2 was dedicated to providing a more accurate interpretation of the Euthyphro Dilemma. Unfortunately, both voluntarist and non-voluntarist alike commonly miss the force of both the voluntarist and non-voluntarist horn of the dilemma. However, there are a few preliminary remarks that bear repeating regarding the nature of the Euthyphro Dilemma as it relates to theism in general. The Euthyphro Dilemma is primarily a challenge associated with a particular view of divine entities. Socrates asks Euthyphro to provide a foundation for piety, precisely because he suspects that it is not based in the wills of the Greek Gods. This is evident given Euthyphro's varied attempts to satisfy Socrates. Eventually, both Socrates and Euthyphro agree that a working definition of piety is that which all of the gods love. It is important to keep in mind that even if all the gods love charity, for example, they could just as easily hate it from one moment to the next. This is a distinct feature of the Greek pantheon. It is within this context that the dilemma was offered, and it is within this context that it is most powerful. However, when ripped from its original context, and applied to Christianity, one wonders if a unified immutable divine will is susceptible to the dilemma at all. Nevertheless, if one is justified in applying the Euthyphro Dilemma to Christian theism, it is clearly a metaethical challenge.

Socrates is clear that he is not concerned with examples of piety, or the meaning of the word pious, but the nature of piety. Therefore, when modernized, the Euthyphro Dilemma is a challenge to the nature or basis of moral values, obligations, and duties.

Craig, in particular, often claims to split the horns of the dilemma by grounding moral value in the divine nature. Of course, this implies that Craig understands the Euthyphro Dilemma to be merely a challenge to moral value. Unfortunately for Craig, the Euthyphro Dilemma is also a challenge to moral obligations as well. For example, the Euthyphro Dilemma could be applied to right action by asking if an action is right because God commands it, or does God command it because it is right. The modified divine command theorist has one of two options. Either ground moral obligations in something other than God's commands or fall prey to the Arbitrariness and Vacuity Objections as applied to moral obligations. The temptation is to ground moral obligations in something other than God's commands. This is a shift that the modified divine command theorist easily makes when the Euthyphro Dilemma is applied to moral value. Craig avoids this move because he holds that affirming non-voluntarism in this way would be nothing short of affirming Atheistic Moral Platonism.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, he introduces the final misconception of the Euthyphro Dilemma.

Affirming the non-voluntarist horn of the dilemma does not commit the Christian to the existence of a standard of moral value, obligations, and duties that are independent of God. It commits the Christian to the existence of a basis of moral values, obligations, and duties that are independent of God's *commands*. There is no need to split the horns of the dilemma. The Christian can easily embrace a non-voluntarist account of moral obligations and duties without grounding moral obligations and duties in something logically prior to or independent of God.

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<sup>47</sup>Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 178.

Embracing the non-voluntarism horn provides a more effective apologetic since it abandons all forms of Divine Command Theory, and accurately interprets, applies, and responds to the Euthyphro Dilemma. In addition to a clearer methodology, a Non-Voluntarist Theory of moral values, obligations, and duties provides a stronger theological position.

The Euthyphro Dilemma is intended to cause the Christian to abandon something essential to Christian theism. Consequently, the Euthyphro Dilemma is primarily a theological challenge. However, because one's response becomes a defense for a particular area of the Christian worldview, the Euthyphro Dilemma is an apologetic challenge as well. The theological objections associated with the Euthyphro Dilemma have been consistently referred to as the Arbitrariness Objection and the Vacuity Objection precisely because they challenge some theological point essential to Christian theism. Therefore, an acceptable solution to the Euthyphro Dilemma must be one that embraces one of the two horns without requiring the Christian to abandon something essential to Christian theism. It has been demonstrated that the Modified Divine Command Theory is not able to adequately respond to Arbitrariness and Vacuity Objections as applied to moral obligations and duties without causing the Christian to abandon something essential to Christian theism. On the other hand, a Non-Voluntarist Theory of moral values, obligations, and duties is able to save theistic ethics from the Euthyphro Dilemma all while maintaining a strong theological position. The following will provide a thorough response to the Arbitrariness Objection and the Vacuity Objection from the perspective of a Non-Voluntarist Theory of moral obligations and duties.

