

A Cruel God?

Edited by
HENDRIK KLINGE
and HEIKO SCHULZ

*Religion in
Philosophy and Theology*
141

Mohr Siebeck

Religion in Philosophy and Theology

Edited by

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141



A Cruel God?

Divine Command Theories as a Challenge
for Theological Ethics

edited by

Hendrik Klinge and Heiko Schulz

Mohr Siebeck

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ISBN 978-3-16-164694-2 / eISBN 978-3-16-164695-9
DOI 10.1628/978-3-16-164695-9

ISSN 1616-346X / eISSN 2568-7425 (Religion in Philosophy and Theology)

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <https://dnb.dnb.de>.

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Typesetting: SatzWeise, Bad Wünnenberg. Printed on non-aging paper.

Mohr Siebeck GmbH & Co. KG, Wilhelmstraße 18, 72074 Tübingen, Germany
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Introduction

HENDRIK KLINGE AND HEIKO SCHULZ

I. Ethics and the Command of God

What should I do? How should I live and act? “He hath shewed thee, O man, what *is* good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Mic 6:8) Anyone who answers the fundamental question of all ethics in this way must expect at least to cause some irritation in an open and pluralistic society. In contemporary European societies, it is anything but a matter of course to refer to the word of God when asking questions about what is morally good. Rather, those who invoke a divine authority in questions of ethics expose themselves to the suspicion that they simply do not accept the rules of post-Enlightenment, democratic deliberation processes. Anyone who cites divine commandments as arguments to arrive at ethical decisions is more likely to receive a weary smile than be taken seriously as a discussion partner. For one would hardly wish to join in a discussion with such a “backward” person.

In contemporary German-speaking theology, especially Protestant theology, there are therefore strong reservations about a strict commandment-based ethical foundation. In addition to the concern of encouraging biblicist or ‘fundamentalist’ tendencies,¹ a major reason for this is that the typically Protestant emphasis on Christian freedom is difficult to reconcile with the apparent or actual heteronomy of commandment ethics. The influence of Immanuel Kant, who contrasts the theonomous (and thus at the same time heteronomous) foundation of ethics with his famous autonomy theorem, is of decisive importance here.² If the divine commandment is currently accorded any significance

¹ Cf. pointedly JOHANNES FISCHER, *Theologische Ethik. Grundwissen und Orientierung* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002), 85 f.

² Kant understands theological ethics as a special case of ethics that seeks the essence of the good in a material (and thus empirical) ground of determination, which, according to him, is inadmissible: “Whether they [i.e. the philosophers] placed this object of pleasure, which was to deliver the supreme concept of the good, in happiness, or in perfection, in moral feeling, or in the will of God – their fundamental principle was always heteronomy, they came inevitably to empirical conditions [....] Only a formal law, i.e., one which prescribes to reason nothing more than the form of its giving universal law as the supreme condition of maxims, can be a priori a determining ground of practical reason” (IMMANUEL KANT, *Critique of Practical Reason*).

at all for the foundation of ethics, this is usually done by recourse to Karl Barth's situational and dynamistic doctrine of commandment.³

In this context, biblical (and therefore, from a Christian perspective, *prima vista* divine) commandments that stand in stark contrast to intuitively widely held moral convictions are of particular importance. A classic example of this is the story of the Aqedah, the binding or sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22), in which God demands that Abraham sacrifice his own son.⁴ The different interpretations of this story by Kant and Søren Kierkegaard already show the aporias into which a decidedly theological ethics based on the concept of the commandment can lead.⁵ The debate surrounding Omri Boehm's theses, who interprets Gen 22 (on the basis of a controversial exegetical decision) contrary to first appearances as the basic pattern of a universalistic morality, can be understood as an indication of the topicality of the question of the ethical relevance of divine commandments for the present day.⁶

Theology and philosophy of religion are therefore faced with the challenge of having to take a stance on the divine commandment in some way without falling back into pre-Enlightenment patterns. A simple biblical derivation of moral norms is no longer a viable path under the conditions of modernity and post-modernity. But does this mean that the divine commandment can no longer play any role at all in the foundation of theological ethics? Are theologians not being unfaithful to their mission if they simply ignore the fact that the Holy Scriptures of the three major monotheistic world religions contain ethical instructions, some of which are very explicit? Should not some attempt be made to give the doctrine of divine commandment a validity that takes account of the objections raised since Kant?

son, translated, with an introduction, by LEWIS WHITE BECK [Indianapolis/New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1956], 66).

