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Euthyphro, the Good, and the Right

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If public opinion polls can be trusted, a majority of the world's people still believes God is in some way closely connected to morality. Philosophers, however, are inclined to be of the opposite opinion. The standard position is that morality is fully autonomous and cannot depend upon God in any important way. Introductory textbooks in ethics often attempt to press home this point before launching into the various secular approaches to ethics that dominate the current philosophical scene. At the heart of the easy modern dismissal of theistic ethics is the Euthyphro dilemma, which is supposed to show that even for the theist morality has a necessarily independent standing. It does this by reputedly revealing deep conceptual problems with the idea that God is the basis of morality. This is the shape of the argument in James Rachels' popular introductory text, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, which allows students their private beliefs in God but renders them irrelevant to the serious discussion of ethics. What results is the curious circumstance that theological ethics—the approach to the subject that has been and continues to be the most common to humanity—is given no attention at all.[1]

This paper aims to show that, under closer inspection, the Euthyphro dilemma poses no problem for a properly nuanced account of God's relationship to morality. In order to see why, it is especially important to maintain a distinction often overlooked in this context: that between the *good* and the *right*. Before getting to that, we begin with a review of the supposed dilemma itself.

Abstract: The Euthyphro dilemma is widely deployed as an argument against theistic accounts of ethics. The argument proceeds by trying to derive strongly counterintuitive implications from the view that God is the source of morality. I argue here that a general crudeness with which both the dilemma and its theistic targets are described accounts for the seeming force of the argument. Proper attention to details, among them the distinction between the good and the right, reveals that a nuanced theism is quite unscathed by it.

1. Here I am referring to *normative* ethics; he does discuss some of the metaethical aspects of theological ethics.

The Dilemma

The dilemma takes its title from the Platonic dialogue, *Euthyphro*, wherein Socrates asks a seemingly simple question about piety: "Is the pious being loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is being loved by the gods?"[2] In its more modern guise, the question is usually altered to a form concerning the relationship between God's commands and what is right. Thus, it becomes, "Is conduct right because God commands it, or does God command it because it is right?"[3] This is supposed to be a dilemma on account of the undesirable consequences of adopting either option.

If the divine command theorist opts for the first, then it appears God could make anything whatever right by fiat. Erik Wielenberg stresses how counterintuitive this seems by imagining an all-powerful being who subjects humanity to various tortures and yet declares these things are right and good.[4] Surely, Wielenberg thinks, such a declaration cannot make it so.[5] Moreover, if God's commands are the source of morality, ascriptions of moral perfection to Him are in danger of being empty. If we say God always does what is right, then we are just saying He always acts consistently with His will. There does not, however, seem to be anything especially praiseworthy about that. After all, someone could consistently implement a wicked will.

The other option, that God commands certain things because they are right, entails there is a standard of rightness independent of and antecedent to God. If this is so, then morality does not really rely upon God's commands at all. God might still bear *some* relationship to morality under such a view. He could, for example, be an authority on what is right in virtue of His superior wisdom and knowledge. Yet there would seem to be no reason why the facts upon which He relies should be unavailable to lesser agents. Thus, God might only provide a nice shortcut for figuring out what agents could nevertheless come to on their own.

In short, the two options facing the divine command theorist seem to either make morality arbitrary or God unnecessary.

2. Plato, *Euthyphro*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 10d.

3. This is, e.g., the way James Rachels puts the dilemma. See James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1999), 56.

4. Erik J. Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 42.

5. Rachels makes this same point; see *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 56–7.

Right and Good

So much for the standard story. I now want to suggest the critics of divine command theory tend to overlook an important distinction that, once made, goes some way towards undermining the force of the dilemma. Rachels furnishes us with perhaps the clearest example of the mistake.[6] Concerning the first horn of the dilemma, the claim that a thing is right because God commands it, he says this: "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."[7] The mistake is this: he completely ignores the distinction between the *good* and the *right*. There are three possible things a divine command theorist might want to say in relation to these two: God's commands establish what is right, or they establish what is good, or they establish both. Rachels, and many others with him, seem to assume the only thing the divine command theorist could intend is the last of these. However, according to the first option, that God's commands establish only what is right, Rachels' statement here quoted is clearly a *non sequitur*. 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*. The divine command theorist can heartily agree with her critics in affirming that God cannot, for example, make torture good by simply commanding it to be done. But this is quite separate from the question of whether He could make it right.[8]

