
Philosophy and Belief in God: The Resurgence of Moral Admirability

SHIKHA SRIVASTAVA
Senior Research Fellow
Department of Philosophy
University of Allahabad
Allahabad U.P., India

Abstract:

A theist normally holds that God is by nature morally perfectly good and also that men have a duty to obey the commands of God- that the commands of God create moral obligation. The 'goodness' of God respects the perfection of his nature. This article is written for the purpose of explaining the theory of the moral principles or rules that guide the actions of a maximally great being. An attempt is also made to resolve an alleged paradox that claims that moral perfection is incompatible with moral admirability.

Key words: Goodness, holiness, love, moral perfection, communication, manifestation, Divine Command theory

INTRODUCTION:

A new interest in the God of the orthodox Hebrew-Christian tradition has grown to a proportionate degree among contemporary thinkers. This new interest in theism can be traced to the demise of intellectual rigor in theological liberalism. This has led to increased sophistication of theistic argument. There are some who believe that God is a rational part other than any special evidence. The others maintain that everything which beings has a cause. The universe had a

beginning and, thus, it has a cause. These arguments prove that God exist.

By a theist I understand a man who believes that there is a God. By 'God' he understand something like a 'Person' without a body who is eternal, free, able to do anything , knows everything, perfect and is the proper object of human worship and obedience, the creator and sustainer of the universe. God is a rational spirit being who is all-powerful, all knowing, all loving, omnipresent, unchangeable, transcendent and eternal and the personal creator. Christians, Jews and Muslims are all in the above sense theists. There is such an absolute perfection in God's nature and being that nothing is wanting to it or defective in it, and nothing can be added to it to make it better.

He is originally good, good of himself, which nothing else in; for all creatures are good only by participation and communication from God. He is essentially good; not only good but goodness itself. The creatures goodness is a super added quality in God. It is his essence. He is infinitely good and the creature's good is but a drop. But in God there is an infinite ocean or gathering together of good. He is eternally and immutably good for he cannot be less good than he is as there can be no addition made to him so there is no subtraction from him.

GOODNESS OF GOD AND MORAL ADMIRABILITY:

Many of us have "goodness" apart from the character of God. Of course, a moral quality will most likely be a consideration. Though there will probably be some difficulty here if we more loosely refer to mere sentimentality, experience and subjective feeling. Consider the following common ideas:

"Goodness is the opposite of badness. However, a negative concept does not define a positive concept, though it does help to isolate it. Then one can immediately ask, "What is

badness?” Certainly this makes clearer that we are considering a matter of ethics and morality.”

Both Plato and Aristotle considered goodness to be, “the highest end to which knowledge and action lead us”¹ However an objective moral quality seems missing here. With regard to the German philosopher Nietzsche, to be good is ‘to be brave’. It is “all that increase the feeling of power, the will to power and power itself in man.”² There is no moral element here, only the upholding of raw human potency. So would this definition establish the ‘highest end in the realm of sophisticated, high tech larceny, to be good?

“Good” may be associated with pleasure, human happiness, or as one philosopher expresses it that which is “minimally conducive to human happiness.”³ Here the experiential tends to rise above the moral. But would this make the proposed bliss of the hedonist or sadist “Good”?

COMPARISON WITH HOLINESS AND LOVE OF GOD:-

Negative holiness is that which God is wholly set apart from that is moral impurity or unrighteousness. Positive holiness is that which God is set apart to that is absolute moral purity intrinsic to himself, or righteousness. Hence, righteousness is at the very heart of God’s moral being.

God’s Goodness is His admirable being and doing, but especially His attractive moral excellence, which when expressed actively is defined as His love. God is good, worthy of admiration and when He morally demonstrates. His goodness that is he loves. “Goodness is the generic attribute of the love of benevolence. Grace, pity, mercy, forgiveness, are there but specific actings are distinguished by the attitude of their objects rather than by the attitude of their objects and by the intrinsic principles.”⁴

Stephen Charnock comments: “Goodness is the brightness and loveliness of our majestic Creator.” In an

active sense it is God's inclination to deal well and bountifully with his creature.⁵ Hence God is morally attractive in both his being and doing. This appeal is experienced by the child of God when his heart having been renewed is capable of delighting in righteousness.

God's love refers to his active goodness. When God communicates his goodness to his creation and man in particular He expresses love.. By its very nature; love has a transitive, active quality, that is, it must be directed towards an object. His communicated goodness of God has four distinct aspects.⁶ When God expresses His goodness, there is the active manifestation of his love as benevolence, grace, longsuffering, and mercy

God is maximal goodness or annibenevolence. In attempting to understand this notion of divine moral perfection one of the main issues for rational theology is the nature of morality.⁷ One should explore the implications of some of these theories for the understanding of God's moral perfection.

According to the divine command theory an act is morally required or obligatory just when God commands it. An act is morally wrong just when God forbid it and an act is morally right or permissible just when God does not forbid it. Moreover, the divine command theory holds that an act is morally required wrong or right because God has either commanded it, forbidden it, or not forbidden it, respectively. The divine command theory implies that morality derives from God's command. Divine commands are not a reflection of any independently existing moral standards. These commands determine moral standards.