³ Cf. for example EILERT HERMS, "Das Wirklichwerden des Guten: das Kommen des Reiches Gottes: zum Verhältnis von Güterlehre und ontologischem Fundament der Ethik," in *Marburger Jahrbuch Theologie* 11 (1999), 85–102.

⁴ Cf. JEAN-PIERRE FORTIN and HEIKO SCHULZ (ed.), *Aqedah. The Binding of Isaac as a Challenge for the Rationality of Religion in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2025).

⁵ Cf. HARTMUT ROSENAU, "Die Erzählung von Abrahams Opfer (Gen 22) und ihre Deutung bei Kant, Kierkegaard und Schelling," in *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 27 (1985), 251–261.

⁶ Cf. OMRI BOEHM, *Radikaler Universalismus. Jenseits von Identität* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2022), as well as OMRI BOEHM, *The Binding of Isaac. A Religious Model of Disobedience* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007). On the debate surrounding Boehm's theses, see the articles by Peter Schäfer in the F.A.Z. of 14 May 2024 and 13 August 2024, the article by Omri Boehm/Michael Bischoff in the F.A.Z. of 11 June 2024, the article by Thomas Wagner in the F.A.Z. of 09 April 2024 and the article by Gustav Seibt in the S.Z. of 29 March 2024.

II. The Debate About Divine Command Theories

In our opinion, providing an answer to these questions is one of the central tasks of theological and religious-philosophical metaethics. This is a metaethical question because it is not the goodness or meaningfulness of individual biblical commandments that is at issue, nor the question of what an ethics that declares the divine commandment to be the highest principle looks like. Rather, it is about a preliminary question of all normative ethics: How should the relationship between the divine commandment and the morally good be determined? This question is not a normative-ethical one, because Kant's question "What shall I do?" requires a completely different answer. Rather, the question of the relationship of the commandment to the moral good is metaethical in the strict sense, because it clarifies the conditions under which ethical judgment is possible in the first place.

In terms of the history of philosophy, religious-philosophical and theological metaethics can therefore be categorized as a chapter in the long history of the dispute over the relationship between religion and morality, theology and ethics. Contemporary metaethicists often cite a passage from Plato's *Euthyphro* as the starting point for this discussion. In this dialog, Socrates poses the question to the eponymous youth: "Just consider this question: – Is that which is holy loved by the gods because it is holy, or is it holy because it is loved by the gods?"⁷ In more recent literature, this problem is referred to as the Euthyphro dilemma⁸ and reformulated in the question of whether the good is good because God commands or wills it, or whether God commands or wills the good because it is good.⁹ In the first case, there is a danger that God arbitrarily determines what is to be regarded as good and what appears to be morally questionable; the Aqedah is the best example of this. In the second case, the problem arises that the will of God becomes irrelevant for ethics per se, since God only affirmatively comprehends the goodness of the good, as it were. Since both outcomes are unsatisfactory for the representative of a theological or religious-philosophical metaethics, he must find a way around both horns of the dilemma. It is therefore no exaggeration to see the more recent discussion of

⁷ Plato, *Euthyphron* 10a, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. I, translated by HAROLD NORTH FOWLER, introduction by W. R. M. LAMB (Cambridge, MA / London: Harvard University Press / William Heinemann Ltd., 1966).

⁸ On the question of whether this is really a dilemma, see HENDRIK KLINGE, *Das Gebot und das Gute. Theologische Metaethik im Zeitalter des Pluralismus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2024), 82–85.

⁹ Cf. JANINE M. IDZIAK, "Divine Command Ethics," in CHARLES TALIAFERRO et al. (ed.), *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (2nd edition, Chichester: Wiley, 2010), 585–591.

metaethics within the philosophy of religion as a reaction to Plato's problem, particularly in its reformulation by John L. Mackie.¹⁰

Theological and religious-philosophical metaethics are, however, rather neglected in contemporary European theology.¹¹ In order to make progress here, one must dare to look "across the pond." Sweeping condemnations of theology and philosophy of religion of Anglo-American provenance, in particular the overly hasty interpretation of analytical philosophy of religion as an academic variety of religious fundamentalism, have led to contemporary German-speaking Protestant theology largely ignoring the work that has been done on the concept of the divine commandment in the English-speaking world in recent decades. It is precisely those approaches that operate as *divine command theories* in the international debate that have, with few exceptions, been almost completely ignored in Germany, even though there has been a growing interest in these theories in recent years.¹²

What characterizes the so-called *divine command theories* is that they combine older theological traditions, especially scholasticism, with argumentative figures from more recent analytical and post-analytical philosophy. The fact that representatives of this current only refer to Karl Barth, if at all, and hardly take into account other basic attempts at theological ethics, such as those that focus on Christian freedom, can be understood as an expression of the difference between continental and analytical traditions in philosophy and theology, which is still difficult to bridge.

