

December 2021

In the Wake of Euthyphro's False Dilemma

Gregory S. McKenzie

Liberty University, gmckenzie1@liberty.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/eleu>



Part of the Ancient Philosophy Commons, Applied Ethics Commons, Christianity Commons, Comparative Methodologies and Theories Commons, Epistemology Commons, History of Christianity Commons, and the Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons

Recommended Citation

McKenzie, Gregory S.. 2021. "In the Wake of Euthyphro's False Dilemma." *Eleutheria* 5, (2).
<https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/eleu/vol5/iss2/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Rawlings School of Divinity at Scholars Crossing. It has been accepted for inclusion in Eleutheria by an authorized editor of Scholars Crossing. For more information, please contact scholarlycommunications@liberty.edu.

In the Wake of Euthyphro's False Dilemma

Abstract

All moral apologists, at one time or another, engage with the Euthyphro dilemma and all theologians engage, at one point or another, the issue of continuity or discontinuity of the Mosaic Covenant and Torah in general. The general view among apologists is that correct theology can be determined by its logical consistency and explanatory power considering philosophical, existential, and scientific principles. This study examines how answering the Euthyphro dilemma as a false dilemma, which is a common position among apologists actually produces theological contradictions primarily in the realm of theology proper and specifically immutability, issues in hamartiology and an improper distinction between sin and morality, and ultimately in Torah discontinuity. This study therefore, examines how contemporary theologies have fallen victim to the venom of Euthyphro's dilemma as a result of their theological commitments and presuppositions, which unintentionally sets up an intellectual and theological barrier to belief. This examination shows that the consistent application of the Euthyphro's false dilemma ultimately leads to Mosaic Continuity as the *theo-logical* conclusion of marrying moral apologetics and theology.

Keywords

Apologetics, Theology, Dispensationalism, Covenant Theology, Continuity, Discontinuity, One-Torah Theology, Immutability, Euthyphro's Dilemma, Moral Apologetics, Torah

Cover Page Footnote

Ph.D. Theology and Apologetics (Projected Completion 2023)

This paper is an attempt to find the *Theo-logical* conclusion of, what is in my humble opinion, some of the best apologetic work ever done. That is the answering of Euthyphro's Dilemma as a false dilemma.¹ While the apologetic work of answering Euthyphro certainly removes an intellectual barrier to belief, it seems that in answering the dilemma, the results actually create a *Theo-logical* conundrum, in essence, creating another barrier to belief because of the propositions of theologies themselves. The most prevalent today, and most relevant to this paper being the propositions of evangelical dispensationalism and reformed/covenant theology. As such, these theologies seem to disagree with the apologetics in regard to the answering of Euthyphro as a false dilemma.

While the differences between these two major theological strands can be quite stark, mostly falling along the free will (Arminian) /sovereignty of God (Calvinist) issue. What they have, *mostly* in common, is some form of discontinuity of the Mosaic Covenant and the Law of Moses. I say *mostly*, because, the Reformed, particularly the Theonomist and Post-millennialists, proclaim at least some form of "Moral Law" continuity of the Mosaic Law.² Thus, the Ceremonial and Civil parts of the Mosaic Law, for the Reformed, are abrogated or changed. The Dispensationalist on the other hand claims that the Mosaic law (including the 10 commandments) are abolished for the newly established dispensation of the Law of Christ.³ But it is here, at the Law vs. Grace or Continuity vs. Discontinuity of the Mosaic Law debate that the venom of Euthyphro rears its ugly head *Theo-logically*. Although the apologists found an astute philosophical answer to Euthyphro's dilemma, the method of answering Euthyphro has not been applied, at least to my knowledge, to the theological understanding of the moral argument for God's from the perspective of God's immutability, sin vs. morality, and ultimately to the continuity issue. This paper seeks to do such an exercise. This paper, however, and unfortunately, only examines, what I believe are the *Theo-logical* implications of this method. Thus, using logic and apologetics we can, possibly, determine the logical validity of our theologies. Simply put, if our theologies violate the laws of logic, and lose their explanatory power they should be reexamined (but we need not throw out the baby with the bath water). *This paper*

¹ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed., (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 181.

² See Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1984).; Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1982), 28-9.

³ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2016), 622-624.

is not a verse by verse defense for continuity of the Mosaic Law (which for all intents and purposes, the debate revolves around the Pauline Epistles), for that would be well beyond the scope of this paper. However, in the process this paper attempts to show, via the apologetic answer, Euthyphro's Dilemma (being a false dilemma), that continuity of the Torah is a logical and viable outcome that can overcome this final barrier to belief, that being Theo-logical incoherence with apologetics and in understanding the immutable nature of God.⁴ This paper simply uses the answer to Euthyphro's dilemma and applies it to contemporary theologies to show where the apologetics and theologies do not sync. For the various views on Torah continuity and related exegesis, one should view the resources found in footnote 5 that cover the theological spectrum from One-Torah theology, Pronomian Christianity, and "Hebraic Roots" (total continuity and applicability as allowed by our current *sitz im leben*), Covenant Theology's version of moral continuity, and dispensationalism (total discontinuity including the 10 commandments).⁵

The *Euthyphro* dilemma is well known in moral apologetics and moral philosophy. The perennial argument started with Plato and has been raging ever

⁴ This argument is moot should one simply bite the bullet, so to speak, in regard to Euthyphro's dilemma. To choose one or the other sides of Euthyphro's points renders the false dilemma option ineffective. But to be consistent, the apologist-theologian should not use the false dilemma in apologetics should they choose taking a side in the Euthyphro Dilemma (like Plato or C.S. Lewis).

⁵ For total continuity, probably some of the best work, is done by Tim Hegg of Torah Resource. His organization, *Torah Resource* provides both popular and academic level articles and books on Messianic "One-Torah" theology. See Tim Hegg, *Ten Persistent Questions: Why We Keep Torah* (Tacoma, WA: Torah Resource, 2013). Or visit Torahresource.com (accessed June 10, 2021); Other Popular and semi-academic level "Hebraic Roots" theology can be found at 119ministries.com, particularly their "Pauline Paradox" video series found at <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLo5QtZ1bPyYbLdyw2AnVKX9tm-b2YJFhQ> (date accessed June 10, 2021). From the Theonomist perspective, see Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed. For the Dispensational view, Fructenbaum's *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* is thorough and exhaustive. Fructenbaum's *Ariel Ministries* is a good source on Messianic-Evangelical Dispensationalism. On the Jewish roots of early Christianity see, Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996); Tom Holland, *The Contours of Pauline Theology: A Radical New Survey of the Influences on Paul's Biblical Writings* (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2010).; Ray A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity: From the End of the New Testament Period Until Its Disappearance in the Fourth Century* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press/The Hebrew University, 1992). Survey texts of dispensational, covenantal theology as well as the Law/Grace and Jewishness of Christianity would include Benjamin L. Merkle, *Discontinuity to Continuity: A Survey of Dispensational and Covenantal Theology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020).; Louis Goldberg, ed., *How Jewish is Christianity: Two Views on the Messianic Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003).; Stanley N. Gundry, ed., *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996).

since. Commonly, Christian moral philosophers and ethicists, and even secular moral philosophers, are bound to try and circumvent the venom of Euthyphro's dilemma.⁶ Essentially, anyone who attempts to explain ethics and morality have to deal with Plato and *Euthyphro*. We ignore it to our own chagrin.