If this moral theory were correct, then morality would have no basis other that God's commands. Furthermore, since there would be no objective, independent moral standards, God's commands would not be guided by any such standards, and God's commands would in that sense be arbitrary. Hence, the divine command theory of morality is a type of subjective

theory of morality. A subjective theory of morality states that right and wrong or good and evil are determined by the attitudes beliefs or feelings of one or more agent. Some types of subjective theories of morality say that it is the attitudes of a group of agents, or of a society that determine morality. Other more extreme theories lay down that what morality is for a particular agent is determined by the attitudes, of that agent, and in that sense there can be equally justified for each agent. Though conflicting these are also moral standards.

Finally, there is the version that holds that morality is determined by the attitudes of one unique agents i.e., the supreme moral authority. The divine command thereof is a special case of this third type of subjective moral theory, the divine command theory is open to serious criticism.

In particular, on the supposition that the divine command theory is true, it is difficult to understand how God can be essentially morally admirable at all times. For in that case, since nothing would be good or bad, right or wrong. Prior to the issuance of God's commands, God could not be said to be morally admirable prior to issuance of those commands. Because it seems possible that there is a time to such that God's first commands were issued. It appears that if the divine command theory is true then God could fail to be morally admirable at same time. Yet God is supposed to be essentially morally perfect, and therefore essentially morally admirable, at all times.

Furthermore, if the divine command theory were true, then there would be a sense in which morality would be arbitrary. According to this theory, anything that God commanded would be morally required and anything that God forbade would be morally impermissible. So, if God were to command us to infants, we would be morally required to do so. If God were to forbid us to act kindly, then it would be morally wrong to be kind. These implications of the divine command theory are clearly absurd. It might be drugged that because

God is essentially morally perfect, he could not command or forbid such things. However, this reply assumes that God's moral perfection has a basis other than his issuance of the commands in question, and this contradicts the divine command theory of morality.

Alternatively, a divine command theorist of morality might reply that it is because God is essentially loving that he could not issue morally repugnant commands or prohibitions (such as commanding us to torture infants or forbidding us to act kindly).⁸ But, if God is essentially loving then one may ask, why is he essentially loving? There are two observations that are relevant to answer this question. First necessarily nature includes what is being essentially loving if and only if it is being essentially loving it is morally admirable. Second, it is God's fundamental nature to be a maximally great being with respect to his worthiness for worship and moral admiration. If God is essentially worthy of moral admiration and entails essentially loving then since being essentially loving does not require to be essentially morally admirable. In other words, God's being essentially morally admirable would explain his being essentially loving. One can ignore this aspect of examination is that God is essentially loving because he is essentially morally perfect.

Although God may always command what is required, and may always forbid what is wrong, it is not because he commands or forbids something that is required or wrong. Plato made this point in his dialogue, the Euthyphro, when he and Socrates argue that something is loved by the Gods because it is good, and not good because it is loved by the Gods.⁹

Thus, the goodness of God is the life of the believers' trust. It is this excellency in God which most appeals to our hearts. Because his goodness is endured forever, we ought never to be discouraged: 'The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble and he know them that trust in him'.¹⁰ When others behave badly to us, he should only stand up to give thanks the

Lord, because He is good; and when we ourselves are conscious that we are far from being good, we should only reverently bless him that he is good. We must never tolerate an instant's unbelief as to the goodness of the Lord; whatever else may be questioned. This is absolutely certain, that Jehovah is good. His dispensations may vary but his nature will always remains the same.¹¹

CONCLUSION:

A natural way to understand philosophy and belief in God as rationality and irrationality are in terms of the proper functioning of the relevant cognitive equipment. No doubt, the intellectual game between belief and unbelief will continue. Seen from this perspective, the pertinent question whether it is rational to believe in God. This is more a metaphysical or theological debate. There are some who may say that God is looking down and is amused at the weak efforts of philosophers to demonstrate the rationality of belief in Him to world in which so many people still believe and trust God. The theist has an easy time explaining the notion of our cognitive behavior and this works properly when it functions in the way God designed it to function. Regardless of whether one finds the resurgence of moral admirability disappointing or encouraging, he cannot deny that it is an important and fascinating part of our contemporary intellectual surroundings.

REFERENCES:

- 1- Everett F. Harrism, ed. Baker's Dictionary of theology p. 253.
- 2- Will Durant. Outlines of Philosophy, p. 368.
- 3- William H. Halverson, A Concise introduction to Philosophy.

- 4- Robert L. Dabuey, Systematic theology, p. 169.
- 5- Stephen Charnock, Works, III, pp. 281, 283-4,
- 6- Lawis Berkhoj, Systematic theology, pp 70-79. Also refer to Charles Hodge, Systematic theology J. 99. 427-9, William G.T. Shedd, Dogmatic theology, pp. 385-92.
- 7- Joshua Haffman and Gray S. Rosenkrantz, The Divine Attributes, Black Well publishers, 2002, p. 143.
- 8- Robert M.Adaws, "A Modified Divine Command theory of Ethical Wrongness" in Religion and Morality, ed. G. Outk and J.P. Reeder, Jr Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1973, pp. 318-47
- 9- Plato, Euthypro, in the Trial R Death of Socrates, trans G.M.A. Grube, Indiana poilis, End : Hackett Publishing Company, 1975.
- 10- Nahum 1:7, New International Version (NIV) <https://www.bible.com/bible/1117na>.
- 11- C.H. Spurgeon- Faith's Checkbook.