

The Interception of Divine Will and Moral Philosophy: A Critical Examination

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Abstract

This focus paper seeks to articulate the dual challenges of divine will and moral philosophy and the inherent struggle to identify their respective spaces within the methodology. She further elaborates on how this Catholic conception of divine will was challenged and shunned in modernity, especially in the context of philosophical theories of free will, and theories of ethics including Divine Command Theory and Natural Law Theory perhaps in her desperate attempt to find solutions to this confusion. The paper ends with considering suitable paradigms that provide boundaries to the debate in relation to human agency, moral accountability, and belief in the divine.

Introduction

As many believers advocate, waiting upon divine guidance as we embark on moral discourse is a common culture throughout religions (Odo, 2022).

Religious or sectarian values are mainly beneficial to those in morality. Moral values whose limits have been made by a high inflow of sectarian elements are not common. The moral value emphasizes on carries both good and bad or evil aspects, as per society or the norms the religion followers choose or are taught to abide by. The moral commands and practices of a pure Christian sect demonstrate other extremes faced by society today. It is orthodox Christian tradition that guides followers relative to any subject matter including their understanding of how God would like them to be.

According to divine command theory, the idea that the will of God or gods is the source of moral behavior is a normative ethical theory.

Divine command theory is a non- consequentialist ethical theory. Non- consequentialism (this employed along with the definition of deontological) is the ethical stance which holds that consequences is not and indeed must not be the test upon which actions are evaluated as right or wrong, right or wrong people and so on. Actions are judged only on their righteousness and people only on their goodness, acceptable in regards of some more “commanding” morals waiting for none to be earned. Most obviously, the Divine Command Theory embodies such views. It states that if anyone believes in God or goddesses or gods and believes they have given out moral rules then most actions and people are ethical only when they follow those rules irrespective of the possible outcomes that may follow; in consideration of the morality, consequences do not matter.

This implies that it is not specific actions that are assessed and taken to be adjudged, but certain classes of actions. Specific actions are assessed and adjudged with regard to classes of actions.

Divine Will and Free Wills' Discourse

These modes of existence: divine will, free will, and determinism are often linked and engaged in debate speeches, philosophical and theological. Divine Will is what is called God's plan or divine purpose and is usually regarded as the primary moral force or authority. It implies that the most supreme deity intends and has plans about the universe and its rationals. Free Will is the matter of internalism about choice and how it explains independent decision-making even in the working of one's religious beliefs. Free will means that individuals are able to control the actions of their own lives instead of being mere instruments of a predetermined divine "master plan". Determinism is a philosophical theory which states that all events, including human actions, are ultimately determined by causes external to the will. What it means is that our decisions are not in fact made freely but are merely the end effects of a battle that started eons ago.

Theological Perspectives

The dilemma regarding divine determinism versus human free will has continued unwaveringly since time immemorial. If God, the Creator, knows the future and dictates all actions, then how can people have true moral agency and freedom of choice? This issue has attracted attention for ages with all sorts of ecclesiastics attempting to unravel the envisaged paradox.

Calvinism, for instance, upholds the doctrine of predestination to the extreme that God has chosen people to be saved or condemned from before the world was created. This approach appears to suggest some limitations on man's freedom as it indicates that all man's choices are within the confines of God's decree. In this regard, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* by Calvin offers many such explanations and contemplates that human autonomy is not negated by God's predestined purpose, but rather it emphasizes how deep God's grace was (Calvin, 1559).

However, as with those critically analyzing Calvinism, the tenets of Arminianism center on human free agency, and since God is able to foreknow our decisions, He does not choose them in advance. This view, therefore, permits people to act in a similar manner since no one seeks to explain how far God's desire controls the actions of men. Arminius's *Defensio Fidei Catholicae* founds and justifies this standpoint quite effectively that free will in man does not undermine the sovereignty of God (Arminius, 1608).

One of the more recent theological approaches, called Open Theism, challenges this assumption by saying that God does not know the future and that he relates with the developed world such that humans are free and their actions are not all dependent on him.