6. Though see also Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe*, chaps. 2 and 3. Wielenberg does not make the mistake as crudely as Rachels, though he does not take notice of the possibility I present here. Kai Nielsen makes the mistake in a form much like that in Rachels. See Kai Nielson, *Ethics without God*, rev. ed. (New York: Prometheus, 1990), 53. David Brink also treats the theist as having the option of asserting either that both good and right depend upon God's will, or that morality is wholly independent of God. See David Brink, "The Autonomy of Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*, ed. Michael Martin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 149–65. Peter Byrne takes note of the option I propose, but only as a kind of footnote on his account which otherwise flows in the familiar channels. See Peter Byrne, *The Philosophical and Theological Foundations of Ethics*, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), chap. 8.

7. Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 56.

8. It is not only critics of divine command morality that fail to keep this distinction clearly in mind. In a recent article Daniel Dombrowski describes the dilemma as being about whether God's commands make states of affairs "right or good" and goes on to suggest that the Euthyphro dilemma should really be seen as a *tri*lemma, quoting with approval from Katherin Rogers, who writes, "God neither obeys the moral order, nor does He invent it. He is Goodness Itself, and all else that is good is good in imitation of God's nature." But it is not clear here if goodness is supposed to be taken as synonymous with the "moral order," or only a part of it. In particular, nothing is said here about how God stands in relationship to the right. Though his overall strategy for addressing the Euthyphro dilemma is similar to the one I pursue here, it could be strengthened by more careful attention to these matters. ("Objective Morality and Perfect Being Theology: Three Views," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 29 (2008): 208 and 211.

Let us, then, assume a view of divine command ethics according to which God's commands are the source of the right but not the good.[9] Someone might want to protest this move by denying that the good and the right can be neatly separated, or indeed, separated at all. Let us grant a tight connection between the two ideas: something we consider monstrously *bad* is in no danger of being thought *right*. As the argument proceeds, we shall see that this is actually a rather important point for the divine command theorist. Nevertheless, there is a clear conceptual distinction between the two ideas manifested in the different roles each plays in our moral language and practice. Consider just one aspect of this: If we fail to do the right we are subject to guilt and the blame of others; on the other hand, there is much good we can do but do not, and receive neither kind of reproach. The good, though laudable, is voluntary; the right is required.[10]

Even given this distinction, and the assertion that God's commands affect only what is right, the divine command theorist is not yet off the hook. Critics can still raise problems with this divine relationship to the right. Even if God cannot make torture *good* by declaring it to be so, is it any more plausible to say he could make it *right*? Our intuitions strongly support the thought that, just as there are some things that cannot be good, so there are others that cannot be made right. This is only an objection, though, if the divine command view is committed to the doctrine that God *could* make anything right. We will now see that it is not.

One reason God could not make just anything right is that His commanding is constrained by His character. This may at first sound odd, for is not God supposed to be completely free in His actions? Indeed He is; yet acting freely is not acting randomly. Instead, God's free action flows from His divine nature. He would not therefore command just anything, but only what is consistent with who He is. It is usually held that God is perfectly good, and if so, His commands will be also.[11]

Erik Wielenberg finds this unsatisfying. It seems to suggest that God has the *ability* to make anything right by commanding it, even if his exercise

9. This is the version of divine command ethics adopted by Robert Adams. See his *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), chaps. 10 and 11. See also: William P. Alston, "Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists," in *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy*, ed. Michael D. Beaty (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 303–26. Alston advocates the same version of divine command ethics, and the general strategy of this essay is inspired by his argument.