The Arbitrariness Objection is classically associated with the voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma. If the Christian wishes to affirm that an action is morally good/right because God commands it, then this would mean that the act in question has no moral qualities

until God commands or prohibits that act. Rachels offers a classic example of this view. He notes, “According to Exodus 20:16, God commands us to be truthful. On this option, the *reason* we should be truthful is simply that God requires it. Apart from the divine command, truth telling is neither good nor bad...But this leads to trouble, for it represents God’s commands as arbitrary. It means that God could have given *different* commands just as easily.”<sup>48</sup>

What is interesting is that modified divine command theorists appeal to God’s divine nature as necessarily good, which is intended to avoid the arbitrariness objection. However, this introduces a new dilemma. If God’s nature is the ultimate explanation for the moral content of an action, then they are not divine command theorists after all. However, if a divine command itself is the ultimate explanation for the moral content of the action, then it has no moral content until God commands or prohibits the act. According to Rachels’ observation, the Modified Divine Command Theory claims that truthfulness is morally good because it “images” the infinite good, but it is not morally obligatory until God commands it. In this case, God could just as easily command one to lie, and the act of lying would be obligatory. The Modified Divine Command Theory might claim that God had morally adequate reasons for commanding one to lie, but then the morally adequate reasons become the basis for the obligations, not God’s commands.

A Non-Voluntarist Theory of moral obligations and duties avoids the Arbitrariness Objection in a similar way that the Modified Divine Command Theory avoids the Arbitrariness Objection as applied to moral value. First, on a Non-Voluntarist Theory, commands are not right-making, but right-indicating. It is not that God’s command to tell the truth makes truth telling right, but indicates that there is a more transcendent basis for one’s obligation to tell the truth. Truth telling is considered a material/immanent norm, that is grounded in some

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<sup>48</sup>Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 42.

transcendent/formal norm. Because personhood is a necessary condition for obligations, the basis for this transcendent/formal norms is most likely something other than a non-personal command. Furthermore, this personal basis must be a necessary basis if it is to avoid potential arbitrariness. A Non-Voluntarist Theory of moral obligations and duties can ground the transcendent/formal norms in the same way that the Modified Divine Command Theory grounds moral values, in God. Truth telling then is good and right because it reflects or resembles God's character. Therefore, the moral obligations to tell the truth is not arbitrary, but grounded in the necessary existence of God. This conception of moral obligations is altogether different from the Modified Divine Command Theory, which holds that truth telling is neither right nor wrong prior to God's command. It is the command that provides the basis for moral obligations and duties. On a Non-Voluntarist Theory, God's commands serve an epistemic function and are indicative of one's obligations. Rather than God's commands, God himself is the basis for moral obligations and duties.

The Vacuity Objection is also classically associated with the voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma. If the Christian wishes to affirm that an action is morally good/right because God commands it, then this would mean that God's goodness/rightness is reduced to an empty claim. Once again Rachels clarifies the challenge. He adds, "If we accept the idea that good and bad are defined by reference to God's will, this notion is deprived of any meaning. What could it mean to say that God's commands are good? If 'X is good' simply means 'X is commanded by God,' then 'God's commands are good' would mean only 'God's commands are commanded by God'—an empty truism."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 42-43.