The view adopted does not favor the usual idea of God's apophatic omniscience as it proposes that God's knowledge depends on the decisions made by his own creatures. Several modern-day theologians including Clark Pinnock and Gregory Boyd have sought to defend Open Theism

claiming that it presents a balanced and biblically consistent comprehension of God's engagement with the universe (Pinnock, 1991; Boyd, 1997).

The control of the mind by God versus freedom of the mind has in addition been one of the major arguments in philosophy. Compatibilists believe that free will and causation are not mutually exclusive absolutes. While actions can and often are caused, one can still be free in the sense of having free will and means of exercise. By contrast, incompatibilists maintain that free will and deterministic causation cannot coexist in any complete version of the two concepts.

A common compatibilist position is that the only sense of free will that is relevant is the ability to do what one wants and to act according to belief even if all desires and beliefs would have been determined. On the other hand, incompatibilists consider that if our choice is under any preceding causes, choice is not free if otherwise is true.

Philosophical Challenges: Should Scientists be bound by Philosophy and Philosophy by Science? Compromise in these disputes, at least today, is called compatibilism. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that these two aspects free will and deterministic views have such skin scratching debates.

Compatibilists are those who affirm that it is possible to combine free will and moral responsibility although many incompatibilists suggest that these two principles cannot be made to cohere.

Compatibilism

Compatibilists assert that free will must be separate from judicial and civil consequences. Even if, determinism holds – they argue, we can still exercise free will. That is the position of Hobbes who insists that liberty is the power of a man to act without external impediments. Thus, they contend, there is no departure from the preference of one's desires because externalities do not stop the person from doing so (Hobbes, 1651).

The social contract anticipates Hobbes contention that although our behaviour may be caused by other forces, external constraints do not prevent us from acting freely regardless of the restraining conditions. Take for instance, a captive would be said not to be free, in opposition to a free person who is not imprisoned who has the liberty to go anywhere they wish. This type of freedom which Hobbes speaks about can exist together with determinism for all willing acts can in a way be seen to be free acts if external constraints are absent.

Incompatibilism

On the contrary incompatibilists would argue that it is impossible for both free will and determinism to coexist.

They argue that if everything we do is the outcome of earlier events, we will never truly be able to freely choose any other action. For example, "freedom of the will" has been widely discussed in the literature by incompatibilists who say that our decisions cannot be influenced by others and that we have the option of choosing otherwise, even when things are exactly the same.

Determinism poses a problem for an influential incompatibilist view, namely that of Kant, since he argued that freedom as genuine action means being able to choose even if all the preconditions surrounding the choice remain the same. That is, according to Kant, the deterministic and free notion of the present action is impossible (Kant, 1785).

Even so, an illustration of such reasoning is often known as the "Principle of Alternative Possibilities", since our decisions may be taken by plausible ways, with the choices of each of them only applying to selection but declaring that the principle may be the only alternative. Under this condition and according to this principle, we are only free if we are able to make a change to select another option, even if we forth feel there is no need to alter the selection since we do it all the same. If such undetermined conditions were such that there were no events and select options raised in early time rather than later, how then, would we be making simple decisions taken for granted?

Case Studies

The Fall of Adam and Eve

In the Holy Scripture of Adam and Eve's Fall, the notorious conflict and dichotomy between God's sovereignty and human's actions is depicted very clearly.

God reveals in Genesis that He was guiding Abraham to go and sacrifice Isaac. Then Abraham did what God commanded and at that moment an angel came and stopped the man from carrying out the sacrifice. There are various interpretations of this biblical story. Some of them explain the reasons for the consent of Abraham to sacrifice his son as his willingness to completely surrender to the will of God suggesting that there was no way out but to surrender. Others argue that it was Abraham who chose to obey God as a matter of faith and that was to test his will and thereby the exercise of free will. This point of view implies that it was possible for Abraham not to follow however he did so because of faith and obedience to God. René Descartes, dwell deep into the problems that relates to the existence of man and how the mind relates to the body in his work *The Philosophical Meditations of Descartes*. Descartes claimed in such work as *Third Meditation* that he possesses will which exists independently from his body and through which he makes choices without any external coercion. However, Descartes also realized the fact that human freedom is never absolute. It is their conclusions that such decisions do not depend on an individual but the will of God and therefore to the correct choice to, for example, the good that one may possess.

