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Euthyphro’s Dilemma

It has been aware that Classical philosophers have found simplifying origins ironically more complex. To that, philosophers like Socrates drifted away from searching for a more simplistic origin and focused primarily on human thought. More specifically, in Plato’s *Euthyphro,* Socrates is charged for impiety. Remembering the Socratic Method—that is the question and answer tactic—Socrates wants to know what exactly piety entails. In conclusion, Socrates brings up a point that is still controversial to current philosophy, known as Euthyphro’s dilemma. Euthyphro’s dilemma states, “Is the pious loved by the Gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the Gods?” In my essay, I will access the polytheistic view of Euthyphro’s dilemma, then translate/convert it to the Judeo-Christian tradition. With the monotheistic translation of Euthyphro’s dilemma, I will then show how the original dilemma intertwines and propagates a catch-22 dilemma.

Before accessing Euthyphro’s Dilemma, I would like to separate it in terms of options so that in duration of this paper, it will be easier for the reader to comprehend which part of the dilemma I am referring to: “(a) Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or (b) is it pious because it is loved by the Gods?” For option (a), it is clearly apparent that piety is independent. Furthermore, for option (a) to be true, piety had to have been outside force to the Gods, that is, the Gods must had to discover piety. That being said, hypothetically, if there were not such things as Gods, piety would still exist. Now let’s discuss option (b). For option (b), we see that piety is the antithesis of option (a), that is, dependent on the Gods. Such dependency additionally depicts that everything is essentially amoral, that things like piety exist only when the Gods decide. For example, counts such as murder, lying, backstabbing, etc. are wrong; for option (b) to be valid, those counts are not wrong until the Gods chooses so. Therefore, hypothetically speaking again, if there were no Gods, piety would not exist either.

Now, from deciphering what both options entail, Socrates actually favors (a) over (b). He had a negative reason—an argument for why option (b) could not be correct—as well as a positive reason—an argument supporting option (a). The reason why Socrates favors (a) is because he believes that the Gods love things is because there is something about the thing itself the Gods are attracted to. In addition, the Gods love it because there is something about the action that they grow fond of. Using simpler examples like chocolate or roses, there are those who can notion that there is something peculiar—or awe-inspiring to the eye of the beholder—that attracts the viewer, meaning there’s not a concrete reasoning behind its fondness. Same rule applies to piety. Now if option (b) was the case, Socrates counter argues by adamantly showing that piety and/or things that can replace/substitute in for piety is arbitrary. For something to be loved is a whim based on the Gods; there is no purpose behind the reasoning whatsoever. With that in mind, Socrates does not think things such as piety is meaningless. But wait, there’s a counter claim to such grievances: God has good reasons. Though this may puzzle or stymie the chances of siding with Socrates, there are ways to lure this counter claim to favor option (a). One question that comes to mind is where such good reasons even come from—referring to the Gods’ train of thought. These intrinsic feelings the Gods acquire furthermore shows how arbitrary their latent knowledge actually is. Therefore, it shows that the Gods’ reasoning derives from an external force, not intrinsically, ultimately negating option (b).

For this essay to be relevant to our studies, applying Euthyphro’s Dilemma to monotheism is necessary as well as emphasizing the application is universal. This conversion is simple; instead of Gods, piety, and love, the dilemma changes to “(a’) Are morals commanded by God because it is moral, or (b’) is it moral because it is commanded by Gods?” However, a catch-22 is evident when attempting to favor either option. We have learned the God in the Judeo-Christian tradition must obtain the “3-omni’s”: omnipotence, omnibenevolence, and omniscience. Standing in the shoes of a theist, he/she would find that because God discovered such rights, meaning God did not create morality (a), God is not powerful. This shows that option (b’) is true. Furthermore, analogous to option (b) in the original dilemma, (b’) makes morality arbitrary due to the fact that God decided it is a right simply because he says so. However, to counter argue, because God is omnibenevolent, good always has good reasons. Unfortunately, this shows that such morality is outside of God himself, ultimately backfires and therefore must favor option (a’).

As stated prior, for one that wants to choose either option (a’) or (b’) will experience a catch-22 in the end—a more difficult dilemma to handle. Though this may seem like it puts a halt on Euthyphro’s Dilemma, there are philosophers out there who believe there is a way to overcome such obstacle. Some counter examples are that we are using mere human logic behind these options. Now, although that may seem obvious, it brings up the notion that God’s logic is superseding, therefore giving up on our own logic. To be fully honest, I think this just creates a stalemate on the entire discussion because though the arguments appear to be valid, the counter claims either digs a deeper hole in the original dilemma, or creates an additional dilemma thus complicating Socrates’ original question.