

Introduction to Philosophy

The Nature of Morality: Divine Command Theory

As you read the material for the next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the readings:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently to these issues in the next class meeting.

Reading

- Plato, *Euthyphro*.

Background

Plato's *Euthyphro* is best known for its challenge to the view that morality is derived solely from the will of God, or, as in Socrates and Euthyphro's case, the will of the gods. This is not to say that Socrates (or Plato) are atheists. Rather, Socrates simply concludes that the commandments of the gods must conform to a standard that is itself independent of the gods' will.

Questions

1. What is Euthyphro's first definition of the pious and the impious (at 5e)? Why does this definition fail to satisfy Socrates?
2. What is the second definition provided by Euthyphro (at 7a)? Why does this definition also fail to satisfy Socrates? In refuting this definition, Socrates makes an extremely important distinction (at 7b–e) between two types of quarrels. How do people resolve quarrels about measurement according to Socrates? But what kind of quarrels are not so easily settled, but often lead to violent conflicts? Can you guess how Socrates thinks these second types of quarrels ought to be settled? Does this distinction between two types of quarrels similar to a distinction we discussed in a previous lecture (hint: the answer is yes, but what is the distinction)?
3. What is the third definition provided by Euthyphro (at 9e)? Why is Socrates yet again not satisfied? In refuting this definition, Socrates asks a famous question, which we may call *Euthyphro's Dilemma*: "Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods?" (10a) Why does this challenge Euthyphro's conception of piety? How might this be related to views of morality based upon the commands of God?