Mechanism relates the presence of free will to the effectiveness of sovereign will, offering the view that although human beings are capable of choice, such choice has a limit, which is the will of God.

Divine Will and Moral Philosophy

Many would like to know what goldberry calls the significance of the divine will and how it affects moral philosophy. Theories associated with this kind of individualism suffer from various issues (issues such as the issues with the validity of the existence of God or gods as the existence of opposing ideas on whether to believe in God or gods, their law who, how, where, even why cannot

be legislated where God or gods do(s) not, of tautology, etc.) The said command theorists try to explain how these problems would arise as if they are problems of every day concerns to any religious person.

Jacques Thiroux (1995) contends that it is the absence of any reasonable requirement of a divine entity or entities as well as the absence of any requirement for adherence to the stated structure which actually brings out the embedded problems for the divine command doctrine. Thiroux goes on to explain that even if one were to satisfactorily demonstrate the supernatural, the question of how it is possible to determine whether a supernatural existence is beneficial to morality still looms.

In his view, however, while it is correct to say that there are rules worth summoning, the underlying rationale for doing so does seem to be flawed. Considerations adduced by Thiroux himself include the contention of the validity of these rules for a person who does not sustain the belief in any sort of supernatural being. Even if this superior measure, and commandments, will be accepted as true, there is still the question of how to be looking into them.

Olen (1983) supports this critic. In as much as sociological imagination applies to religion as it does on other facets in society, it is to be expected that there will be varieties of religions. Thus the catch is: how do we discern which of these perspectives should be accepted? Is it appropriate to adopt certain religious beliefs and practices given the current state of religious plurality? The same challenge with the question raised above poses that if morality is a feature of religion, then this same question which faces religiosity will also face morality if it is placed in ethical contexts.

It is this insecurity that in part fuels a huge argument as to the existence of a creator, or to the existence of any higher purpose, order, or plan to which we belong and have a specific role.

No doubt, it can be shelved that this issue brought up by Jeffrey Olen need not arise because as stated above, with or without divine command theory just like social institutions, there is ethics with a lot of diversity. This supports the assertion that the notion of some moral disputing ethical systems is an inclination of truth. In short, the variation is part and parcel of the phenomenon known as ethics. O'Brien Steven, in his article God and Morality, states that in dealing with moral issues one does not take theology as the final authority. As he puts it, 'some people would feel more secure if they had the knowledge that the world has been designed by some all-good being for good purposes. Most ordinary people would wish to please rather than displease, out of fear or courtesy, with God's command'. But that sort of anxiety and fear is unfounded given that the existence of some people at some point in history is dependent on the decision of other people. In one way, at least, there must seem to be the presence of some external authority which one believes is followed for some reason.

Fidelity to a secular law may be guided only by its internal logic or avoidance of a lawbreaking penalty. Worrying or showing respect to God's wishes would not render the divine command theory irrelevant. Some advocate that if God is there then murder is an evil act as God created all so no one should die and God does not encourage destruction. This view was Cahn's as well. These opinions are not reasonable to him. God made the microbes' viruses and the plague-ridden rats

which must be pets too. Only that this time he is at the contrary edge, he states that as God made provisions for us to live then in turn it means that God had made provisions for us to die too. Thus it is understood that by murder one is put in helping the works of the Lord. Third, God endowed humanity with both the urge and abilities to commit murder. Therefore it follows that God wants us to act on this urge. Cahn argues further that “an individual becomes persuaded in the Tenth Comandment purports to have become persuaded, that a trustworthy source of knowledge regarding God’s will for man can be found in the elevating sent of virtue towards the Law and the democratic virtues of resistance to violence with low or no aversion to killing.