The term *divine command theories* is ambiguous. In current English-language literature, it is also used to refer to older drafts of theological ethics (n.b. not only metaethics), from Duns Scotus to Kierkegaard. Understood in this broad sense, *divine command theories* can be described as the most significant manifestation of theological voluntarism, which, alongside natural law ethics, represents the main current of older Western theological ethics.¹³ In a

¹⁰ Cf. JOHN L. MACKIE, *Ethics. Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin Books, 1990 [orig. 1977]), 229 f.

¹¹ Cf. KLINGE, *Das Gebot und das Gute*, 5–13.

¹² Cf. GEBHARD LÖHR, *Gott – Gebote – Ideale. Analytische Philosophie und theologische Ethik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991); HEIKO SCHULZ, "Christlicher Glaube und Metaethik oder: Kann die Sprachanalyse zur Klärung ethischer Grundprobleme in der Theologie beitragen?," in HERMANN DEUSER and DIETRICH KORSCH (ed.), *Systematische Theologie heute. Zur Selbstverständigung einer Disziplin, Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie* 23 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2004), 193–214; BRUNO SJ NIEDERBACHER, "Wie Moral von Gott abhängen kann," in GEORG GASSER et al. (ed.), *Handbuch für analytische Theologie* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2017), 781–803; BRUNO SJ NIEDERBACHER, *Metaethik* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2021), 149–168. HENDRIK KLINGE, "Metaethik im Religionsunterricht," in *TheoWeb* 19, no. 1 (2020), 368–380; HENDRIK KLINGE, "Kant und die *Divine Command Metaethics*. Anmerkungen zu einer Debatte innerhalb der analytischen Religionsphilosophie," in *KSt* 113, no. 1 (2022), 84–111, and HENDRIK KLINGE, *Das Gebot und das Gute*, 142–194.

¹³ Cf. KLINGE, *Das Gebot und das Gute*, 91–141.

narrower sense, *divine command theories* can be described as those theoretical models that emerged from the 1960s onwards as ethical variants of analytical philosophy of religion. The first approaches can already be found in the work of Wittgenstein's student Peter Geach.¹⁴ A real "revival" then took place from the 1970s onwards.¹⁵ Authors such as Robert M. Adams and Philip Quinn presented various drafts that established the divine commandment as a central (meta-) ethical category.¹⁶ The discussion, which mainly took place in journals, soon took on a high degree of complexity, with some very specific problems being discussed. At the same time, the first counter-designs to *divine command theories* emerged, which were linked to them both in their analytical style and in their fundamental orientation towards theological voluntarism. Eminently clear examples of this are the *divine will theories*, which attempt to go 'behind' the divine command by elevating the divine will instead of the divine command to the basis of theological ethics.¹⁷ The high point of the debate so far has been the appearance of several extensive monographs since 1999 that attempt to integrate variants of *divine command theories* or related approaches into a more comprehensive attempt at ethical grounding.¹⁸ One of the most interesting current developments is Christian Miller's further development of *divine will theories* into a *divine desire theory*, which aims to engage with metaethical constructi-

¹⁴ PETER T. GEACH, "The Moral Law and the Law of God," in PETER T. GEACH (ed.), *God and the Soul* (South Bend, IN: Routledge & Kegan Paul Books, 1969), 117–129.

¹⁵ Cf. KLINGE, *Das Gebot und das Gute*, 167–179.

¹⁶ Cf. ROBERT M. ADAMS, "A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness," in GENE OUTKA and JOHN P. JR. REEDER (ed.), *Religion and Morality* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1973), 318–347; ROBERT M. ADAMS, "Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again," in *Journal of Religious Ethics* 7 (1979), 66–79; PHILIP L. QUINN, *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

¹⁷ Cf. MARK C. MURPHY, "Divine Command, Divine Will, and Moral Obligation," in *Faith and Philosophy* 15, no. 1 (1998), 3–27, but also already EDWARD WIERENGA, "A Defensible Divine Command Theory," in *Noûs* 17, no. 3 (1983), 387–407. The late Quinn is also open-minded towards *divine will theories*, see PHILIP L. QUINN, "Divine Command Theory," in HUGH LAFOLLETTE and INGMAR PERSSON (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory* (Chichester: Wiley, 2013), 81–102. For an overview, see KLINGE, *Das Gebot und das Gute*, 195–212. On Christian Miller as currently the most important representative of *divine will theories*, see below, note 19.