While grounded in moral ontology and epistemology (whether or not morals or sin exists and how do we know), the stated goal of this paper is to move the argument from establishing the source of morality (Divine Command, Platonic, Naturalistic, or other) to *marrying theology and moral apologetics*. The view taken at the conclusion of this paper is that morality is grounded only in the eternal Law of God and can only be consistently understood by the continued validity of the Torah for believers today. Primarily, this paper shows how, considering YHWH's very nature of not changing (being immutable), any attempt to discontinue/abolish the Torah is to be poisoned by *Euthyphro's* dilemma.⁷ Arthur Pink said it best by saying, "Whatever the attributes of God were before the universe was called into existence, they are precisely the same now, and will remain so forever."⁸ So, can an immutable God issue temporary commands? If a command of God is temporary, is that law a direct and necessary reflection of his character or are those laws simply capricious and ultimately vicious?

The Euthyphro Dilemma

The dilemma found in Plato's dialogue goes as follows:

- 1) Either something is good because God wills it,
or
- 2) God wills something because it is good.

Immediately, the implications of this are that, if something is good because God wills it, then what is good is essentially *arbitrary*. God could have willed that hatred, murder, or rape be "good." That God might simply and arbitrarily command that something be good is implausible, because *perpetual* moral goods seem to be needed for any basic functioning of family and society! For, what if

⁶ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed., (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 181. David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 6-7, 39.; Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 42-3, 45, 47.; Erik J. Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 51, 53-67.

⁷ Jas. 1:17; Mal. 3:6; Ex. 3:14; Pss. 110:5, 119:8

⁸ Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in the Godhead* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1975), 35.

God simply decided one day to reverse his previous judgements? Humanity needs *permanent* commands and ones that are not arbitrary. But, going to the other side of the dilemma, if we insist that God wills something because it is good, this renders these goods independent of God, which obviously leads to the conclusion that God is not needed for morality at all.⁹ Of course, for any moral argument to say that God does not exist because we do not need God for morality is anathema to any believer, no matter their theological stripes.

The False Dilemma

Many moral Apologists have rightly insisted that the *Euthyphro* dilemma is actually a false dilemma. Morality, therefore, is dependent on divine initiative, but these moral demands are not arbitrary. The moral demands are *necessary* expressions of God's just and loving nature. In other words, *any* moral demands that God would make are *necessary* and *directly reflect* his perfect nature. Also, and most importantly, since God is good, *all* of his demands are therefore good and morally obligatory for humanity to follow. Any argument to the contrary would be logically impossible, like saying there exists a married bachelor or a square circle.¹⁰

One should note, that we are merely talking about a philosophical version of God, created by the moral argument. But what if we were to apply the same logic to YHWH, who is actually presented in the Scriptures? This is the goal of Christian moral apologetics, is it not?¹¹ Once the logical necessity of God for any type of moral knowledge is shown, then the goal is to show that YHWH is the one true God. This apologetic process is done typically by showing validity of

⁹ See Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 181 for a fuller explanation of *Euthyphro*.

¹⁰ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 181.

¹¹ This method is often called the Classical Apologetic method. It offers a "two-step" approach to apologetics. This method is championed by apologists and theologians like William Lane Craig, R.C. Sproul, and J.P. Moreland, First showing the existence of God, then showing the truth of Christianity. There are other methods in apologetics such as Reformed Epistemology, made popular by reformed philosopher Alvin Plantinga, which is essentially a version of another apologetics method known as Presuppositionalism whose proponents include Greg Bahnsen, Francis Schaeffer, and Van Til. A fourth method is similar to Classical Apologetics called Evidential Apologetics, as popularized by Gary Habermas' "minimum facts" which attempts to show God and Christianity by one step rather than two by showing the validity of the resurrection through the earliest Pauline and non-pauline creeds in the Apostolic Writings. For an overview of typically Christian apologetic methodology see Steven B. Cowan, ed., *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000).; An older discourse on apologetic methodology is outlined by Gordon R. Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims: Approaches to Christian Apologetics* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1976).

miracles, the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the historical reliability of the Apostolic writings, among other methods. This, of course, should bring the targeted individual to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. This is apologetic methodology 101.

Moral apologists, with their penchant for philosophy, should also expect a strict adherence to the Law of Contradiction as well. This would mean that their philosophical God which they produce, correctly, in showing how morality is only possible with God, is the same as YHWH! Philosophical God (α) is YHWH (α). In other words, α is α . Remember the basic laws of contradiction and identity: α cannot be both α and β simultaneously. If this were not the case, then apologists' arguments for the reliability of the Scriptures would be in direct contradiction with their philosophical stance. Therefore, the philosophical God *must* be the same as YHWH, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Immorality and Sin: Synonyms?

To begin however, it seems then, that the philosopher-theologian should be asking the question, if morality is universal and objective, then what do we make of sin as a logical category? For the philosophical God we have shown is one in which morality comes, but YHWH is concerned with righteousness. *If* they are the same God ($\alpha=\alpha$) then surely the sin of which YHWH is concerned with, and by grace forgives, has to be same as our philosophical God's definition of moral failure. If one commits a sin are they being immoral and if one is immoral are they sinning? To sin is to be immoral, is it not? Surely this is the case. But do the theologians agree? Is there a distinction to be made?

Culture and Epoch

If objective morality is to be objective it has to be at least to some degree perceived by all people at all times in human history.¹² Do contemporary theologies actually believe the apologists? Does this understanding span at all times and for all people? For instance, if dispensationalism is correct, during the dispensation of the law (and the millennial dispensation – See Is. 66 and Ez. 34-48), it is immoral *and* sinful to not observe the Sabbath, Moedim, food purity

¹² Moral apologists often account for perception to be in degrees and not necessarily equal across the whole spectrum of human existence (i.e. the existence of sociopaths and psychopaths) due to some physical or genetic impairment or mutation, or via the searing of the conscience in which it becomes easier to kill if you dehumanize your victim. See Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York, NY: Bay Back Books, 2009).;

laws (among other laws).¹³ If perception of sin *and* morality is not universal (i.e. culturally dependent, as in Israel) or time based (dispensations), then there are only two options. First, there are dueling standards (morality *or* sin). Said another way, there are multiple means (based on culture or time) of salvation and ultimately different moral standards. One for the Israelites, the Church, and the Goyim. Thus, morality and sin are not universal nor objectively perceived meaning by all peoples and at all times.

Belaboring the point further, do people today feel or recognize as if they acted immorally or sinfully, for eating pork or shrimp, or if one profaned the Sabbath? The question that has to be asked is this: is violating a commandment of God in the Torah immoral *and* sinful? For the “morality” that is perceived *universally* would never feel as if a wrong was committed for eating what is obviously “good” food (just ask anyone in the American South if they would give up shrimp and pulled pork). They do not view it as immoral nor sinful. A messianic observer of Torah would say that it is both immoral and sinful, but the majority of mainstream Christianity, violation of the Moedim, the Sabbath, food laws, etc. impart no immorality nor sin (because we live *today*).