10. For an extended and enlightening discussion of the distinctive nature of the right see Stephen Darwall, *The Second Person Standpoint* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

11. In a closely related objection to the one considered here, it is sometimes suggested that divine command views necessarily make God's commands arbitrary. It should be clear what the proper response to this is: they are not arbitrary at all but emanate from His nature. William Alston emphasizes this point; see his "Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists." Also, for a similar view, see Paul Copan, "Can Michael Martin Be a Moral Realist?" *Philosophia Christi* 1, no. 2 (1999): 65.

of that ability is constrained by His character. So if God were, *per impossible*, to command gratuitous torture, He would thereby make it right.[12] This implication, however, does not follow. In order to see why, we need to say something about what features of God bring it about that He can, by commanding, create moral obligations (which is another way of saying "make things right"). This will ultimately yield a second reason why God cannot make anything whatever right.

Hobbes claimed God was able to create obligations because of His "irresistible power."[13] This view would lead straight to the kinds of objectionable consequences already noticed. If power alone could create obligations, then an all-powerful being could make anything whatever right. There is good reason, however, to deny that divine *power* is the salient feature as far as obligations are concerned. Rather, God's moral qualities play a much more important role. To see why, think first of the ordinary human context. The state is usually thought able to impose obligations on its citizens. Contrast this with the gangster, who may threaten the same kind of force as the state, but who is not able to create obligations. H. L. A. Hart made much of this difference in developing his theory of law. For him, what separates the gangster from the state are the background conditions within which each gives its orders.[14]

What are the background conditions for the creation of *moral* obligations? The most basic one is a context of social relationships. If there were only one person existing in the universe, it would be hard to think of any obligations she would have. Rather, obligations arise from our relationships and interactions with others. Take promising for example: If I tell you I will meet you Tuesday, I have created an obligation for myself to do so. You now have a legitimate claim that I will have violated if I fail to show up. It is hard to think of an obligation someone has that does not obtain in virtue of the explicit or implicit demands of some relationship in which he stands.[15]

This is bound to be a controversial point. Someone might wonder about obligations to self or to animals, which have no obvious connection to other persons. Obligations to animals are easier to explain, so I begin with them. It is instructive to notice that our feelings of obligation towards animals inevitably correlate with their level of—for lack of a better term—"humanness." By this I mean their ability to experience pain or pleasure in a way recognizable to us and in general to display evidence of some form of inner life.[16] As

12. Erik Wielenberg, *Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe*, 49.

13. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (New York: Penguin, 1968), 397 (Part 2, chapter 31).

14. H.L.A. Hart, *The Concept of Law*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). See chapter 2.

15. "Demand" has a connotation of impertinence in colloquial usage, though I intend it in sense closer to "requirement" or "request."

16. This kind of criterion is very similar to the one Peter Singer uses to argue for concern for animals. For him, some kind of "sentience" that allows for the experience of pleasure and

an example, consider how much stronger people tend to feel that they ought not to maim or kill a dog or chimpanzee than a worm or jellyfish. The source of this feeling of obligation concerning the treatment of animals, I suggest, springs from our perception that they desire us not to cause them pain. They are even able to communicate this is a rudimentary way. This all, no doubt, relies on a tendency we have to anthropomorphize animals to some degree. Nevertheless, anyone who has ever had a dog has experienced very real demands from an animal.[17]

What about obligations to self? It is an open question whether there are any, but some have proposed certain candidates, like the obligation to develop our talents (put forward by Kant). Let us assume for the moment there are some such obligations. Would they constitute a counterexample to the claim I have made that all obligations rely on social relationship? First, we need to be clear about the meaning of "to" in this context. There are two senses in which we could understand it: We could construe it to mean the self is the *source* of the obligation, or instead that the self is the *object* of the obligation. The first would mean that an obligation—to use Kant's example—to develop my talents is one I impose upon myself. The second would mean only that such an obligation *concerns* myself, but leaves it an open question who imposes it. It is certainly a possibility that all obligations to self merely have the self as an object but are imposed by others. Society may well demand that I develop my talents and thereby impose upon me an obligation to myself. The objection thus relies upon the sense of an obligation to self whereby the self is both the object *and* the source of the obligation. Surely, the objection must go, it is possible that the only person in the universe has obligations to herself, and the obligations in question are not the sort imposed by others on the self. Who then, I might ask, are they imposed by?