The modified divine command theorist claims that in terms of moral value, the ultimate metaphysical and explanatory stopping point is God's divine nature. Therefore, modified divine command theorists claim that 'X is good' simply means 'X images or resembles God's divine nature.' Therefore, the claim 'God's commands are good' simply means that 'God's commands image or resemble God's divine nature.' However, this is not the full extent of the Vacuity Objection. The modified divine command theorist claims that 'X is right' simply means 'X is commanded by God.' Therefore, to say that 'God's commands are right,' or that 'God is right,' simply means 'God's commands are commanded by God,' and 'God is commanded by God.' The former claim is susceptible to the Vacuity Objection, and the latter claim the modified divine command theorist denies; claiming that God does not have moral obligations since he does not issue commands to himself. The modified divine command theorist must ground moral obligations and duties in something other than God's commands if the Christian is to avoid the Vacuity Objection as applied to moral obligations.

A Non-Voluntarist Theory of moral obligations and duties avoids the Vacuity Objection in a similar way that it avoided the Arbitrariness Objection. Since divine commands are not right-making, but right-indicating, it is able to resolve Rachels' challenge. If one were to accept the idea that moral obligations and duties are based in the divine nature, then moral rightness has a non-arbitrary, and rich meaning. If 'X is right' simply means 'X resembles the divine nature,' the 'God's commands are right' would simply mean that 'God's commands reflect his divine nature.' A non-voluntarist response to the Arbitrariness Objection and the Vacuity Objection provides a significantly stronger theological position than the Modified Divine Command Theory. By abandoning the voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma, the Christian is able to

embrace non-voluntarism without—as Craig puts it—affirming Atheistic Moral Platonism.<sup>50</sup> By removing these two objections, a non-voluntarist response offers a more robust conception of God. Providing a clear method and strong theological position—as noted earlier—is not enough to satisfy the overall goal of Christian apologetics. Any theistic conception of ethics must also be able to reply to various objections that accompany the Euthyphro Dilemma.

### *Explanatory Scope*

It is not enough for a theory to be methodological clear and theological strong, it must also be sufficiently broad in its explanatory scope. This means that the theory must be able to reach beyond the Euthyphro Dilemma's immediate metaethical objection and address the various philosophical objections associated with the non-voluntarist horn of the dilemma. These objections include the Epistemic Objection, the Moral Authority Objection, the Moral Autonomy Objection, the Abhorrent Command Objection, and the Objection to Commands with No Apparent Moral Component.

The Epistemic Objection addresses one's ability to recognize moral value and moral obligations. If the modified divine command theorists are correct, and divine commands constitute one's moral obligations, then it seems to presuppose that one would need to be aware of the divine command in order to act rightly. The Epistemic Objection can take many forms, but one particular objection sets the stage for many others. What if one can know—with a high degree of certainty—that murder is morally bad and morally wrong without believing in God or being issued a command from God? Craig notes that a divine command conception of ethics is not required to address epistemic objections since the Euthyphro Dilemma is a metaethical

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<sup>50</sup>Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 178.

challenge.<sup>51</sup> However, a proper response to the Epistemic Objection is needed for the theory to remain internally consistent. As Baggett and Walls note, “Without good answers to such questions, no full-fledged defense of Divine Command Theory would be complete, and no moral argument of a voluntarist could fully work.”<sup>52</sup>

Despite Craig’s observation mentioned above, others have argued that divine commands are a type of speech act that requires some form of communication from commander to the commanded by way of the command. This necessarily entails some knowledge of the command. Morriston notes, “In order to successfully command, one must *deliver* it to its intended recipients. This brings us right back to the problem of the reasonable nonbeliever.”<sup>53</sup> Copan and Flanagan argue that one’s belief in God or God’s commands has no bearing on whether an actual command has been issued.<sup>54</sup> While belief in God or God’s commands may or may not affect the recipients’ standing as ‘receiver,’ the question is whether or not knowledge or awareness of the command has added value to an obligation that a reasonable nonbeliever already discerned. In other words, if a nonbeliever is aware of an obligation prior to the command, then the command becomes superfluous. The obvious conclusion is that in some cases God’s command does not necessarily add obligatory value when the obligation has been discovered independently. This appears to be entirely consistent with Paul’s claim in Romans 2:

For it is not hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They

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<sup>51</sup>Craig, “This Most Gruesome Guest,” 170-171.