Therefore, any theology that understands these commands to be abolished or put aside have to admit that at least in *some point in history* (either past or future) *these commands were/will be morally obligatory*. But that would lead us to the conclusion that moral reality can change at any point and time of God’s choosing. Thus, they are not really objective in the philosophical sense, but rather culturally (for the Hebrews/Israelites/Jews) and epochally relative (during the applicable dispensation).¹⁴

¹³ Dispensationalist contention is that God *dealt differently* with man during the said dispensations. As in, there is a different standard during the different dispensations. Perhaps better stated, God used different tests and standards on humanity. To deny this is to deny dispensationalism. Rules during one dispensation are not necessarily continued between the dispensations, but rather can be abrogated or superseded, except the promises to Israel those continue and are not superseded by the “Church,” but these promises are currently paused (prophetic postponement). For a supporting analysis of Prophetic Postponement see J. Randal Price, “Prophetic Postponement in Daniel 9 and Other Texts, in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, eds. Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1994), 133-159. For an overview of the differing regulations and dispensations see Renald E. Showers, *There Really is a Difference: A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 2017), 33-53. Dispensationalist also claim that physical Israel are the only ones partaking in the physical New Jerusalem for the 1000 years. Thus, they are the only ones required to do the Moedim and sacrifices of the millennial temple. The church is in heaven during this time and does not participate in said rules.

¹⁴ Is. 66 which is obviously a futurist eschatological text makes it clear that consumption of unclean meats (v.17) leads to destruction, and that the Moedim, Sabbath, and New Moons continue (v.23).

Can We Actually Separate Morality and Sin Philosophically and Theologically?

It is here where we find that any attempt to try and separate the two (morality and sin) would be fraught with apologetic and philosophical nightmares. Primarily because the immorality of the philosophical god (α) would not be the same as the sinfulness of the scriptural God (β). Thus violating the law of contradiction. Unless of course there are multiple means of salvation for different people (different for the Gentiles) in the various dispensations, or that the philosophical moral god is not YHWH. Of course, these options are untenable scripturally and philosophically.

The recourse then, is that YHWH has bestowed to all men, some *restraining laws*, a.k.a “the moral law.”¹⁵ These restraining laws (whether it is called “prevenient grace” or “common grace”), thus maintain the *minimum standard* and the means by which we can find the philosophical version of God, via the moral argument. One need not be a Christian to have this moral law, but this law is incomplete, because it lacks a comprehensive *sin* component. This incompleteness of the “moral law” would mean that all are born with some type of a *general morality* that needs to be completed, redeemed, or sanctified. Thus, this general restraining morality is a starting point, not a destination nor arbiter of total moral truth.

To bring this general law in sync with the full sanctified law, it seems that the universally perceived “moral law” is contained within the greater law that would include *all sins*. Thus, we find that we actually cannot separate the two, as the lesser is contained in the greater. They are actually one in the same, with one, the lesser, able to *restrain* the unregenerate, and the other, the greater, to fully sanctify the elect (i.e. to become like Christ). Historical analysis would show this to be the case, as there are many cultures and peoples with similar laws, yet most theologies would say they are still in sin for unbelief and conformity to uniquely

¹⁵ Arminian theological insights could be helpful here in that this is some form of prevenient grace. C.S. Lewis makes the point that “The doctrine of Total Depravity – when the consequence is drawn that, since we are totally depraved, our idea of good is worth simply nothing – may thus turn Christianity into a form of devil-worship.” *The Problem of Pain*, 29. To counter this Reformed theological anthropologists typically assert a version of *Pervasive Depravity*, meaning that everything is marred by sin, not necessarily totally incapable of knowledge about God (contra Barth), given that it is by grace that the knowledge we do have and the human conscience comes from God. Calvinists call this “Common Grace” rather than prevenient grace. See Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 150. Furthermore, the historical context in which Lewis is addressing is Barth's insistence of a God that is “wholly other” and humanity is totally incapable of knowing God. On this type of fideistic knowledge Lewis obviously disagrees.

Christian moral values.¹⁶ C.S. shows this commonality as “the Tao” in the *Abolition of Man*.¹⁷ So, to at least some general degree, the greater law is evident to all men. It is not bound by culture, time, or space. Apologetically and evangelistically, this should lead the observer of this lesser moral law to search out the *lawgiver* and all his requirements. Lewis says in a similar vein, that “God may be more than moral goodness: He is not less. The road to the promised land runs past Sinai. The Moral law may exist to be transcended: but there is no transcending it for those who have not first admitted its claims upon them...”¹⁸

Christianity, as such, tells people to repent of their sins (their moral failures). That is very well and good. That is very different than *knowing* that one has something to repent of (e.g. sins). C.S. Lewis says, “It is after you have realized there is a real Moral Law, and a Power behind the law, and that you have broken that law and put yourself wrong with that Power – it is after all this, and not a moment sooner, that Christianity begins to talk.”¹⁹ Thus, the recognition of *sinning* (as opposed to some naturalistic or merely philosophical “morality” or the lesser “moral law”) is the necessary result of moral inquiry (whether through deductive reasoning or abductive conclusions).²⁰ The two laws really have to be the same thing, as they come from the same person and ultimately for the same purpose (i.e. sanctification and righteousness). Finding YHWH and all of his commands (e.g. knowing sin), is thus an *a posteriori* realization after general moral reflection. This would be transcending the restraining laws and being

¹⁶ For instance, not committing idolatry which is part of the most basic moral demands of any Christian and codified by the *Shema* and further evidenced by the New Testament Creeds. Thus, the recognition that Jesus is Lord (Kurios/YHWH) is a moral demand of not committing idolatry is *required* for salvation. If it is a requirement, there exists an obligation, thus one has a moral obligation.

¹⁷ C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2001), 83-101. One should note that the historical similarity of these moral laws is essentially an inductive argument for universal morality.

¹⁸ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2001), 59-60. The distinction of “transcendence” however, needs to be resolved. As why the need for transcendence of the moral law when Sinai and the “moral law” are given by the same person? In this Lewis also shows his stance on the Euthyphro dilemma, in that he “emphatically embraces the first alternative.” (“That God commands certain things because they are right”). See *Problem of Pain*, 99. This would be the same as Plato (and contra Paley).

¹⁹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2001), 31.

²⁰ For the deductive moral argument see William Lane Craig’s work and debates. The abductive approach is best developed and expounded by David Baggett and Jerry Wells, *God and the Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (New York, NY: Oxford, 2016).

sanctified into the greater law (thus understanding sinfulness).²¹ Reiterating Lewis, that is the point when Christianity begins to talk. Therefore, if the result of our moral inquiry leads to YHWH, then our philosophical "moral law" god (α) and YHWH "lawgiver" (α) are indeed the same at all times and across all cultures. In that the so-called moral law, cannot be by definition different than the righteous requirements, otherwise there would be competing standards of righteousness.