If the objector is tempted to reply that they need not be imposed by anybody, it becomes a bit mysterious how to account for these supposed obligations. The very concept of an obligation is a thing that must be done, that is in some way *required*. A requirement entails a requirer*er*. To grasp this point, imagine another universe, this time containing no persons whatever. Could anything possibly be required in such a universe? The idea is absurd. We might want to say objects in such a universe would be required to behave according to its physical laws, but this is quite clearly *not* the sense of requirement relevant to obligations.[18] The only possibility for the lone agent to

pain is the decisive factor. See Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 55–61.

17. This is meant to be a story about how we could explain obligations to animals in terms of social relationships and the demands made within them even in a universe with only one person. In our world, the picture is more complicated than the one I sketch here. In addition to whatever demands issue from animals themselves, we are subject in our treatment of animals to the demands of other persons as well. Witness, e.g., the existence of anticruelty laws.

18. Russ Shafer-Landau has criticized the contention that moral requirements, or as he puts it, "laws," necessitate a lawgiver. He argues that once we recall there are laws of logic, for

be subject to requirements is for her to require things of herself. For my part, I find this notion somewhat strained. Yet notice how an account like Kant's, which has as a central feature the moral law imposed by the agent upon himself, has a tendency to use language that personifies reason. This reason, magically endowed with personhood, places demands upon the agent. Thus Kant, devoted as he is to autonomy, finds it necessary to talk—even if metaphorically—in terms of demands arising within relationship.

We ought to notice, however, that not just any relationship can give rise to any obligation. My child's request for assistance is not on a par with a similar request coming from a stranger on the street. Robert Adams develops an account of social obligation wherein he suggests several factors that contribute to the creation of obligations.[19] The members of our society place many demands upon us; we will tend to treat them as imposing obligations to the extent that: (1) They arise from within a relationship that is itself good and so properly valued; (2) The personal characteristics of those who make the demands are praiseworthy; (3) The thing demanded is good.[20] This is not intended as a list of necessary and sufficient conditions. In other words, not all of these things will seem relevant in all cases. Rather, it is an attempt to generalize some features of relationships that seem to have a tendency to elevate the demands made within them to obligations.[21]

A series of cases wherein we hold two of the factors constant while varying the third will help to illustrate their salience. Imagine first a parent who receives a request for assistance in paying for college from her child compared to the same request coming from an abusive boyfriend; surely we are more likely to consider the first a possible source of obligation. As for the second factor, compare the same request to the parent coming from a diligent and respectful child versus a rebellious and lazy one. Again, the first seems a more likely source of obligation. Finally, imagine a child who requests financial assistance for college and one who requests money to set up an assassin training camp. As in the other two cases, the first is more likely to give rise to an obligation. The general picture that emerges is that the goodness of the demands and those who make them are central to their forming obligations.

instance, we must either adopt the implausible view that these laws need lawgivers, too, or accept the idea that there can be laws without lawgivers (see *Moral Realism: A Defense* [Oxford University Press, 2003]) However, he fails to notice that there are two quite distinct senses of "law" (or "requirement"). We might call the laws of logic *constitutive*: they describe what sorts of moves constitute valid reasoning. Moral laws, on the other hand, are *imperative*, purporting to tell us what we must do. The former kind obviously need no lawgiver, the latter just as obviously do. (Darwall also emphasizes this difference; see *The Second Person Standpoint*, 14.)

19. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, chap. 10. Actually, these are the criteria he suggests tend to elevate mere obligations to the more stringent status of *moral* obligations. For my purposes, it is not important to introduce this complication. The point is the same: these are factors that increase the felt pull of the demands of others upon us.

20. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 244–5.

