Euthyphro's Dilemma

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Abstract:

In Plato's Dialogue Euthyphro, we find the Euthyphro's Dilemma, in which Socrates askes Euthyphro, "Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by gods?"[1]

In this paper, I will examine the dilemma from various perspectives, providing diverse arguments and examples. First, I will delve into the second horn of the dilemma, using Indian Philosophy to explain it. Next, I will examine the second horn from different perspectives, incorporating religious aspects as appropriate. Then, I will present an alternative viewpoint that does not align with either horn, in a succinct manner. Finally, I will conclude by giving relation between the dilemma and contemporary socio-educational theories.

Keywords: *Euthyphro's Dilemma, Philosophy, God, Piety, love of God, Naiyayikas, Vedas, Nietzsche, Descartes, Religious perspective, Socio-educational Theories.*

1. Introduction:

Plato's Socratic Dialogue "Euthyphro" is about the conversation between Socrates and Euthyphro that occurred in the weeks before the trial of Socrates. Here they discuss the nature of piety and its relation with God.

It is a convoluted matter whether those with piety are beloved by the Gods because of their piety or if they are sanctimonious because the Gods adored them. A multifaceted dispute spanning across philosophical and theological realms has been in flux for centuries regarding this matter. This is an enigma that has been put forth since antiquity and one that yet has no concrete response. Piety is usually affiliated with spiritual declarations, and veneration of the divine is frequently a segment of it. In some cultures, we view piety as a way to gain favour with the Gods, while in others it is an expression of faith and devotion to the divine. Enthusiasts of the "love of the Gods before piety" argument advocate that the affection of the God is not a result of piety, rather, it is the other way around. They understand the Gods love those who are scrupulous to them and that this affection is

what inspires the pious to be so. Or say, it is the love of the God that prompts a person to be devout, rather than the other way around. Those who hold this assertion believe that God rewards those who devote themselves to him, and that this reward encourages the devout to maintain their piety. However, some dissent from this position assert that adherence leads to the love of God; they believe that the love of God and being pious are inevitably linked. They hold that those who are saintly are more likely to be loved by God because of their devotion and faithfulness. The notion that often backs this reason is that the pious are more likely to win the favour of God, which inspires them to advance in their piety.

In the archaic world, piety was recognized as an essential part of existence, as they considered God would only take care of those who stood devoted to them. It was also supposed that it would reward the devout in the afterlife. The approach of God cherishing the pious was broadly endorsed, and it was regarded as a symbol of favour and grace from the divine. Contemporary world still commonly recognizes the conception of piety and identifies it as a harbinger of reverence and devotion to the divine However, it is further perceived as a means of earning favour with God; in some instances, saintly people may be seen as favoured by God because of their devotion and respect, while in alternative cases, devotion may be viewed as a means to secure favour with God Conclusively, it is challenging to establish decisively whether piety contributes to the love of God or vice versa. Each side has legitimate assertions, and there is no specific conceptual category that can restore the duality. The next section attempts to delve into each side of the argument in detail, examining each one individually.

2. Philosophical perspective:

"Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by gods?"

This question can be paraphrased as-

Does goodness exist independently and is favoured by God, being itself or is goodness bestowed by the god on the objects and therefore loved by God, as it is his doing?

If we consider the second part of the question, that something or someone is God-loved already and therefore it is considered pious, then we shall consider it true that goodness and morality are dependent on God. A thing or being do not intrinsically possess the value of goodness or piety (or etc.) it is something that God bestows on them, being a supreme power and controller.

In Plato's Dialogue, Euthyphro favoured this side of the argument that piety is something which is dependent on God for its existence and it is decided by the God, therefore this piety is loved by the God. In this context Socrates points to the circularity in Euthyphro's reasoning as

"But if the god-loved and the pious were the same, my dear Euthyphro, then if the pious was being loved because it was pious, then the god loved would also be being loved because it was god-loved, and if the god-loved was god-loved because it was being loved by the gods, then the pious

would also be pious because it was being loved by the gods. But now you see that they are in opposite cases being altogether different from each other: the one is such as to be loved because it is being loved, the other is being loved because it is such as to be loved. I'm afraid, Euthyphro, that when you were asked what piety is, you did not wish to make its nature clear to me, but you told me an affect or a quality of it, that the pious has the quality of being loved by all the gods, but you have not yet told me what the pious is."

~Plato, Five Dialogues, Euthyphro (11b).

Thus, the above propositions underline the circularity that emerges out through the duality of entity or being as pious or God loved. But, the ontological identity and it's nature is not ascertained.