The Venom of Euthyphro

However, let's grant the evangelical moral apologist the argument. They have made the case for the moral philosophical God and are now showing that this philosophical God is indeed YHWH. But here it should start becoming rather apparent that their apologetic methodology and their theology might be separated by a gulf. Now, if the philosophical God makes demands that are *necessary* reflections of his character (e.g. the false dilemma), but YHWH does not do the same, every moral apologist has just been bitten by *Euthyphro*. For God cannot make a demand that is *outside* of his nature. By necessity, *all* of his demands (i.e. laws) are reflections of his character (goodness) and cannot change (unless, of course, goodness can change). For even the philosophical God is immutable, supreme in all aspects. If God's moral character or his demands can change, then all apologists and theologians have to bite the bullet on Euthyphro, just like Plato and Lewis did. They choose number two in the dilemma.

What about the Law?

Besides Pronomian Christianity, certain strands of Messianic Judaism, and the "Hebrew Roots" movement, most of modern Christianity rejects either all of Torah (Dispensationalists) or portions and meanings of Torah (Reformed and Covenant theologians). Right away, however, an objection can be made by both Dispensationalists and Covenant theologians who would claim that the moral parts of the Torah have not been abolished or amended. Dispensationalists would go further than Covenant theologians by saying the Law of Christ (i.e. our current dispensation's and its moral law) is totally different than the Torah, but a moral law exists nonetheless. The Reformed theologian on the other hand, especially the Bahnsen-like theonomist would claim that the ceremonial and food purity laws, etc., have been abolished and it is simply the "moral law" of Moses that remains.

The result of this thinking, is that objective morality (the greater law) changed, primarily, as popularly understood, at the time of Christ's death and

²¹ See footnote 18 on Lewis' assertion of "transcendence" and the moral law.

resurrection (more on this in the following paragraphs).²² Of course, any change in the Law would necessitate that both Covenant and Dispensational theologies bite the bullet with regards to the *Euthyphro* dilemma. Because, if one was *morally required* to follow the demands of the Mosaic Law, but then they were abolished, that would mean that the commands were simply good because they were commanded by God and apparently *arbitrary* for societal coherence and acts of worship at a certain point in history. So, the logical conclusion is that the commands were “good” because God commanded them, thus point 1 of *Euthyphro*.

But interestingly, because of contemporary theological positions, there is a requirement to hold both sides of *Euthyphro*'s dilemma simultaneously! What this means for these theologies is that if the *character* of the Torah changed, as in, God no longer holds us accountable, except to the so-called “moral” components or the Law of Christ, this would either make 1) YHWH *not* the author of these moral components or, 2) they (the moral components) are the only true reflection of YHWH because these “moral laws” or the Law of Messiah are the only *permanent laws*. The rest of the commands, therefore, are *not actually* nor *ultimately* true reflections of God's character, but rather they are simply demands that He could or could not have issued. The abolished parts of the Torah are simply random laws that YHWH issued, to burden humanity with a set of laws that could never be accomplished, except by himself in the Messiah.²³ On the other hand, should the Law be totally and completely abolished for the Law of Christ, then YHWH's commands, whether it be the Law given at Mt. Saini (or any other dispensation) are simply capricious and only the Law of Christ is now the acceptable morality (which again will change in the coming dispensation).

Furthermore, this new morality (the Law of Christ), by Christianity's historical insistence, is that the new moral requirements are Pneumatological (by the Spirit). The issue with the Pneumatological emphasis, is that besides the obvious feed, house, clothe the poor, sick, widows, children (even the unregenerate do those things), the *range of moral convictions* is just as broad as eschatological theorizing. Additionally, if one needs the Holy Spirit to perceive the moral requirements of today (Messiah's Law), then are they actually truly

²² If God demands obedience to his commands, even if they are arbitrary, deontological ethics would make following the demands, such as sabbath, food laws, etc, a moral duty. Thus, morality had to change at Christ's death and resurrection. For if these are abolished, then we are no longer morally required to follow them.

²³ Of course this violates a Deut. 30:11-14 which is repeated in Rom. 10:5-8. The concept of “ought implies can” means that the demands are not too hard for us to do. This does not mean that we would be able to do them perfectly, human fallibility automatically precludes such an understanding of being perfect.

objective? For without the Spirit, these moral requirements (the Law of Messiah) are not perceivable, thus not universal nor objective. Rather, they are subjective and relative based on one's regeneration (e.g. culturally dependent and being part of the universal Church). However, this conclusion is actually a step too far and can be circumvented by noting that we are simply back at square one with a lesser law (known by the unregenerate) and the greater law (for the sanctification of the saints), except this time, it's a different morality than the morality before Christ, because the moral obligations are different (Sabbath, Moedim, food purity, etc.).

As for the *range of moral convictions*, take for instance, the Spirit convicts a group of independent fundamentalist dispensationalists that smoking, alcohol, and dancing are evil/sinful (morally wrong to do if one is a Christian); while the so-called "young, restless and reformed" congregant sips a nice bourbon while getting a tattoo without blinking an eye. Both are "led by the Spirit" coming to essentially *mutually exclusive* conclusions. Another example is One-Torah theology's adherence to the Food provisions found in Lev. 11, while the vast majority of historical Christianity rejects those laws as they are thought to be nonbinding *today*. Both claim to be led by the Spirit and are coming to mutually exclusive conclusions. In fact, Zondervan's Counterpoints series has about 40 books on the various views held on just about every topic in Christianity. Certainly, a whole heap of mutually exclusive results are contained within.²⁴ This, of course, is a philosophical impossibility.²⁵ For our immutable philosophical god and YHWH cannot actually give nor command mutually exclusive alternatives.²⁶ This intrinsic impossibility of multiple moral/sin and theological truth claims is indeed a barrier to belief to an outsider and unregenerate person (and insider alike - considering the precipitous decline in church attendance over the last 50 years, but that is another paper). In short, the various voices, saying all sorts of different things, indicates a spirit, or the Spirit, saying multiple things, or human perception (either via hardness of heart of conscience searing) not able to accurately perceive the moral and righteous requirements as issued "by the Spirit." Either way it seems to be a significant barrier to moral epistemology and faith in general.

²⁴ See

<https://zondervanacademic.com/products/series/counterpoints:%20bible%20and%20theology?sort=newest&amnt=72&view=grid> (Accessed June 9, 2021).

²⁵ This is the charge that Roman Catholicism lays at the feet of the Protestant Reformation. Since the rejection of the monoepiscopacy, the number of doctrines, convictions, and Christian "moral" (perhaps moralist) expression has extravagantly multiplied. It is a legitimate attack and is a problem that needs addressing. This paper simply addresses the philosophical impossibility of such a state given that the Spirit is *echad* with the Father and Son.

²⁶ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001), 18.