<sup>52</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 35.

<sup>53</sup>Wesley Morriston, “The Moral Obligations of Reasonable Non-believers: A Special Problem for Divine Command Meta-ethics,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 65, no. 1 (2009): 3.

<sup>54</sup>Copan and Flanagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide*, 155.



show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them...<sup>55</sup>

Craig, Copan, Flannagan, Baggett, and Walls affirm that the nonbeliever can have a knowledge of right and wrong apart from the commands of God. However, this seems—for the reason mentioned above—to be at odds with a Divine Command Theory since the non-believer might have a knowledge of and reasons for fulfilling a moral obligation regardless of a divine command.

A Non-Voluntarist Theory of moral obligations avoids the Epistemic Objection, or at least the problem of internal inconsistency, because it views God's commands as right-indicating rather than right-making. It does not require the nonbeliever to be cognizant of a particular command in order to have some awareness of moral obligations and duties. What is more, this theory can account for the nonbeliever's ability to recognize not only moral good and evil but also moral right and wrong without a preceding command. Since, even the nonbeliever was made in the image of God, and the image of God entails the human conscience as one of its many characteristic, then the nonbeliever is capable of recognizing these moral qualities. The commands of God simply serve to provide clarity to the fuller meaning of moral goodness and moral rightness.

The Moral Authority Objection asserts that if one is able to recognize moral value and moral obligations independently, it implies that God's commands are superfluous at best, and lack moral authority at worst. The objection principally denies that God has added moral value when it comes to one's moral obligations. The modified divine command theorists claim that God's character, knowledge, and role as creator grant the sort of moral authority needed for his commands to constitute one's moral obligations. It is at this point that that modified command

theorist is most consistent. If God's commands constitute one's obligations and are necessarily superlative in every way, then he is the most likely candidate for moral authority, and his commands would be binding and authoritative. However, this conclusion is not unique to the Modified Divine Command Theory.

On a non-voluntarist view, God's commands are right-indicating rather than right-making. Therefore, God's commands may serve to clarify one's understanding of what intuitively seems morally good and morally right. Furthermore, God's commands may correct one's misconceptions of moral good/evil and moral right/wrong. This perspective can also appeal to a person who must have more moral insight, is more morally good, and acts in accordance with moral goodness. Indeed, the God of the Bible does not simply have more moral insight, but perfect moral insight. He is not merely more morally good, but the standard of moral goodness. Finally, He does not *merely* act, but acts in accordance with his moral perfection. If God's divine nature is the basis for goodness, and it is good to obey God's commands, then God is the most appropriate moral authority.

The Moral Autonomy Objection is also related to the Epistemic Objection. If a divine command conception of moral obligations is correct, and one cannot recognize moral values and moral obligations, then the theory seems to undermine the individual's own moral autonomy. Baggett and Walls describe the challenge from the objector's point of view when they observe, "Rather than carefully thinking through issues on their own, voluntarists simply consult the relevant command or allegedly sacred text to find their marching orders."<sup>56</sup> If God's commands constitute one's moral obligations, this sort of response appears warranted. In any given situation, the one who wishes to make accurate moral judgments would see the prudence behind

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<sup>56</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 35.

consulting with God's moral code. However, one might argue that this could cause a type of obsession with ensuring that one's actions did not unintentionally break one of God's commands. In addition, if God's commands constitute one's moral obligations, what is to be done when one finds oneself in a situation that is not addressed by a particular command or set of commands? Unless one relies upon some degree of moral autonomy, their ability to make accurate moral assessments is crippled.

On a non-voluntarist view, God's commands are meant to draw one's attention to transcendent moral truths that assist in developing a person in the way they relate to God primarily and mankind secondarily. God's commands are not ends in and of themselves but a means to a much greater end; one's moral development. Therefore, moral decision making may not be as binary as obey or disobey, but rather something more inclusive. Perhaps this view is more akin to what Paul had in mind when he instructed the Corinthians by saying "Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."<sup>57</sup> This framework allows for moral some moral freedom and autonomy since the law can be seen not as the end itself, but as a tool to accomplish a much greater end.