If we look at this from Indian Philosophical point of view, then the orthodox theistic notion may be referred to understanding. According to which, one must follow what's written in Vedas for one to lead a good and moral life. The Vedas are considered pious as it is said that they contain the teachings of the God. Even Vedas are said to be written by the God himself, by which we can conclude that because the Vedas are written by God, they are pious and must be followed as it is. This line of thought supports the second half of the Euthyphro's Dilemma as the Vedas get the authority from the God and therefore are taken to be the best way of living a moral life and becoming pious.

In the Nyaya school of Indian Philosophy, Sabda (Testimony) is regarded as the valid source of knowledge. According to Nyayikas, Testimony is of two kinds- Vaidika (of the Vedas) and Laukika (secular). The Vaidaka testimony is perfect and infallible because the Vedas are spoken by God. Therefore, we can say that God is the source of piety and morality. But this claim is also refuted by many on the grounds of circular fallacy.

Thus, this theory resembles Divine Command Theory, that indicates that apart from God's will there are no moral standards this implies that Morality is not based on reason but is arbitrary. These commands can change anytime, any day and establish a whole new set of rules and standards on the whim of God.

Here, Nietzsche agrees with Euthyphro, as he rejects the notion that goodness is something that a thing possesses intrinsically: *"Whatever has value in our world now does not have value in itself; according to its nature- nature is always value-less. Instead, whatever has the value has been given value at some time, as present."*[2] But, according to Nietzsche, God is not who bestows goodness – *"it was we who gave and bestowed it. Only we have created the world that concerns man!"*[3] So, he somewhere agrees with Euthyphro but the reasons are not the same.

We can understand that if morality is totally dependent on God, then the absence of God would also result in the absence of morality. As Dostoevsky said- "If God does not exist, everything is permitted." Which is not an acceptable argument, as even atheists show morality, so morality is

not dependent on God, rather it must have some other ground.

This leads us to the former half of the question, that, pious is God-loved because it is pious. This view can be given various names such as intellectualism, rationalism, realism and objectivism.

Although, we all are well aware that God loves each and every creature around the globe but we can understand this concept by taking the example of Mother and Child relationship: as a mother loves all her children undoubtedly, still she has a favourite child of them all. The favourite one would always be someone who is the closest to her in all aspects, be it emotionally or taking after her habits or a more of a friend-like relation. Along this analogy the relationship between the God and the pious being. Though the God is unbiased and loves each and every soul but the being who is pious is closer to the God as essence of God is also pious. Piety is closest to God.

From Indian perspective, we can take the example of Meera Bai for a better understanding of this view. By the stories narrated about Meera Bai we see that in every adversity Lord Krishna saved her miraculously as she was a pious being, who devoted her life solely to Lord Krishna.

But God is fair and loving, that is absolute. We all know the story of Judas' betrayal and the Jesus. Though Judas, one of the twelve Apostles, betrayed Jesus which lead to the crucifixion of The Christ, Jesus still loved him as he loved everyone.

In many monotheistic religions, such as Christianity and Islam, piety is seen as an essential aspect of the relationship between human beings and the divine. It is believed that God rewards those who lead a pious life, and punishes those who do not. This view is often used as a way to encourage people to lead a moral and virtuous life, and to foster a sense of devotion and obedience to the divine. In polytheistic religions, the gods are often seen as capricious and unpredictable. In these belief systems, piety is seen as a way to appease the gods and earn their favour. It is believed that by performing the proper rituals and sacrifices, one can gain the gods' protection, blessings, and favour.

However, some belief systems, such as certain forms of Buddhism, do not involve the concept of gods or deities. In these belief systems, piety is seen as a personal quality or virtue that leads to inner peace, moral fortitude, and self-control. Piety is not seen as necessary for spiritual realization, but rather a natural outcome of inner transformation.

According to Socrates, piety and morality are not dependent on the existence of God. Morality exists outside God, so when God does something good it is not that he has decided that it is good rather his actions are such that meets the concept of the good and moral. Therefore, he stays with the first horn of the dilemma that God loves pious, because it is pious independent of him.

There is a third view to this dilemma, which do not support either of these two. The supporters put it such as: Neither is morality dependent on God, nor God is dependent on morality, instead GOD IS MORALITY. They argue that we can consider the embodiment of morality is nothing but God. As God cannot perform anything evil and his actions are the good and moral in its

essence.

Here we are reminded of *Cartesian evil demon and the impossibility of the monstrous*[4] lie given by Rene Descartes. In his meditations, he explained how God cannot be a deceiver and evil in essence.