21. I should add that these features have the described effect when *thought* present, whether they in fact are.

There is a certain class of obligations, which I denominate *contractual*, that are a special case. Having made a promise, for example, it does not appear that our obligation to fulfill it depends upon the factors described above. The reason for this is that in making the promise we are implicitly granting that the one to whom we make it has a legitimate claim on us for the thing promised. In other words, we stipulate at the outset that the future demand of the person with whom we contracted will be treated as imposing an obligation upon us, and that this is not subject to revision. It even seems plausible to think that the force of the demand for the fulfillment of a promise comes as much (or more) from society as from the recipient of the promise.[22]

Moreover, a case can be made that some of the factors above *are* relevant to the obligation to keep a promise. The relationship within which the promise is made surely is: promises extracted through threats or manipulation are often thought not to bind the one who makes them. Imagine a child who is kidnapped and abused and made to promise never to tell the authorities should he ever escape. Should we consider that promise binding? The nature of the thing promised also is important. If a person makes a promise to carry out a mob hit but later repents of the idea, should we say he ought nevertheless to fulfill it? These considerations point to the conclusion that even though contractual obligation are more complicated, they are still sensitive to at least some of the factors we have been discussing.

The lesson for divine command theory is clear: God's goodness is of highest importance to His ability to create obligations by His commands. Adams puts the point nicely: "It is only a God who is supremely excellent in being, in commanding, and more generally in relating to us, whose commands can plausibly be regarded as constituting moral obligation."[23] The second reason why God cannot make just anything right should now be clear: If God's character were quite different, such that He commanded gratuitous torture and other such things, He would no longer be the sort of being whose commands could give rise to obligations. To put it differently, they would no longer be a source of the right.

Let me summarize the argument so far: The standard version of the Euthyphro dilemma (as we saw with Rachels) presents the theist with two options: Either he must say God's commands make things right and good, or that there are moral standards independent of God. We have seen first that the good and right must be kept separate, and that the theist is not committed to

22. Hume thought about promises in a way very much like this. As he explains, "All of them, by concert, enter into a scheme of actions, calculated for common benefit, and agree to be true to their word; nor is there any thing requisite to form this concert or convention, but that every one have a sense of interest in the faithful fulfilling of engagements, and express that sense to other members of the society. This immediately causes that interest to operate upon them; and interest is the *first* obligation to the performance of promises" (*Treatise of Human Nature* [New York: Prometheus, 1992], 522–3).

23. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, 255.

the position that God's commands determine the good. The theist can claim God's commands *do* ultimately establish the right, but this does not make the right arbitrary. The reason why is that God's commanding is constrained by His nature, and His very ability to be the source of moral obligations depends upon His goodness.

Divine Goodness

I indicated at the beginning that the Euthyphro dilemma is standardly employed to demonstrate the autonomy of ethics. Insofar as this is the goal, my arguments have not yet completely thwarted it. The account given has depended in several places on the goodness of God, but it might be objected that at just this point the independence of morality is ultimately demonstrated. For there seems to be a puzzle about calling God good: If the divine command theorist is to maintain morality's ultimate dependence upon God, then there cannot be an external standard of goodness to which God conforms. Rather, God must Himself be the source and paradigm of goodness. However, this makes the ascription of goodness to God appear vacuous, for in calling God good we are only saying God is like God.[24] It would seem that in order for such an ascription to have substantive content, we must have a standard of goodness independent of God.

This objection runs into problems for the same reason the Euthyphro dilemma does: it fails to notice an important distinction. While it is correct to think that a substantive description of God as good requires our having an independent conception of goodness, this independence can be of two kinds. Let me illustrate them with an example: Imagine a language called *Twing* someone makes up and sets down in an official manuscript. Suppose Tim learns Twing indirectly from some friends who speak it. Suppose further that one day he stumbles upon the official manuscript, reads it, and exclaims, "This thing is written in perfect Twing!" Tim is here making what is for him a substantive statement. He has an independent concept of perfect Twing that he applies in this case. Contrast this case with Tim finding some other manuscript (perhaps a translation of Homer) composed in Twing accompanied by the same exclamation. In the first case, Tim's evaluation of the manuscript depends upon a merely *epistemically* independent conception of perfect Twing. In fact, his conception is *ontologically* dependent, for his conception of perfect Twing traces back to the very source he now evaluates. In the second case, Tim's conception of perfect Twing is both epistemically and ontologically independent of the manuscript he is evaluating. Returning to the case at hand with this distinction in mind, it is clear that, in order to

24. For objections like this, see Kai Nielsen, *Ethics without God*, chap. 2, and David Brink, "The Autonomy of Ethics," 152–3.

make a substantive ascription of goodness to God, our conception of it need only be epistemically independent and not ontologically so.[25] In other words, it is only necessary that we learn what is good from instances other than God. It would be a real and important discovery for us that what we antecedently understand as the good is exemplified in God, even if He is ultimately its source. This objection therefore fails as an argument for the autonomy of ethics.