Theory of Natural Law is another of the prominent ethical theories which states that it is possible to comprehensively understand ethics and morals through the use of reason and by observing nature itself. Although such a conception does not necessarily depend on a willingness to submit to God’s plan, it usually assumes the existence of a rational being who ordered the world according to those moral laws. Therefore, though Divine Command Theory is not deeply embedded in the articulation of moral precepts, it may be understood as doing thin the ethical approaches of Natural Law Theory. How can one reconcile the problem of evil and the theory of God’s Omnibenevolence and omnipotence? If He is too good then why is there evil? And if He is all able then why evil has not been exterminated? This issue has occupied the minds of the scholars for many centuries, pardoning the gap in theological literature in which moral goodness and incidentally evil has existed. J. L. Mackie in his work - The Problem of Evil - presents a traditional rationalist case studies illustrating why evil exists, illustrates paradox in which evil exists and God is omniscience and omnipotence. The Problem Critical Examination The issue of the relationship between God’s will and ethical philosophy is a multifaceted one which has been on the table for thousands of years.

Though studies regarding “divine will” can help explain moral values and ultimate aims, it raises certain concerns such as human agency, free will or theodicy.

Theological and Philosophical Perspectives

The challenges and tensions involved in combining divine will and moral philosophy are no such phenomena and are as expected to depend on the theoretical and philosophical prisms taken on board. For example, Calvinism which seeks the absolute power of God and that individual make a conscious choice of salvation or losing it, have inner conflicts of coordinating the will of God with the will of man freely. On the contrary, the Arminians who emphasize free will in on pertinent matters may be at a few lifting the Divine will and how it can affect the decisions we make without infringing our free will regarding matters such as salvation.

Practical Implications

Arguments regarding divine will, and indeed moral philosophy are not mere exercises of the mind. They have consequences with respect to how one perceives his interaction with the rest of the universe, with God himself, and with morality. For instance, when we yield to the belief that the only possible source of moral validity occurs in God’s will then more often than not people will obediently practice religious instruction without attempting to challenge its authority.

When experiencing weakness, perhaps we could look at things differently. Have we ever considered that if we allow individuals to act for themselves and develop set of values for themselves, then, instead of blindly adhering to the established norms prevailing in society; they will become innovators?

The Problem of Theodicy

The problem of evil is one of the most damning critiques against the existence of a kind and omnipotent God. If there is an all-good God, then, why is there evil? If there is an all mighty God, then, why is there evil allowed to exist? This problem has been in discussion for centuries with several ingenious ways of trying to separate evil from the nature of an all loving God.

One way out of this problem of evil is to claim that such is summoning evil for the greater good. This stance posits that evil is a necessary tool within God's ultimate destiny for creation, for example, in formation or in testing our beliefs. But again, this stand has been knocked as being too simplistic and does not address the plight of the innocents who suffer.

Conclusion

Finished with answers to the question 'why does God allow evil?' some authors pointed out that God gives power to choose freely which also covers the basis of human evil. This view suggests the problem lies in human beings. It further argues that human beings only are the ones accountable for the evil in the world and therefore, God Permits His Kingdom to suffer because He can't interfere with our free choices otherwise our, constitutional First Amendment Rights will be curtailed.

Nevertheless, this reply has been subject to criticism due to its inability to account for the problem of natural evil like earthquakes, hurricane and diseases.

The effects of the discussion about divine will and ethics are not only confined within the confines of the classroom. A grasp of this relationship allows individuals to negotiate intricate ethical conflicts, appreciate their own faith systems in a more complex manner and relate productively with others holding religious or secular philosophies. Although this paper has provided an overview of the issues and attendant literature concerning divine will, and moral philosophy, there are many gaps to be filled. Future research can focus on one particular aspect or one theological or philosophical perspective; look at the development of the argument over the years or the impact of various standpoints about this issue. Notwithstanding, the question of divine will and moral philosophy is quite intricate and continues to be evolving raising more questions regarding the human condition and reality. In doing so, we can also develop a greater recognition of the complexity of the problems that human beings are able to perceive and address.

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