¹⁸ There are four monographs in particular that have had a significant influence on the debate: ROBERT M. ADAMS, *Finite and Infinite Goods. A Framework for Ethics* (New York, NY/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999 [Adams' *opus magnum*]); LINDA ZAGZEBSKI, *Divine Motivation Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2004); C. STEPHEN EVANS, *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), and JOHN E. HARE, *God's Command, Oxford Studies in Theological Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). Hare has already developed his position in his previous publications. Cf. JOHN E. HARE, *God's Call. Moral Realism, God's Commands, and Human Autonomy* (Oxford: Eerdmans, 2001), and JOHN E. HARE, *Why Bother Being Good? The Place of God in the Moral Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

vism.¹⁹ Despite these approaches, however, a certain fraying of the debate cannot be overlooked. After the major monographs around the turn of the millennium, it is mainly partial problems that are currently being discussed. A glance at the academic platform academia.edu reveals just how lively the discussion remains, with new contributions on very specific aspects of *divine command theories* and their criticism appearing almost daily. The method and approach of *divine command theories* are seen as a paradigm on which to build.

From the perspective of German-speaking theology, however, the foundation of theological or religio-philosophical ethics in an analytical spirit is anything but self-evident. It can therefore also benefit the debate on *divine command theories* itself to place it in a continental context and to confront it with completely different attempts to lay the foundations of theological ethics in order to break through the relatively closed circle of those who deal with *divine command theories*. For the German-speaking context, however, it is to be hoped that the style of analytical philosophy of religion, which seems alien to many theological ethicists, will be able to give new impetus to the question of the foundations of theological ethics.²⁰

III. Objectives of this Volume

The contributions in this volume emerged from a conference that took place from March 3–5, 2022 under the title “Ist das Gute gut, weil Gott es will? *Divine Command-Theorien* und die Grundlegung der theologischen Ethik” / “Does the Moral Good Rest Upon God’s Will? *Divine Command-Theories* and the Foundation of Theological Ethics” held at the Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main. The contributors all took a more or less clearly religio-philosophical perspective, however diverse their own religious and denominational backgrounds may have been. To round off the volume, a number of contributions were added supplementarily, for the sake of certain aspects that, in our opinion,

¹⁹ Cf. CHRISTIAN B. MILLER, “Divine Will Theories: Intentions or Desires,” in JONATHAN KVANVIG (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 185–207; CHRISTIAN B. MILLER, “Divine Desire Theory and Obligation,” in YUJIN NAGASAWA and ERIK J. WIELENBERG (ed.), *New Waves in Philosophy of Religion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 105–124; CHRISTIAN B. MILLER, “What Should Theists Say about Constructivist Positions in Metaethics?,” in KEVIN JUNG (ed.), *Religious Ethics and Constructivism. A Metaethical Inquiry*, *Routledge Studies in the Philosophy of Religion* (New York/London: Routledge, 2018), 82–103.

²⁰ Lohmann’s judgment, made over twenty years ago, that especially in Protestant theology the fundamental question takes a back seat to applied ethics, can in our opinion continue to be valid. Cf. FRIEDRICH LOHMANN, *Zwischen Naturrecht und Partikularismus. Grundlegung christlicher Ethik mit Blick auf die Debatte um eine universelle Begründbarkeit der Menschenrechte* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002), 1–6.

could not be given sufficient space within the framework of the conference. Both the conference and the research volume were guided by four sets of questions:

(1) The debate about *divine command theories* is anything but settled, but on the contrary, still extremely lively. How should the current state of the debate be assessed from a philosophy of religion perspective? How have the main protagonists developed their theories in the meantime? What approaches to solving the Euthyphro dilemma are being tested? And, last but not least, what objections to *divine command theories* are being raised and discussed at this advanced stage of the debate?

(2) The debate about *divine command theories* goes back a long way historically and is also widely discussed outside Christian theology and philosophy of religion. Which historical perspectives are particularly significant for the present? How can the metaethical dimension of the divine commandment in the Holy Scriptures of Judaism be characterised? What role do *divine command theories* play in contemporary Islamic theology?