There is one final worry, however, that someone might have: If God's nature is the source of the good, then does changing His nature change the nature of the good? If His nature were to become cruel instead of loving, would cruelty then be good? The answer to this question relies on the distinction just made between what establishes the good and how we come to form our conception of it. The latter depends upon the kind of creatures we are and the environment in which we find ourselves. Leaving that fixed, changing God's nature to something quite contrary to its present form would not change at all what we take to be the good. Furthermore, any knowledge we acquired of His altered character would neither incline us to call Him good nor to accept His requirements as imposing obligations. Changing God's nature would also not change what is "really" good since an identification of God with the good is only intelligible on the assumption that He is the superlative exemplar of our prior conception of the good.[26]

There is one way in which God having a different character would yield a different conception of the good, and that is if He created a quite different world that reflected that other character. If we were creatures with a very different form of life, we would have a correspondingly different conception of the good. There is nothing out of order about this, however. Our notion of the good seems necessarily tied to our attributes and capacities as humans. This is a premise most ethicists would surely be willing to grant.[27]

25. This distinction is quite similar to, and serves a similar purpose as, the old distinction between "order of being" and "order of knowing." Paul Copan deploys this distinction in the article mentioned above (footnote 11), pointing out that it is not enough for the atheist to show that we can *know* what is right or good apart from God; he must also give a plausible story about what makes such knowledge possible.

26. That is not to say that an encounter with God cannot change our idea of the good in certain respects, but those changes must always seem in hindsight to be commensurate with what was previously a partially incomplete grasp of the good. This is similar to a point often made in ethics: a theory that required us to alter too much our currently held conception of morality would not seem to us a theory *about* morality at all. Likewise, if God's character were radically different than what *we* consider good, we would never be tempted to apply this label to it.

27. Michael Martin, however, seems to deny it, suggesting that certain moral truths hold in any possible world. In the context, he is arguing against a version of divine command ethics that holds that God is necessary for morality. The problem, as he sees it, is the implication that if there were no God then there would be no moral standards, which conflicts with his conviction that certain moral standards hold in all possible worlds—even those without God ("A Response to Paul Copan's Critique of Atheistic Objective Morality," *Philosophia Christi* 2 [2000]: 84–5.) My position in this paper is more modest than the one to which Martin is responding. I argue not that morality *must* depend upon God, but that it *may*. This avoids the thrust of Martin's objec-

Conclusion

What shall we say, then, about the Euthyphro dilemma? For one thing, it is able to present a serious obstacle to theistic views of the sources of morality only when both those views and the dilemma itself are crudely described. If a distinction is drawn between the right and the good, divine command theory can yield accounts of both that easily evade the objections the Euthyphro dilemma is supposed to generate. To the objection that God could make anything right, the theist can point to the constraints of God's nature and the background conditions for the creation of obligations. The theist can also accept that the ascription of goodness to God requires an independent standard, but insist that it need only be epistemically and not ontologically so. In short, a nuanced divine command theory can finally put Socrates' troubling question to rest. Arguments for the autonomy of ethics can no longer rely on the Euthyphro problem to undermine the conceptual coherency of theistic approaches.[28]

tion, for I can admit that there could still be morality without God. After all, morality is in part a social institution that involves the demands we place upon one another in society. There is every reason to think beings like ourselves would still place demands upon one another even if there were no God. I do, however, think the content and nature of morality without God would be quite different than what it is, though there is not room to elaborate on this point here. I should add that there is a sense in which morality without God is impossible if, as I think is the case, the existence of anything at all is impossible without God. But it is best to keep this metaphysical issue distinct from the purely metaethical one of whether the existence of morality is compatible with the nonexistence of God.

28. I owe thanks to David Shoemaker and anonymous reviewers for insightful comments on this paper.