The Abhorrent Command Objection is a particularly potent one since it poses both a theoretical and practical threat. The theoretical objection entertains the hypothetical counterfactual of God issuing a command that is morally repugnant. Objectors will often refer to acts such as murder, torturing babies for fun, or some form of gratuitous cruelty as potential commands that God could issue. They claim that if God's commands make an action morally

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<sup>57</sup>2 Cor. 3:4-6 (ESV).

right, and God issues an abhorrent command, then one would be obliged to carry that action out. The practical objection refers to various biblical examples where God appears to issue alleged abhorrent commands. Therefore, what begins with theory ends with a potential practical application in the Christian worldview. Of course, if God were to issue an abhorrent command, then he would not be worthy of praise.

The Standard Divine Command Theory affirms that if God commanded gratuitous cruelty—although Ockham held this to be an impossibility—that gratuitous cruelty would not only be good, but obligatory. The Modified Divine Command Theory grounds moral value in the necessary, unchanging, morally perfect divine nature. In terms of moral obligations, the standard and modified formulations hold that actions such as murder, adultery, and gratuitous cruelty do not have moral rightness or wrongness until God commands or prohibits the action.<sup>58</sup> Granted, these sort of actions may have negative moral value (i.e., they are evil), but would not be morally binding in any way.

A Non-Voluntarist Theory of moral obligations entails grounding moral value in the divine nature, and agrees with the modified divine command theorist that these actions have negative moral value precisely because they utterly fail to measure up to God's moral perfect character. However, the Non-Voluntarist Theory disagrees that these actions do not have the property of moral wrongness prior to God's command. It is just because these acts fail to correspond with God's perfect goodness, that they are morally wrong. Thus, because of his morally perfect nature, God is incapable of issuing commands that are inconsistent with his goodness and rightness. While this response addresses the theoretical objection, it still must be reconciled with the practical objection.

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<sup>58</sup>Copan and Flanagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide*, 163.

Objectors refer to various biblical examples of alleged abhorrent commands. These examples often include the treatment of women, the treatment of slaves, the Canaanite genocide, the flood in Genesis 6, and the binding of Isaac. In each case, regardless of whether one holds a particular theistic ethical theory, addressing such issues is a matter of exegesis, and is reduced to the interpretation of the text. The binding of Isaac serves as perhaps the most infamous example. According to Baggett and Walls, Adams' does not view the binding of Isaac as a historical event, and so he neatly navigates this issue.<sup>59</sup> Copan views God's command as a test, speculating that God does not intend for Abraham to follow through on the act.<sup>60</sup> Baggett and Walls do not take a stance on the historicity of the account, but instead, maneuver around it by referring the fact that God sent his only Son as a sacrifice for sins.<sup>61</sup> While each philosopher has his own interpretative method, each seems to appeal to the atoning death of Jesus to somehow soften the blow of the fact that God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son. This criticism is not meant to claim that there is not a deep and meaningful connection between Abraham not withholding his only son and God not withholding his only Son. It is merely meant to suggest that this correlation does not answer the objection.

A Non-Voluntarist Theory can claim that God's command to Abraham did not *create* some obligation for Abraham, but was meant to *indicate* a more transcendent/formal norm grounded in God himself. God's covenant with Abraham was one that was based upon the faithfulness of God and his promise for an heir in Isaac. It is easy to conceive that Abraham could have viewed Isaac as the means by which God would fulfill his promise, thus trusting in

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<sup>59</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 137.

<sup>60</sup>Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster*, 47.

<sup>61</sup>Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 137-138.

