

On "the Euthyphro 'Dilemma'"

By "the Euthyphro 'dilemma'" is meant that "either God's approval of certain states of affairs is what makes them right or good *or* God approves of certain states of affairs because they *are* right or good, as in Plato's *Euthyphro* (10A)" (205). Otherwise expressed: "[T]he Euthyphro question" is, "[I]s something good because God wills it or does God will it because it is good?" (209 f.).

The proper response is "Neither!" "God neither obeys the moral order, nor does [God] invent it. [God] is Goodness itself, and all else that is good is good in imitation of God's nature' [so Katherin Rogers]. Hence the Euthyphro 'dilemma' is really a tri-lemma" (211).

There is a parallel argument from modal logic. "God neither invented modal truths nor is bound by them. Rather, modal truths reflect the divine nature itself. . . . [B]oth moral and modal logical considerations make it possible to reject the forced choice implied in the Euthyphro 'dilemma': there is a third option made possible in perfect being theology or philosophy of religion, the option wherein it is integral to the divine nature to *be* good and necessary, rather than [either] to (arbitrarily) *invent* goodness and necessity or [to] (dependently) *conform to* goodness and necessity" (211; on 205, "perfect being theology or philosophy of religion" is explained to mean "the Anselmian effort to think through what Charles Hartshorne has called the logic of perfection: what attributes would a perfect being possess? Perfect being philosophers and theologians think that responses to this question ought to drive responses to most other questions in theology and philosophy of religion. For example, what are the implications, if any, of the logic of perfection for the claim that God exists?; what are the implications, if any, of believing in a perfect being for moral theory or metaethics?; etc.").

Once again, according to Rogers: "[I]t is impossible that God should command us to act in ways that are not for the best. . . . God neither creates nor conforms to the standards of value; [God] *is* the standard" (213; cf. also 216: "God does not create

objective moral principles, nor is God bound by them; rather, God *is* the moral standard and we are moral to the extent that we imitate divine omnibenevolence.").

The choice before us is this: either (1) "the tradition from Hume to G.E. Moore is correct in claiming that an ought cannot be derived from an is, so that any oughts are merely the result of some decision that we make, whether individually or collectively, in which case there may be . . . intersubjectivity in morality, but not real objectivity; or (2) there is an omnibenevolent, perfect being that generates in us an objective *ought* if and when we become aware of such a being" (220).

With respect to the second alternative, however, we also have a choice—between classical theism, on the one hand, and neoclassical or process theism, on the other, the latter being relatively more adequate and free of difficulties.

(All parenthetical page references are to Daniel A. Dombrowski, "Objective Morality and Perfect Being Theology: Three Views," *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy*, 29, 2 [May 2008]: 205-221; and all quotations in double quotes are of statements of Dombrowski himself, those in single quotes being either terms that he sets in [scare] quotes or statements of others that he quotes.)

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For all of my sympathy—as well as agreement!—with Dombrowski's argument, I'm also put off by it. For one thing, what he calls a "tri-lemma" is nothing of the kind, but rather one of the ways of successfully coping with a *dilemma*—that way, namely, generally known as "escaping between the horns." Also troubling is that some of his interpretations of process thought are insufficiently subtle or nuanced—as when he gives the impression that "omnipotence" itself is the problem, instead of clearly identifying it as the untenable, because self-contradictory, meaning commonly assigned the term, implicitly if not explicitly, in the theological tradition (215 f.); or when he says "in the neoclassical or process theistic view, God is *a se* or independent with respect to divine

existence (the fact *that* God exists), but not with respect to God's *actuality* (*how* God exists)" (210), not only misleadingly implying that God's existence is a matter of fact, after all, but also ignoring God's *essence*, i. e., that God not only exists *a se* but also exists *as God* in the same independent way (210).

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