The Defenestration of Ancient Philosophy: A Change at the Cross

Before looking at the different problems discussed above, a problem occurs right away and undermines the very concept of objective moral truth based on theological propositions. This being, that every human *before* Christ's death and resurrection had a certain type of morality/sin. Then, those *after* the cross had another type of morality/sin. Again, remember that the popularly understood *non-permanent* laws of the Old Testament still imparted a *moral obligation* to follow (hence the death penalty for violation of it; Sin = death and the very reason Messiah had to sacrifice himself). Of course, should there exist one type of morality before the Cross and a different type after, this would defenestrate all of ancient philosophy, particularly the Greek classics (Plato, Aristotle – perhaps making this paper moot?) and more importantly Moses's, David's, Solomon's and the Prophet's commentaries on morality/sin. For, their commentaries and insights on *moral obligation are no longer valid*. There can be no continuity of any of *their perceptions* because the moral components they were required to observe are no longer. Of course, this is impossible should *objective* moral values and duties exist for humanity. Because objective means not dependent upon culture or epoch.

Teleology for The Cross?

Perhaps the argument could be made that there is indeed a necessary shift *Theo-logically* at the cross. This is hard to deny, as the Christocentric theme in Christian theology is almost self-evident. So with some *prima facie* force, the argument could be made by contemporary antinomian theologies that a change at the cross was initiated because God commanded the Law for a reason (a teleological argument). Once that reason was accomplished, those rules were no longer needed. Of course, a notable exception in Premillennialism is the millennial kingdom. The Torah, or something similar to the Torah, as Dispensational or Covenant Premillennial theology claims, needs to be re-established for that thousand years, then to be abolished again in the eschaton.²⁷

Despite the initial force of God setting forth a specific purpose and accomplishing it through specific demands, that only actually kicks the can down the road, so to speak. Firstly, the problem of temporary demands is that they are

²⁷ Of course, this only a problem for pre-millennial eschatology. Dispensational theology claims that only physical Israel will partake in the physical kingdom. The Church age saints await the eschaton in heaven. So the moral requirements would not be universal in the millennium, rather the moral obligation for the obedience to the Law would only be for a particular culture (and presumably the surrounding nations) on earth. Not for the heavenly race of the Church Age saints. Could this be considered a form of eschatological cultural moral relativism?

not a *direct* and *necessary* reflection of God's immutable character. Secondly, this still runs us head long into the problem of objective moral reality changing. It seems that if objective morality exists then it has to be the same for all people at all times. We've already noted how ancient moral philosophy can no longer be epistemologically relevant as those would have had a different Law. Thirdly, it seems that should these Laws that God describes as holy, because he himself is holy, then the abolition of them, would by teleological necessity, mean that God preordained a characteristic of holiness for himself to be abrogated at some time in the future (at Christ's resurrection). Meaning, if his holiness and lawful reflections of that holiness can change, then God can make himself lose an eternal quality, which is intrinsically impossible for a supremely perfect and eternal God. So despite the initial force, the idea of planned obsolescence of God's commands, especially in regard to characteristics of his eternal holiness, makes little sense and is ultimately intrinsically impossible.

Humans Before Sinai

Even more so, those humans that existed *before* the Law would have to have knowledge of YHWH's moral standards, as well (if it is to be objective). What was their moral law? Was it different than that of Moses? If it was different from Moses, then YHWH has changed his moral standards at this point in history as well. Of course, if moral standards can change, then moral epistemology is gone, and moral apologetics is rendered a futile endeavor. For, God could simply change his moral standards again in our age and, furthermore, how would we know when He did so?²⁸ But this means that *any* change in the moral code means that God's demands are random and fall victim to *Euthyphro*.

God's *non-permanent* and *capricious* moral demands thus contained in the Law (Sabbath, food laws, Moedim) could actually be considered morally evil and sadistic laws. This point is what *Euthyphro* ultimately is implying, and it is especially poignant, given that God used physical punishment in enforcing these *non-permanent* laws (Num. 15:32-41 among others). Because God simply declared these *non-permanent* laws and the associated punishments "good." But obviously, the laws and punishments cannot be *truly* good because they could be simply abolished at the command of God (for why would a perfect and eternal God need to change a good and perfect law?). So, in essence, objective moral standards are actually not objective at all because they can change.

Since historical evidence does show that not everyone had the Torah (the Israelites are the people of the book), one could say that true morality was not

²⁸ Dispensationalists obviously think a change of moral obligation will occur at the beginning of the next dispensation at the start of the Millennial Kingdom. This will be covered later in the paper.

objective during that time. That topic will be covered later in this paper, as we find that, from the beginning, there was knowledge of Torah in Adam, Noah, and Abraham (and all their descendants). The Law of Moses was when the Law was *written*. But, on that, knowledge of a Law does not necessitate it being written down (because its objective and perceptible and YHWH is personal and interactive God). Likewise, humans do not lack knowledge of God's commands, rather, as Paul and Peter tell us, we simply suppress the knowledge!²⁹

God Holds Us Accountable to the Only Moral Components of His Law and the Cosmic Sadist

Let's assume for the sake of argument that, indeed only the moral components of the law continue from Moses. This theological stance would either 1) make YHWH *not* the author of these moral components (because they are good in and of themselves) or, 2) the moral components are the only true reflection of YHWH. The rest of the commands are then *not* reflections of God's character, rather, they are simply demands that he could or could not have issued.

Point 1, that God is not the author of these moral components, would lead us to the unfortunate and unfathomable conclusion that moral standards actually do not proceed from God. As goodness is something that is universal and separate from the command of God or more appropriately because God exists, these attributes exist and can be thus commanded by God. But, without God, there is no possibility of morality nor recognition of sin. In fact, naturalism should rule the day. Morality would be a myth. The new atheists would be correct, and we should not be believers in any god, let alone the Almighty.³⁰ This point does not need to be examined. The moral argument for God's existence, both deductive and abductive versions, make a sufficient and significant case for a god's existence (the philosophical God).

Point 2 is a bit more challenging because it is where theology and philosophy have to marry, which is the point of this paper. The *philosophical* outcome of a *theology* that holds that only the moral parts of the Torah continue is that the moral standards found within the Torah are the only *permanent* reflection of God's character. The rest are capricious, random, and temporary and are, therefore, *not* a reflection of God's unchanging nature.

²⁹ Rom. 1:18. 2 Pet. 3:5.

³⁰ See Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science can Determine Human Values* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2010).; Richard Joyce, *The Myth of Morality* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 135-174.; Erik J. Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics: The Metaphysics and Epistemology of Godless Normative Realism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Of course, that would mean since the Sabbath, the feasts, and other laws like circumcision were, in fact, laws that are *not* a *direct* reflection of God's character, they were actually never really obligatory in the first place. In fact, the only reason they were obligatory and enforced is because God is some mighty tyrant. It was mentioned above that God's commands, even if arbitrary, would still constitute a moral responsibility upon the subjects. But the moral obligation is made only because of coercion and ego-stroking of the lawgiver. As in, it is a moral obligation to preserve your life, but it is only through prudential self-interest should one should obey those commands. He commanded the laws, therefore, they should be obeyed even though they are seemingly random, by fiat, and simply for enhancing his power and control over his subjects. Worse still, is that God severely punished Israel, and even the surrounding nations, for not following *temporary* commands! Of course, this is not a good God, but rather a cosmic sadist. This conclusion, however, runs us smack into *Euthyphro* again. For, those temporary moral demands do not derive their goodness from God's permanent nature, but rather because God commanded them. They are *not a permanent* reflection of his character, as is required by our immutable philosophical God. Therefore, we run into the dilemma of point 1 of *Euthyphro*.