Isaac rather than God. Perhaps, God's command was to indicate that the morally right way of relating to God is to lovingly and freely submit to him in trust to fulfill his promise. In other words, God's command indicated that it is morally good to obey and exercise faith in God. It appears that this is that type of obedience and faith that Abraham ultimately displayed. This non-voluntarist interpretation admits that God issued the command and intended for Abraham to obey, but it does not view the command as an abhorrent command given the transcendent right that it was meant to indicate.

In addition to God's commands that have an obvious moral component, God issues commands that have no apparent moral component. For example, God prohibits Adam and Eve from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.<sup>62</sup> He commands Abram to go into the land of Canaan.<sup>63</sup> Jesus commands his disciples to cast their nets on the right side of the boat.<sup>64</sup> Unlike the command, "Do not murder," these commands do not have an apparent moral component. The Standard Divine Command Theory and the Modified Divine Command Theory hold that God's commands constitute one's moral obligations and duties. In other words, the obligation to obey is based in the command itself. The proposed Non-Voluntarist Theory holds that God's commands are not right-making, but right-indicating. It proposes that moral values, obligations, and duties are grounded in the divine nature.

A potential objection to a Non-Voluntarist Theory of moral obligations and duties is how it accounts for divine commands with no apparent moral component. The divine command theorist might object in the following way. If God's commands are indicative of some moral

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<sup>62</sup>Gen. 2:17.

<sup>63</sup>Gen 12:1.

<sup>64</sup>John 21:6.

good, what does the non-voluntarist make of commands with no apparent moral component? The divine command theorist can object to non-voluntarism on the grounds that since there is no apparent moral component to the contents of the command itself, then there is no other ground available for the moral goodness of obeying.

A response to this objection needs to be clear regarding the moral components of a divine command. Either it is morally good to obey God's commands with no apparent moral component, or there is no moral quality vis-à-vis obeying or disobeying the command. If one were to claim that there is no moral component vis-à-vis obeying or disobeying the command, then the objection goes away since it is neither a problem for non-voluntarism, nor a relevant example for analysis of a divine command conception of ethics. It is not a problem for the non-voluntarist since it does not need a ground for a quality it does not have, and it is not a relevant example for analysis of a divine command conception of ethics since its moral quality just is that it is commanded by God. On the other hand, if the Christian were to claim that it is morally good to obey God's commands that have no apparent moral component, she must provide a proper basis for that obligation. The Christian may claim that it is morally good to obey a God whose divine nature is essentially and necessarily good. Thus, the obligation to obey is not grounded in God's command, but in his essentially and necessarily good nature.

Of course, the divine command theorist may object by asking whether it is good to obey God because he commands it, or does he command obedience because it is good? The non-voluntarist must affirm that God commands obedience because it is good. This does not commit the Christian to a standard of goodness independent of God. It merely commits the Christian to a standard of goodness independent of God's commands to obey. Thus, one should obey God's

commands that have no apparent moral component because it is morally good to obey a God who is essentially and necessarily good.

Even at this point, the Non-Voluntarist Theory provides a reasonable basis for moral value, moral obligations, and moral duties. It provides a clear methodology, a stronger theological position, and greater explanatory scope. When taken cumulatively, these three areas provide a more effective apologetic response to the Euthyphro Dilemma. Ultimately, it seeks to make room for the non-theist to view ethics in a theistic framework that does not illicitly strip her of her moral knowledge, authority, and autonomy.

### *Conclusion*

This project has sought to provide a better way for the Christian to respond to the Euthyphro Dilemma. It has suggested that by abandoning all forms of Divine Command Theory and embracing a Non-Voluntarist Theory of moral values, obligations, and duties the Christian theist can adequately respond to the Euthyphro Dilemma with stronger apologetic force with greater explanatory scope by clarifying unnecessary ambiguity, without requiring her to abandon essential doctrines of the Christian theism.