(3) As described above, the current debate is particularly characterized by the fact that numerous alternative theories to the *divine command theories* are being tested. The best known of these are certainly the different variants of *divine will theories*. How can the state of debate be described here? What further developments have *divine will theories* and related theory types undergone in recent years? What newer approaches are now being tested? How should the performance of these alternative theories be assessed with regard to the Euthyphro dilemma and other core problems of religious-philosophical metaethics?²¹

²¹ Regrettably, it is not feasible to cover all alternative theories within this volume. We would like to express our gratitude to Agata Bielick-Robson (Nottingham), co-editor of the RPT-series, for bringing to our attention one additional theory which is among those that unfortunately cannot be discussed in the present volume. In a written note she explained this theory to us as follows: In Judaism, there is a long rabbinic tradition of mediation between heteronomy and autonomy, which originates in the talmudic “not-in-heavens” (*lo basha-mayim*) argument. The little aggadah from the tractate *Bava Metzia 59b* tells the story of the dispute between the talmudic masters, into which God intervenes with his direct commandment to support one of them, Rabbi Eliezer. But Rabbi Joshua, belonging to the opposite school, raises against the divine intervention, by quoting God himself: “*It is not in heaven*” (Deut. 30:12). What did he mean by that? Rabbi Jeremiah replied: “The Torah has already been given at Mount Sinai [and is thus no longer in Heaven]. We pay no heed to any heavenly voice, because already at Mount Sinai You wrote in the Torah (Exod. 23:2): *One must incline after the majority*.” The moral of the story is that while the very origin of the rabbinic code of values is heteronomous and points to the *matan Torah*, that is, “giving of the Torah” at Mount Sinai, the development of the law by the human agents in the world is already autonomous, that is, no longer dependent on God’s instruction or intervention. This dialectical rabbinic topos found its most sophisticated variant in Hermann Cohen’s *Religion of Reason* which contains a detailed polemic with Kant and his notion of Enlightenment as based on rational autonomy. Cohen’s argument is in favour of a *subtle heteronomy*. While only God can *reveal* to the “pagan man” the true Good and transform him into a moral agent in the strict sense of the word (the

(4) As already emphasized, continental philosophy of religion and theology has so far hardly entered into a dialogue with Anglo-American approaches to a metaethics of philosophy of religion. What perspectives do continental theologians take on the talk of the divine commandment? What do continental approaches to theological or religio-philosophical metaethics look like that *do not* follow the paradigm of analytical philosophy of religion? And last but not least, what divergences and overlaps can be seen between the different traditions? Can connecting lines be identified? Can the different strategies profit from one another?

IV. Overview of the Contributions to the Volume

The four sections of the present volume are oriented towards the question complexes mentioned in the last section. The introductory section is devoted to the recent debate on *divine command theories*. The following section is dedicated to historical and interreligious questions, which, however, can only be pursued in part here. The third section is devoted to alternative theories to *divine command theories*, before the fourth concludes the volume with a look at continental theology and philosophy of religion. The following remarks provide a brief overview of the individual contributions to the volume.

Section 1: Promises and Limitations of Divine Command Theories

Michael Almeida's article presents for discussion a hypothetical defense of *divine command theory* (DCT), which is interpreted as a variant of theological voluntarism and distinguished from its *non-command variants*, whereby the

original heteronomy of revelation), the human soul – once transformed – no longer needs constant instruction; when it internalizes the revealed commandment, it is fully “converted” and acts according to “Sinai in our heart” (the resulting autonomy of moral reason). According to Cohen, therefore, “revelation is the creation of reason” or the fulcrum of rationality and ethics, which then develop autonomously in the human religious community: “Thus the teaching is no longer in heaven, and it has not come from heaven, but apparently its origin is made wholly subjective: in your heart and in your mouth. In the heart of man and in the rational speech of man ‘the word’ is contained, as the commandment is called here. It is not far from the spirit of man, but near to it. Revelation has its foundation in the heart” (HERMANN COHEN, *Religion of Reason: Out of the Sources of Judaism*, trans. SIMON KAPLAN [Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995], 72; 81). The translator, Simon Kaplan, summarizes Cohen's position as follows: “Ethics presents us with the infinite task of trying to close the gap between reality and ideality, the *is* and the *ought*. This task presupposes a God who insures that our efforts are not futile. Religion worships a God who commands us to make ideality the focal point of our lives. Thus Deuteronomy 16:20: ‘Justice, justice shall you pursue.’ Without ethics, religion would become myth; without religion, ethics would not present us with an infinite task but an impossible one” (ibid., 32).