Since these theological positions makes this the case, this leads us to the unfortunate conclusion that God himself violates his own *permanent* moral nature and moral commands by initiating a law of such a random nature and then punishing the unfortunate subjects that could never perform the standards laid out! Certainly, theologians would not be saying that, right? But this is precisely what these theologies do, when they insist that only the moral components of the Torah stand and the rest are abolished. Those "moral standards" are *direct reflections* while the other parts of the Torah were actually just fiat and able to be abolished with God himself in Messiah. But, as already shown, this fiat and the punishments issued by God make him a moral monster and consequently a violator of his own nature (goodness). Which, of course, means he (YHWH) is not God. Thus, there is no salvation and Messiah was ineffectual, for who could die for a God who sins against his own supposedly permanent moral standards? It is absurd to think that the Son of God could die to save himself and the Father.

The theologian will most certainly object and say that Adam and Eve (and the rest of humanity, for that matter) could have obeyed the random and permanent laws should they have never entered into sin. Therefore, humanity could, in fact, obey all the laws at one point. While that is true, this argument is only a straw-man, for it actually does not solve the problem of the supposedly *non-permanent* demands of the Torah that YHWH issued. For remember, should these *non-permanent* laws come to be abolished, then those laws are not *necessary and direct* reflections of God's just and moral character. Thus, man's sin (or inability to achieve or miss the commanded standard) is irrelevant, because

the laws that man is required to follow were actually not reflections of God's character, in the first place.

In summarizing this section, one only really needs to look at the Law of Contradiction with regards to *Euthyphro*. Remember, Christians must either bite the bullet in regard to the *Euthyphro* dilemma, like Plato did (that there are goods outside of God), that the demands of God can be arbitrary, or accept that *Euthyphro* is actually a false dilemma. And since it is a false dilemma, then $A = A$. Thus, *all* of God's commands are *necessary, direct, and permanent* reflections of his character (since he is immutable). Thus, YHWH's commands in the Torah are, by nature, a *necessity and direct* reflection of his character and therefore permanent fixtures, not arbitrary. Saying they could be abolished or arbitrary is like saying there is a round square or like saying God could demand rape and make it lawful.

Abolition Means God Loses Immutable Attributes

For if any of these laws could be abolished, then God would actually lose supposedly eternal characteristics. So the questions one must ask is, would YHWH send his only Son to make himself a God with fewer supreme attributes? Of course, if God could lose an attribute of goodness by abolishing a command of his, then he is not God for he must be, by nature, the supreme manifestation of good, by the demands he gives. A supreme attribute can never change because it is perfect. The Law is either perfect (Ps. 19:7) or it is not. If the demands YHWH gives are not *ultimately* good and perfect (meaning they can be abolished, for why would *perfection* need to be changed?), then by all means, these laws *ought* to be abolished because they are arbitrary. But in this position, we lose YHWH in the process. Surely this is an untenable and unintentional outcome.

The Law is Totally Done Away With; It is Now Only the Law of Messiah

Having dealt with the theologies (Reformed and Covenant theologies) that claim that the moral components of the Torah are the only ones that must be followed and the rest are abolished, it was shown that they fall victim not only to the *Euthyphro* dilemma but also to a basic logical principle of not contradicting oneself, when it comes to describing God's Character. In a systematic theological sense this is like a spider's web. They attempt to move the section of the spider's web, which regards Bibliology (i.e. Torah), but in the process, they actually do significant damage to Theology Proper, and the rest of the web. Such is the venom of *Euthyphro* and the inflexibility of non-contradiction and identity.

But here, Dispensational theology does one better, so to speak. Dispensational theology *totally* abolishes Torah (even the Ten Commandments)

and replaces them with the Law of Messiah.³¹ So, while Covenant theology partially abolishes Torah, Dispensationalists totally abolish it, after Christ's death and resurrection. Not only that, Dispensationalism has at least seven different periods in which *God dealt differently* with men on the earth. Thus, *Morality and systems of punishment changed six times* (we are not yet in the final dispensation, according to this theology). A quick example of this future dispensation is that right now it is not a moral requirement to observe the feasts, but in Christ's millennial reign, it will be (Ez. 44:1- 46:24; Is. 66).³²

For the sake of brevity, going through each dispensation to show whether or not the demands given in that particular dispensation were *necessary* and *direct* reflections of God's nature will not be done. Primarily because, if they can change, they are not *necessary*, but arbitrary, and are, therefore, not a direct reflection God's character, as already shown above. This is particularly potent when it comes to the dispensation of Law and its abolition with the dispensation of Grace. Interestingly, should he change dispensations and the laws surrounding God's dealing with man, YHWH would be violating his own law which states not to add or take away from his Law (Deut. 12:32 and if Christ came to abrogate the law, he violates Deut. 13:1-5). Surely God cannot violate the Torah, for that would make the Father and Messiah a sinner (but only in that dispensation). The consequences of such a belief are devastating, to say the least, and ultimately absurd that God could not be guilty of sin in one dispensation but guilty in another by adding or taking away from his own laws.

Further difficulty is evidenced enough by the first two dispensations. God gave two commands to Adam and Eve. 1) The creation mandate of Gen 1:27-28 and 2) the prohibition regarding the fruit. Yes, Adam and Eve sinned. They broke the second command. Rightly, they got exiled from the garden. But then Cain is reprimanded for not bringing proper sacrifice (where did that arbitrary rule come from?) and then banished to wander, for murdering his brother (where did that command not to murder come from?). Bringing *Euthyphro* back into the picture, there is no biblical evidence showing that God ever commanded humanity not to murder (except in the Mosaic Law, but Cain and Abel are before Moses). Would that lead us to say that it is wrong to murder because murder is wrong on its own?

³¹ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2016), 622-624.

³² Dispensationalists claim that it actually is not the same feast as required by the Mosaic Law but different in nature and characteristics. Fruchtenbaum says, "To summarize, there will be a sacrificial system instituted in the Millennium that will have some features *similar* to the Mosaic system, along with some *new laws*." Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology*, 772. (These laws he does not enumerate, mostly because they are not written down, or do not exist). Furthermore, the subtraction and addition of laws violates God's own demands to not add or subtract from the Law (Deut. 12:32; Prov. 30:6).

Surely not! Murder was *always* wrong because it is a violation of God's own character and thus a violation of his Law. The same can be said for the offerings of Cain and Abel. The sacrificial system was in effect during all past ages (as Christ was slain *before* the foundation of the world) and still is in effect (albeit moot, on earth, because of the Temple's destruction), and *will be a necessary and direct* reflection of God's character (hence the demand for sacrifices in the Millennial Temple). Not only that, the need for personal effectual atonement for sin *by Messiah* was *always* demanded from the beginning (Gen 3:15; Deut. 32:43; Heb. 10:4).