A correct understanding of the non-voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro Dilemma is essential to a Non-Voluntarist Theory. The non-voluntarist horn merely commits the Christian to affirming a basis of moral obligations and duties that is distinct from God's commands, not a standard that is distinct from God himself. Therefore, this theory avoids the claim that non-voluntarism is a tacit affirmation of Atheistic Moral Platonism. Non-voluntarism is able to affirm the Modified Divine Command Theory when it grounds moral value in the divine nature. In addition, it is able to affirm the strategic nature of the abductive argument for God's existence. However, it does not affirm that God's commands constitute one's moral obligations and duties.



Unlike the Modified Divine Command Theory, non-voluntarism claims that God's commands are right-indicating rather than right-making. Therefore, one must seek some other transcendent basis for moral obligations and duties. Just as the Modified Divine Command Theory views God as the transcendent basis for moral value, the Non-Voluntarist Theory views God as the transcendent basis for moral obligations and duties as well. Since obligations are relation dependent (i.e., obligations rely on a person to person relation), God's divine nature, which is personal, is the best explanation for moral obligation and duties.

A Non-Voluntarist Theory is to be desired above all forms of Divine Command Theory since it benefits from a clearer methodology, a stronger theological position, and a broader explanatory scope. Its methodology is clearer since it understands the historical position of Divine Command Theory, and uses the divine command terminology in a standard/historical manner. Furthermore, this position accurately understands the force of the Euthyphro Dilemma. There is no need for the Christian to attempt to split the horns of the dilemma, but merely embrace the non-voluntarist horn. In addition to its methodology being clearer, this theory takes a stronger theological stance. It can adequately respond to the Arbitrariness Objection and the Vacuity Objection as applied to moral obligations and duties. The Non-Voluntarist Theory avoids the Arbitrariness Objection in a similar way that the Modified Divine Command Theory avoids the Arbitrariness Objection as applied to moral value. First, non-voluntarism holds that God's commands are not right-making, but right-indicating. It is not that God's command to tell the truth makes truth telling right, but indicates that there is a transcendent basis for one's obligation to tell the truth. Truth telling is considered a material/immanent norm that is grounded in some transcendent/formal norm. Since personhood is a necessary condition for obligations, the transcendent/formal norm must be personal. Furthermore, it must be a necessary personhood

since it is meant to avoid potential arbitrariness. Consequently, truth telling is good and obligatory because it resembles the goodness of God. Since God is necessarily good, truth telling is not arbitrary.

This theory avoids the Vacuity Objection in a similar way that it avoids the Arbitrariness Objection. Since divine commands are not right-making, but right-indicating, the theory is able to resolve Rachels' challenge. If one were to accept the idea that moral right and moral wrong are defined by their resemblance to a good God, then moral rightness has a non-arbitrary, and rich meaning. If 'X is right' simply means 'X resembles a good God,' then 'God's commands are right' would simply mean that 'God's commands resemble a good God.' In addition, this theory allows for God also to be considered just and righteous in a non-vacuous way. Since God is bound by his divine nature, his actions necessarily resemble his goodness.

In addition to a clearer methodology and a stronger theological position, this theory provides a broader explanatory scope. Non-voluntarism is able to respond to the various ethical objections associated with the Euthyphro Dilemma. These objections include the Epistemic Objection, the Moral Authority Objection, the Moral Autonomy Objection, the Abhorrent Command Objection. In addition, it is able to more adequately answer the potential objection to commands with no apparent moral component. At each objection, non-voluntarism provides a reasonable basis for moral value, obligations, and duties that makes room for the non-theist to view ethics in a theistic framework that does not illicitly strip her of her moral knowledge, authority, and autonomy. In other words, it does not require the non-theist to make non-necessary adjustments to her view in order to entertain the idea of theistic ethics. This is an extremely important feature of any defensive apologetic. If the goal of apologetics is to provide a

winsome case for the truth of the Christian worldview, the least cumbersome pathway is the best.

A Non-Voluntarist theory of moral values, obligations, and duties accomplishes this goal.

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