It is manifest by the natural light that all fraud and deception depend on some defect.

~ *Rene Descartes, Third Meditation (2008, p. 35, AT VII 52)*

3. Dilemma and Contemporary Socio-educational Theories:

The Euthyphro Dilemma provides an effective method for exposing the difficulty of moral decision-making in educational settings. It can be applied to aid students in comprehending that moral judgments are not always decisive and that, depending on the circumstances, multiple points of view may be taken and multiple findings may be determined. This is a great means to help students think reasonably and analyse their own ethical judgments and those of others. Examining the Euthyphro's Dilemma helps to investigate how the divine command theory impacts ethical decisions. Are these values autonomous from any holy edict, or are they dependent on the convictions and values of the educational system? In modern educational systems, the Euthyphro dilemma has been employed to debate the role of religion in moral instruction. For example, it has been proposed that morality should not be presented through a religious lens, as this could lead to the teaching of religious standards rather than universal ethical principles. However, others suggest that religion can be used to impart universal morality, since it produces a blueprint for recognizing righteous behaviour and a way of relating moral values to the sacred.

This predicament is pertinent to current social-educational theories as it emphasizes the necessity of recognizing the ethical implications of the orders of a higher power, be it a spiritual authority, a government, or a social organization. Teachers must be conscious of the consequences of their lesson plans and the ideologies they promote within social and educational contexts as to ensure promotion of positive values. This could be achieved by engaging Euthyphro's dilemma in the curriculum.

Investigating the relationship between social and educational systems, contemporary socio-educational theory is focused on figuring out how to best foster the development of students in an unbiased and inclusive environment. This idea highlights the significance of taking advantage of social and educational resources to form an educational atmosphere that will help students to thrive. In this respect, we can look at the Euthyphro dilemma to consider the ethical implications of this approach. For example, should a school system utilise its influence to propagate values like respect and tolerance, or should one trust in the student's own morality to form their conduct?

Humanism and constructivism, among other contemporary socio-educational theories, have addressed this dilemma. Humanism states that intrinsic values are the only justification for morality,

while constructivism insists that collaboration and experience should be considered when forming moral behaviour. These two outlooks can be seen as a reaction to the Euthyphro's Dilemma, as they both bring attention to the values of personal experience in shaping ethical values. In essence, humanism and constructivism do not posit that moral values came from an outside source, like God. Instead, they suggest that one should be the architect of their own moral values.

It is possible to use the Euthyphro dilemma to investigate how culture affects educational results. For example, in certain cultures, it is typically accepted that religious criteria should be prioritized over secular ones when making decisions. This could result in educational systems that are geared toward one religion.

In this way, the Euthyphro dilemma presents a basis for considering the role of ethics in education and the value of instructing moral values in current societies.

Conclusion:

Whether sanctity goes before divine love or the inverse is an alteration of the traditional philosophical quandary that chicken came first or the egg[5]. One's outlook and set of principles determines the answer to this question. Investigating the diverse theological and philosophical ideas concerning the liaison between piety and divine love is indispensable. Based on the idea that being holy will lead to God's affection, certain religious theories posit that sanctity is the source of God's love. Many spiritual doctrines, such as from the Hinduism's karma to Christianity's grace, agree with this point of view. It is believed that God favours those who are devoutly pious because of their virtuous lifestyle, and, therefore, considered deserving of divine compassion. On the contrary, certain philosophical doctrines contend that God's love spurs one to be pious, arguing that when one experiences God's love, it produces holiness. This perspective holds that divine love is an integral part of every human, and piety is a demonstration of this divine love. We often observe this perspective in philosophies such as Stoicism and Neoplatonism, which both stress the importance of establishing a connection with the divine. A variety of religious and philosophical beliefs offer different perspectives on the matter, and it comes down to individual opinion. Nonetheless, God's love and devotion are two sides of the same coin. Having a meaningful bond with the divine requires being pious and loving God, regardless of which comes first. To sum it up, it's essential to realize that piety is a demonstration of divine fondness, and creating a bond with the divine is a critical component of any spiritual practice. It is then an individual's choice to determine their beliefs and understanding.

1. *Plato, Five Dialogues, Euthyphro (G. M. A Grube Translation)-pg.1*
2. *Nietzsche, The Gay Science, 301 -pg.4*
3. *Ibid. -pg.4*
4. *Rene Descartes, Third Meditation, 2008 -pg.5*

5. Plutarch, The Symposiacs, 1st Century CE -pg.7

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8. Reference of Judas from Bible.
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