Again, *Euthyphro*'s dilemma has shown its poison. The first dispensation shows us direct commands from God (do not eat of the fruit), but also holds man accountable to another standard that is not specifically enumerated (i.e. sacrifices, not to murder, etc.). Are these demands *necessary* and *direct* reflections of God or are they independent of God? For, where did they come from? Likewise, the Law of Moses, claimed by dispensationalists to be the very standard of moral perfection required by God (e.g. Messiah upholding all applicable parts perfectly), but then claim that YHWH, through Messiah, actually holds us to a *higher moral standard*, called the Law of Messiah. How can moral *perfection* be made better? If Messiah was perfect based on the standard laid out by an unchanging father, then, how can there be a different standard? Is perfection no longer perfect after the cross?

Perhaps, the dispensationalist will say that the Law of Messiah is simply the weightier matters of the Mosaic Law (justice, love, mercy), thus the Torah is not totally abolished.³³ This position however puts this theology in the awkward position of saying the love and mercy mandated by the Law are actually standards of good which exist independently of God's standard of perfection. Thus, God only holds to them, not because they are *necessary* and *direct* reflections of himself, but that they are good in and of themselves. The other Laws (now abolished according to dispensational theology), are simply fiat that actually did not have to be issued by God in the first place, because they are not *necessary* nor *direct* reflections of God, but were only issued for some purpose (teleology). On this topic we already covered and its results.

Therefore, all of God's commands must be a *necessary* and *direct* reflection of himself. If we do not hold to this position, then *Euthyphro* is no longer a false dilemma and the apologetic work here should be abandoned and we should all agree with Plato (that Goods are self-existent and not moored in God). Thus, *morality and sin are different*, thereby making the philosophical god different than YHWH (violating the law of contradiction in our apologetics). Or,

³³ This is a compromise position of dispensational thought.

take the position that God randomly assigns laws and changes them, thereby making laws that are not direct reflections of his unchangeable nature.

Knowledge of All of God's Commands – There was Always A Knowledge Before the Written Law (Because Objective Morality Requires It)

Even a cursory glance at the biblical history *before* Moses shows that there was knowledge of the moral demands of YHWH before YHWH himself gave Moses the Law. For the very first words of the Bible make it obvious. "In the beginning God..." Surely, an immutable God knew his own commandments from the beginning? Already mentioned above was the sacrificial and offerings rules given to Adam (Gen 3:21 shows the need for sacrifice *and* covering by garments (e.g. sacrifice for the covering of sin and nakedness. To be *clothed* in righteousness. Job 29:14, Ps. 132:9, Is. 61:10 Rev. 3:4; 19:8), Cain and Abel (First Fruits – Gen 4:4-5). But other notable examples include Enoch who walked with God. This can only imply that he lived a life of devotion and piety as prescribed by God (Gen 5:22). Noah obviously had knowledge of clean and unclean animals (Gen. 7:2). Melchizedek "was a priest of God Most High" (Gen. 14:18). Although, not in the Levitical line, this surely represents knowledge of offerings and priestly duties prior to the Levites. This priestly line is still in operation today because it is everlasting (Heb. 7:3). Lastly, Abraham obeyed God's commands, statutes, and Laws (Gen. 26:5).³⁴ Which one has to ask, what commands, statutes, laws?³⁵ For all of these are before Moses.

But what about the nations? They would have to have knowledge as well for it to be objective. The biblical narrative of the flood and then subsequent dispersing after Babel (Gen 11:9) show that everyone comes from a single source (and everyone before that came from a single source in Adam).³⁶ As such everyone *started off with the same knowledge*. Post-diluvian, the source, obviously, being Noah and his sons. The vast similarity in the different codes of

³⁴ The word "laws" is translated from the Hebrew word "*Torah*".

³⁵ Some rabbinic views conclude that Abraham was filled with the whole Mosaic Law before it was given at Sinai (see m. *Qiddushin* 4:14). This rabbinic conclusion is s likely considering Abraham also saw Messiah's day and was glad (Jn. 8:56). There is no reason to doubt Moses's use of the word Torah in relation to Abraham to mean anything other than what he compiled after Sinai.

³⁶ Should the life spans of the antediluvian people be literal, then the generations surely had access to the "ancient" knowledge of Adam, as Enos (who knew both Adam and Seth) was alive in the time of Noah! Given the oral history of these earliest peoples, either the stars (see E.W. Bullinger, *The Witness of the Stars* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1967) or oral stories themselves where the means of transmission, if not YHWH himself (as He met with Cain, Abel, and probably Enoch *postlapsarian*).

law demonstrate a very similar understanding of many moral components. To ignore that shared understanding would be absurd. Lewis again shows the universal understanding of *some* of the requirements that God demands.³⁷ This would only be possible via a single source and shared history of all nations (i.e. All the laws of God as handed down by Noah). However, in disobedience the nations strayed away from all the required ordinances (for none seek after him and all have gone astray and they suppress the truth in unrighteousness – Ps. 14:3; Rom. 3:12; 1:18) and it was only through God’s grace that God corrects the lawless and brings them back, in faith, to all of his required demands and shows them the consequences of their rebellion (e.g. the revealing of sin. Unless of course there are multiple means of salvation). For justice, mercy, and faith are written into the same everlasting code of YHWH, which is why the story of Abraham exists.

The knowledge of God’s Law before Moses demonstrates that YHWH did not come up with laws by fiat at Sinai, but rather they are pre-existing ordinances. This is confirmed by Paul who says in Rom. 5:12-14.

So then, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all people because all sinned – for before the law was given, sin was in the world, but there is no accounting for sin when there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam until Moses even over those who did not sin in the same way that Adam (who is a type of the coming one) transgressed.

It is obvious that people violated God’s commands (i.e. sinned) from Adam until Moses. If there were no commands, then Paul should not have written that they sinned differently than Adam did. By what commands or laws were they sinning against? All people were obviously punished because of sin and all people sin (because death reigned, not to mention the wickedness that caused the flood judgement). Furthermore, Paul tells us elsewhere that “for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation.”³⁸ It seems that those in the flood (before Moses) were subjected to the wrath of God. So this has to mean that the imputation or accounting (ἐλλογεῖται) in this case

³⁷ C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001), 83-101.

³⁸ Rom. 4:15.

(Rom 5:12-14) can be seen, perhaps in an eschatological sense.³⁹ As in they are not *eternally* punished, but if sin was indeed a logical category that brought about the wrath of God *before* Moses, then surely the standard was in place and known (e.g. objective moral reality).⁴⁰ The *physical punishment* (death) is required by God's law, but whether *eternal* imputation of such a violation need not necessarily follow, because grace and mercy are also a logical categories established *in the same law*. Additionally, Paul tells us he would not have known sin except through the law.⁴¹ Logic dictates that if there is no accounting for sin without the law then there is no way that Paul can say that these people sinned. For sin cannot be a logical category without a standard to fall short of! Yet we see everyone from Adam to Moses being held accountable by death, because they sinned, although not in the same way as Adam, they sinned nonetheless (i.e. violated God's commandments). It seems Paul is pointing us to is the fact that righteousness and grace were always present (even before the written Law was given – Rom 4:3). What is righteousness if there is no standard? What is sin if there is no standard? If YHWH is immutable, then his righteousness has to be the same at the beginning as it is now. The bottom line is that if there is the law of sin and death that began with Adam (Rom. 8:2), there has to be a standard by which one can identify what is sin. For without a law there is no sin, yet we see *law enforcement* (from the beginning since Adam) taking place because all sinned and death reigned through them all.