argumentation can also claim validity for the latter in the author's view. According to Almeida's reading, the DCT claims "[that] there are no properties other than the commands of God that are either necessary or sufficient to the moral status of actions, events, or states of affairs." If one follows this reading and furthermore hypothesizes the truth of the theory thus designated, then it can be shown that – according to the author's central thesis – it is not ruled out for moral or theological reasons that God commands anything morally reprehensible (e.g. cruelty for its own sake), but simply for logical reasons: "There are no non-logical limits on the commands God can issue, but there are no possible worlds in which divine command theory is true *and* God commands the performance of an unjustifiable harm." If this is true, however, then the moral objections to theological voluntarism (here: qua DCT) come to nothing, because the possibility on which those objections are based (God commands morally reprehensible things) is already ruled out for logical reasons under the premises of DCT.

C. Stephen Evans argues for a weak, non-voluntaristic version of DCT. In the basic form, which spans both variants, it is identified with the conviction "that it is divine commands that in some way provide the basis or foundation for moral obligations." A *strong* version of this theory would be voluntaristic: it would not only endorse the so-called *modal status thesis*, i.e. the view "that it is God's commanding or forbidding an act that gives it a special modal quality: the quality of being morally obligatory or morally forbidden," but also the *divine discretion thesis*, according to which God can *choose* what he commands or forbids without restriction. Evans' weak theory considers the first thesis to be sufficient for DCT and seeks to avoid the danger of divine arbitrariness in the Euthyphro dilemma by denying the second. The price for this does not seem too high to him: an objective theory of the good and the concession that God's commands are *limited* by his knowledge of the good must be presupposed – God can only choose or command the good or *what he recognizes* as good. In this way, the idea of God's sovereignty (= the other horn of the dilemma) is only seemingly accepted; for even in this weak variant of the theory, God plays an unconditional role in the moral life of human beings, a role that allows, indeed compels, us to continue to speak of an ethics of divine command: "this is because it allows for God to be the one to whom we are *accountable* or responsible." People can therefore consider themselves absolutely responsible to God even if his commands "are completely fixed by his knowledge of the good."

Wes Morriston takes a generally critical stance towards *divine command theories*. In his article, he takes a detailed look at the approaches of Adams, Almeida, Evans and Miller. He identifies three main objections to *divine command theories*. The first objection concerns the question of whether God has good reasons for his commandments. If this is the case, then an ethical standard is introduced that is independent of God's command. However, if God has no

reasons for his commandments, their content becomes arbitrary. Morriston distinguishes the problem of “terrible commandments” from this argument, which is familiar from the discussion of the Euthyphro dilemma, for which he refers back to the standard example of the Aqedah. According to Morriston, the defender of a *divine command theory* can avoid these two problems by pointing to the moral perfection of God, for example. The third objection, which has so far received little attention, is actually the decisive one for Morriston: If God (as is obvious) has not communicated his commandments to certain people and therefore has not commanded or ordered them to do anything, it would seem to follow, assuming a *divine command theory*, that these people cannot act morally wrong, which is patently absurd. According to Morriston, this *promulgation objection* now leads to a new dilemma for the advocate of *divine command theories*: If God’s commandments are completely determined by his knowledge of the good, the well-known problem of an ethical standard that is independent of God’s commandments arises. But if this is not the case, God’s decision for certain good actions becomes arbitrary again. The question then arises as to why God has not left the decision between different morally good actions to us. If he has *reasons* for not doing so, the problem arises once again that it is then impossible to explain why God has not revealed his commandment to all people.

Bruno Niederbacher begins with Richard Swinburne’s attempted solution to the Euthyphro problem, which distinguishes between moral propositions that are contingent and those that are necessarily true. After an interim remark on the ontological relationship of God to abstract objects, Niederbacher turns to theistic activism. He discusses the approach of Thomas Morris and Christopher Menzel with regard to the question of whether theistic activism can show that the truth of necessarily true propositions depends on God. Niederbacher then discusses various problems with this approach, including those that pertain to the omnipotence of God. To solve these problems, he proposes to distinguish between universals and particulars in relation to actions and properties as well as between concepts of the creaturely and the non-creaturely. These intricate conceptual distinctions ultimately lead Niederbacher to his own solution to the Euthyphro dilemma: while it is unproblematic to allow the truth of contingently true propositions to depend on God, that of necessarily true propositions causes considerable difficulties for the proponent of a theistic metaethics. However, these can be solved if one assumes that the truth of a necessarily true proposition is constituted by God’s thinking. The problem of arbitrariness is then eliminated because God’s thinking is in turn determined by his perfectly good nature.

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