Written, Not Changed

If there is a difference between those before Moses and after Moses, it is matter of explicit warning. The idea of “progressive revelation” need not change our ideas of moral epistemology and whether or not God changes. A change in God need not take place when he chooses to make his commands *more explicit*. Similar to that of a father to child making his command clearer. Moses, the Prophets after him, John the Baptist, Messiah himself, and the apostles are all

³⁹ This verb is present passive indicative. This writer takes this to mean that since Paul is recounting a history of people who have long since died. As such they are in a spiritual form and awaiting the resurrection (thus the eschatological reading). Thus, their present state is one in which they are not necessarily held accountable eternally of these sins based on grace. Furthermore, perhaps this understanding is based on Peter and Christ's preaching in Sheol after the crucifixion (1 Pet. 4:6).

⁴⁰ Even Cain is told that “sin is crouching at the door.” (Gen 4:7). Thus, a standard of sin had to have been known *from the beginning* (or at least from the time of eating the fruit). If the knowledge came from the fruit, then the knowledge of the Law was contained and already existing in the fruit. In consuming it they gained access and understanding of the *preexisting* ordinances.

⁴¹ Rom. 7:7.

such instances of this progression. But progression of *explicit* intent is not changing the original intent, rather, it makes the subjects exposed to the explicit warning without excuse.

Therefore, the Law and its requirements were pre-existing Moses. As such, the laws as recorded by Moses, are likely, the *written* account of the pre-existing laws of YHWH which are the *necessary* and *direct reflection* of himself. It was by this standard by which everyone pre-Moses were held accountable to (at least in a physical death). Again, a standard is necessary! In other words, in order for there to be a category for righteousness, there has to be a standard by which Abraham (and all before Moses) were held to. What is this standard?

YHWH is the Immutable Standard

This standard is obviously YHWH himself (because he is infinitely holy). His statutes for human behavior are thus *necessary* and *direct reflections* of himself, as we are to be holy *as he is holy*.⁴²

YHWH and Euthyphro

In conclusion one has to ask the question about the commands, statutes, and laws of God in regard to his nature. Here is a version of the *Euthyphro dilemma*.

Is God holy because He keeps the commandments?

Or

Are the commandments holy because they are commanded by God?

Or

(The false dilemma) Are the Commandments holy because they are a *necessary*, *direct*, and *permanent* reflection of God's nature?

The scriptures tell us that God is holy. If the Law of God has proceeded from God, in keeping with his own nature, they *must* and *necessarily* be a *direct* and pure *reflections* of God. Well then, God is eternal (Is. 40:8), therefore *all* his commands are eternal. His laws, all of them, are holy and good (Rom. 7:12). The law is able to discern the thoughts of men (Heb 4:12). The law is able to sustain

⁴² This is one of the things it means to be *Imago Dei*. We are to reflect his behavior (i.e. perfection and sinless).

life (Matt. 4:4; Ez. 20:11). The law is immutable (Lk. 16:17). The law is righteous (Deut. 4:8). Lastly and most importantly, it is grounded in love (Rom. 13:10).⁴³

In closing, this paper has been my humble attempt to show how the apologetic answer to the *Euthyphro* dilemma (as a false dilemma), while removing an intellectual barrier to belief, creates a Theo-logical barrier. In the process of doing good apologetics, contemporary theologies have relegated themselves to be poisoned by the venom of *Euthyphro's* dilemma. Not only that, they fall victim to the ever-present law of contradiction in regard to immutability and whether or not the philosophical god (of objective moral reality) of the moral argument is YHWH (the God concerned with sin and righteousness).

Euthyphro's dilemma is nothing that we should fear. Apologists have shown that it is indeed a false dilemma, but the confusion comes when we do not apply the same logic to YHWH and the scriptures when it is abundantly clear that he (in all his tripartite manifestations) does not change his covenant love.⁴⁴ This result, it seems, means that most of modern Christianity the theology of the apologists does not conform to the philosophy. Any abolition of Torah thus shows that either God's laws are simply fiat, or that the laws were pre-existing God, and therefore God is dependent on them. If they are fiat, they are not permanent reflections of God or if they are pre-existing God then YHWH is not God. There is no reason to bite the bullet and be poisoned by *Euthyphro's* venom, when all of God's commands found in the Torah are *necessary, direct, and eternal reflections* of himself and that they are the very foundation of objective moral reality.

Bibliography

Baggett, David, and Jerry L. Walls. *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Bahnsen, Greg L. *Presuppositional Apologetics: Stated and Defended*. Edited by Joel McDurmont. Powder Springs, GA: American Vision Press, 2011.

_____. *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1984.

Bullinger, Ethelbert Williams. *The Witness of the Stars*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1967.

⁴³ Roger Hadad, *Apologia for the Law and the Sabbath* (Voir Dire Publishing, 2019), 29.

⁴⁴ Jas. 1:17; Mal. 3:6; Ex. 3:14; Pss. 110:5, 119:89

- Cowan, Steven B., ed. *Five Views on Apologetics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000.
- Craig, William Lane. *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*. 3rd ed. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008.
- Fruchtenbaum, Arnold G. *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*. San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 1989.
- Goldberg, Louis, ed. *How Jewish Is Christianity: Two Views on the Messianic Movement*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003.
- Grossman, Dave. *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*. New York, NY: Bay Back Books, 2009.
- Gundry, Stanley N., ed. *Five Views on Law and Gospel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996.
- Hadad, Roger. *Apologia for the Law and the Sabbath*. Voir Dire Publishing, 2019.
- Harris, Sam. *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*. New York, NY: Free Press, 2010.
- Hegg, Tim. *Why We Keep Torah: 10 Persistent Questions*. Tacoma, WA: Torah Resource, 2013.
- Hoekema, Anthony A. *Created in God's Image*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986.
- Holland, Tom. *Contours of Pauline Theology*. Scotland, GB: Christian Focus Publications, 2004.
- Joyce, Richard. *The Myth of Morality*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Lewis, Clive Staples. *Mere Christianity*. New York: HarperOne, 2001.
- _____. *The Abolition of Man*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001.
- _____. *The Problem of Pain*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001.

- Lewis, Gordan R. *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1977.
- Merkle, Benjamin L. *Discontinuity to Continuity: A Survey of Dispensational and Covenantal Theology*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020.
- Nanos, Mark. *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letters*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996.
- Pink, Arthur W. *Gleanings in the Godhead*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1975.
- Pritz, Ray A. *Nazarene Jewish Christianity: From the End of the New Testament Period Until Its Disappearance in the Fourth Century*. Jerusalem-Leiden: The Magnes Press and The Hebrew University, 1988.
- Shafer-Landau, Russ. *Moral Realism: A Defence*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Showers, Renald E. *There Really Is A Difference: A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology*. Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1990.
- Wielenberg, Erik. *Robust Ethics: The Metaphysics and Epistemology of Godless Normative Realism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- _____. *Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005.